



Industry insights

Culture vouchers

RISE
BOOKSELLING

 **eibf**
The voice of booksellers

What is Industry insights?

RISE Industry Insights is a series of research papers that investigate priority topics for the bookselling sector. They give insights into key issues, policy reforms and external initiatives that affect the bookselling sector. In addition, they provide network members with tools to engage with relevant political stakeholders, culture sector professionals and private sector representatives to ensure that their priorities are adequately upheld and supported.

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About RISE Bookselling

Resilience, Innovation and Sustainability for the Enhancement of Bookselling' (RISE Bookselling), is a three-year EU co-funded programme run by the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) for its network members, aimed at upscaling, reinforcing and maximising the capacity and resilience of the European bookselling sector.

About EIBF

The European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) is a non-commercial European and international umbrella organisation representing national booksellers associations and booksellers across Europe and worldwide. Our mission is to represent our members and their interests on a global platform, as well as to provide a forum for cooperation and foster the exchange of best practices.

Contents

Introduction	1
Methodology	2
Case studies	2
ITALY	3
FRANCE	7
SPAIN	11
GERMANY	15
Analysis: positive impact on the book industry	17
Positive impacts	17
Lessons learned	19
Conclusion	21
Acknowledgements	22
Endnotes	23-24

Introduction

Over the course of almost a decade, several European countries have launched cultural voucher programmes, that is, state-funded measures with the aim of introducing teenagers and young adults to their country's unique and rich cultural scene, while also supporting cultural and creative industries. These cultural vouchers are physical or digital cards as well as mobile phone apps that are granted to 15- to 18-year-olds with a fixed amount of money to be spent exclusively on cultural goods and activities for a limited amount of time.


In some countries, such as Italy and France, the cultural voucher scheme has been in place for years; in the case of Italy, almost a decade. Meanwhile, other countries, such as Spain and Germany, introduced these schemes more recently, in part, as measures to help the cultural sector rebuild after the COVID-19 pandemic. As is well known, many cultural-sector organisations, providers and businesses, including bookshops, suffered heavily from the lack of customer footfall and turnover during and after the pandemic.

Through its network members, the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) – the organisation behind RISE Bookselling – has been made aware of the predominantly positive impacts that these national schemes have had, not only on book sales and increasing footfall of young people in bookshops in the respective countries, but also on reinforcing young people's reading habits, as well as diversifying their cultural practices. In response to these testimonies, and given the interest from more countries to introduce similar schemes, this Industry Insights paper takes a closer look at said cultural vouchers, their specificities and their impact across four countries where they are in place. Those countries are **Italy, France, Spain and Germany.**



Methodology

In this research paper, the four countries mentioned above, Italy, France, Spain and Germany, will be spotlighted and analysed as case studies in chronological order of when the cultural voucher was first introduced. The key features of each country's respective model for cultural vouchers will be presented, first in the shape of an overview with the following information:

-  Country name and flag
-  Cultural voucher name
-  Website(s)
-  Year of implementation
-  Beneficiaries
-  Format of cultural voucher
-  Applicable cultural content and/or products
-  Total budget or funding available
-  Book market size (turnover) in 2022
-  Money per voucher
-  Time constraints and other deadlines

This information will then be developed, contrasted and analysed, with the aim of identifying similarities and highlighting benefits as well as replicable components for other members of the RISE Bookselling network who may wish to advocate for the introduction of a similar initiative in their respective countries. The impact of the cultural voucher on the cultural and creative sector, particularly on the bookselling sector, and their response will also be put into perspective and discussed.

For each country included in this paper, the national booksellers association has been asked to provide their opinion on the overall impact and benefits of the cultural vouchers for their membership. Any additional information has been accessed via the official websites of the cultural voucher schemes as well as national literary journals and news publications.

Case studies

In this section, we will present an overview of the four countries' cultural voucher schemes, the studies that have been carried out investigating the impact of the schemes on the bookselling sector and the cultural practices of the young beneficiaries of the scheme. As mentioned above, each country will be introduced by a summary of the key

features of the scheme. This information is then complemented as we dive further into each scheme's respective specificities and explore who may benefit from the voucher, how it works and what impact it has, or may have, on the bookselling sector and on young people's cultural practices, and more specifically, on their reading habits.



59 million
POPULATION



BOOK MARKET SIZE
€3,3 billion
2022²

OLD VOUCHER SCHEME



Bonus Cultura or 18App

www.18app.italia.it

IMPLEMENTED

2016 -2023



BENEFICIARIES
18-year-olds



FORMAT
An app

BUDGET

€230 million
2022 and 2023¹

PER VOUCHER

€500
per person

APPLICABLE WITH



Cultural **activities** such as cinema, concerts, theatre, museums, fairs and national parks. Cultural **goods** such as books (also e-books and audiobooks), CDs, newspaper subscription (physical and digital), film (digital, but not streaming services subscription). Also **practical courses** in music, theatre and foreign languages.

USED WITHIN



Claimed the year **after the person turned 18**. Valid until the first half of the following year

(E.g. people born in 2004 who turned 18 in 2022 can apply for the voucher from 31 January 2023 until 31 October the same year and use the vouchers until 30 April 2024.)

Bonus Cultura

Since 2016, the Italian “Culture Bonus” or “18App”, Bonus Cultura in Italian, has allowed 18-year-olds in Italy to obtain a voucher of €500 to spend on cultural goods and activities. According to Tommaso Nannicini, Secretary to the Prime Minister at the time of the scheme’s introduction, the culture bonus was a result of a political decision to “[...] remind [young people] how important cultural consumption is, both for enriching yourself as a person and strengthening the fabric of [...] society.”³ In 2016, the year when the Bonus Cultura was first introduced, a budget of €290 million

was expected to cater for around 575,000 teenagers living in Italy and holding Italian or EU-citizenship. The scheme was soon revised to cover all 18-year-olds who are permanent residents of Italy, regardless of their nationality, while the budget was decreased to €230 million per year.

However, following the 2023 Budget Law, from 2024 and onwards, the budget for cultural vouchers will decrease drastically to €190 million, and the system is to be reformed so that the Culture Bonus be split in two different types of vouchers which are to be given only under certain conditions based on income and merit.

⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that, initially, in an effort



NEW VOUCHER SCHEME



Carta del Merito & Carta Cultura



Website to be launched in **2024**

IMPLEMENTED



BENEFICIARIES 18-year-olds:

- Low-income families with a total annual income of no more than **€35.000**
- People who graduated high school with top grades (maximum 19 years old)



FORMAT
An app



BUDGET
€190 million
from 2024 onwards

PER VOUCHER

x2 €500 per card with the possibility to combine the two and receiving **€1.000**



(i.e. if a person from a low-income family receives top marks, they can claim both cards)

Yet to be determined



USED WITHIN

Claimed by those **born in 2005** who turned 18 in 2023 and used the year after the person turned 18

(e.g. someone born in 2005 who turned 18 in 2023 may request and use either or both cards in 2024)

to save funds and reallocate support to the cultural sector, following the general elections in autumn 2022, a majority of the new Italian Parliament wished to abolish the culture voucher completely. This proposal was met with strong resistance from the opposition, and it was later decided that the vouchers should remain, but the budget be significantly decreased, and a more exclusive approach be adopted to decide who should be eligible to obtain the vouchers⁶.

Who can benefit from the Bonus Cultura?

Like the old Culture Bonus scheme, which has been in place since 2016, the two different vouchers under the new system, the Culture Card (Carta Cultura) and Merit Card (Carta del merito), will contain €500 each for youngsters to spend on cultural goods and activities. However, they can only be requested by people fulfilling certain prerequisites: the first card will only be available to 18-year-olds from households with an annual income of less than €35,000 and the second will only be available to those who

graduated high school with top marks. Those who fulfil both conditions may request both cards and thus receive a combined €1,000 to spend on culture. The new system will apply from 2024 to people born in 2005, that is, those who turned 18 in 2023.

How does it work?

For people born in 2004 and turned 18 in 2022, the rules of the old Bonus Cultura system still apply. This means that the new 18-year-olds may request the Culture Bonus by registering on the official website, called the 18 app, with their electronic ID (known as SPid or Cie). From this website they may then download vouchers to purchase goods and services either in physical shops or online, e.g., a newspaper subscription service or a bookshop's webshop.⁷ With the use of geo-localisation, the 18app allows its users to discover vendors and offers in their vicinity. The vouchers can be spent during a limited amount of time, typically throughout the year it was obtained until the first half of the following year. In practice, this means that people born in 2004 who turned 18 in 2022 can apply for the voucher from 31 January 2023 until 31 October the same year and use the vouchers until 30 April 2024. As the vouchers are reserved for individual use, if requested, all beneficiaries must be able to present a valid ID document upon purchase.

For retailers and other cultural actors to be able to accept Bonus Cultura vouchers, they also need to register via the 18app platform. To register, the shop owner or legal representative must identify themselves using an electronic ID. Following a successful registration, this person may grant additional staff members access to operate the account on behalf of the shop owner. In addition to the personal data which is automatically generated with the electronic ID as they access their account, exhibitors must also provide the contact details of their business, such as address, email, website, and indicate whether they will be offering goods or services as an online or physical retailer, or a mix of the two. They must also provide their tax code, VAT number and their ATECO code, which identifies in which type of sector they operate. Only exhibitors operating in the cultural sector are accepted to advertise on the 18app.⁸

At the time of writing this paper, the Ministry of Culture is yet to publish an implementing decree which will clarify the technicalities of the cards within the new system which takes over from

2024, for instance, specifying which purchases will be allowed and what methods should be used for requesting and activating the culture bonuses. Moreover, there are speculations about the introduction of penalties for merchants who do not respect the established restrictions within the *Bonus Cultura*, for example, the rule that specifies that vouchers are restricted to individual use. However, these speculations have not been confirmed.⁹

Impact and reception

The Italian Booksellers Association (*Associazione Librai Italiani, ALI*) has strongly advocated for the continuation of the *Bonus Cultura/18app* under the current terms, i.e., that all 18-year-old Italian residents be eligible for the €500 voucher, and not just those fulfilling certain conditions. ALI argues that the new system would be meritocratic and exclusive, stating that “culture is also freedom in being able to choose without being subjected to economic and family constraints”. The association has emphasised its commitment to this line, which they will continue to push in 2023. In the words of Paolo Ambrosini, President of ALI and owner of the Bonturi Bookshop in San Bonifacio:

“We are perplexed by the current government’s decision to first repeal the 18App/Bonus Cultura and then, following our firm opposition, to change it to a culture card with the introduction of a family income ceiling of €35,000, because it loses the universality that is, in our opinion, the qualifying point of [the Bonus Cultura].

We still fall into the error of linking culture to income and thinking that only those with lower incomes should be supported, forgetting that it is not infrequent that those with greater means are not educated in the use of cultural assets.

For this reason, even at the recent meeting at the Ministry of Culture, we proposed that €300 be given to everyone with an additional €200 for those with lower incomes. Let us see what the government will do, also because there is a problem of resources, which is the real and only reason why they thought of first repealing and now amending the [Bonus Cultura].”

“

We are perplexed by the current government's decision to first repeal the 18App/Bonus Cultura and then, following our firm opposition, to change it to a culture card with the introduction of a family income ceiling of €35,000.



PAOLO AMBROSINI

President of Associazione Librai Italiani (ALI)

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In terms of the scheme's financial impact on the Italian book sector since its introduction, ALI reports that between 2016 and 2019, 47% of the total sums disbursed these years (€525 million out of €1,110 million), was spent on the purchase of books. Consequently, the recorded effects of the Culture Bonus also include an increase in the percentage of people who declare themselves as readers, which rose from 46.8% in 2016 to 53.4% in 2017, 51.1% in 2018, and finally to 54% in 2019.

This development is particularly relevant in the Italian context since, as according to Forum del libro, a non-profit association promoting books and reading, Italy continues to fall at the bottom of European rankings on reading indexes. Moreover, ALI recounts, there is a prevalent gender gap when it comes to reading in Italy: in 2021, female readers accounted for 45.7% while male readers only made up for 35.8%. The demographic most devoted to reading is girls aged 11-24, among whom over 60% read at least one book per year with a peak between the ages of 18 and 19 (62.6%).

During the years of implementation of the Bonus Cultura-scheme, Italian booksellers have clearly observed the positive impacts of the scheme by way of more young people visiting their shops.

Aldo Addis, bookseller and owner of Libreria Ubik di Sassari recounts, ***“with the introduction of 18App, a virtuous path has begun that has brought many young people to bookshops, young people who have rediscovered a taste for reading and being able to choose independently among the shelves. It seems to me that the objectives for which the measure was created have been achieved, and we would like to see interventions of this kind being strengthened more and more”***.

On a final note, ALI President and bookseller Paolo Ambrosini reflects on the changes that the scheme has brought not only to young people's increased interaction with culture, but also how bookshops have changed and been challenged to update and renew themselves in the contact with those young adults. In his words: *“[...] over the years of its application, [the Bonus Cultura] has enabled new 18-year-olds to build reading paths in complete freedom from economic and family constraints. The results have been seen and are still being seen in bookshops with a renewed interest on the part of young people for books also thanks to an offer [of books] that has been able to renew itself with proposals [catered to young people and their needs]”*.



France



66 million
POPULATION



BOOK MARKET SIZE
€4,3 billion
2022¹⁰

pass Culture **Pass Culture**

<https://pass.culture.fr>
<https://passculture.app>

IMPLEMENTED



test phase in 5 regions.
Expanded nationally in 2021.



BENEFICIARIES
15- to 18-year-olds



FORMAT
An app



BUDGET

€199 million 2022
€208,5 million 2023



PER VOUCHER

15 YEARS: €20
YEARS 16 & 17: €30
18 YEARS: €300



APPLICABLE WITH

Cultural **events** such as theatre, cinema or concerts. Cultural **goods** such as books (also audiobooks and e-books), CDs or DVDs, works of art and musical instruments. Also **practical courses** like dance, drawing and music classes.



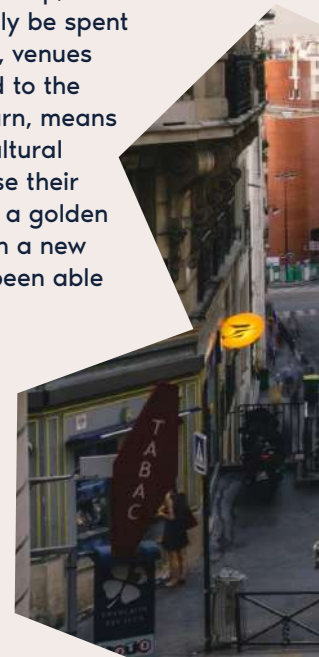
USED WITHIN

18 YEARS: must be used within 24 months after it has been obtained. **15 to 17 YEARS:** may accumulate the yearly amounts but all must be spent before their 18th birthday when they obtain the €300.

Pass Culture

With the ambition to enhance young people's access to culture, as well as strengthening and diversifying their cultural practices, the French Pass Culture has made yearly cultural vouchers available to all 15- to 18-year-old residents of France since 2021. Through an online app, teenagers can access these vouchers to buy tickets to museums and concerts, take music classes or reserve books to pick up at their local bookshop. Since the app employs geo-localisation to show cultural actors in the users surrounding area, the *Pass Culture* allows young adults to discover the cultural wealth offered in their proximity. According to figures obtained by the French Booksellers Association (*Syndicat de la librairie française, SLF*), in the beginning of 2023, 3 million young French people had connected to the app, as had 21,000 cultural actors.

Since its purpose is to make young people discover the local cultural offer, the pass does not allow for home delivery of goods ordered on the app. Instead, any good purchased through the app must be collected at a physical venue, such as a bookshop or record shop, for instance. Moreover, the grants can only be spent on activities and goods from retailers, venues and institutions which have connected to the app to advertise their offer. This, in turn, means that the *Pass Culture* also provides cultural actors with a new channel to showcase their cultural programmes and goods, and a golden opportunity to reach and connect with a new audience which they might not have been able to attract before.



Who can benefit from the Pass Culture?

Originally the culture pass was directed only to 18-year-olds, but since its national launch in 2021, it has gradually been extended to encompass all teenagers enrolled in public or private education between the ages of 15 and 18. Each year, 15-year-olds receive €20, while 16 and 17-year-olds receive €30 through the *Pass Culture* app to spend on cultural goods and services.¹¹ It is possible for 15- to 17-year-olds to accumulate the yearly amounts so they have up to €80 in total as they turn 17.

However, the amount must be spent before their 18th birthday, when they receive a lump sum of €300 to spend on cultural goods and activities via the app. These €300 must be spent within 24 months after they have been obtained.

In addition to the individual vouchers, the extension of the *Pass Culture* also gives public and private schools specific grants to attend cultural activities and events. Each class of 13-14 or 14-15-year-old students receives a sum of €25 per pupil, while upper secondary school classes receive €30 per pupil for the second year and €20 per pupil for the final year. Currently, these grants can only be spent on class visits to cultural or historical venues, cinemas, theatres, concerts etc.¹²

How does it work?

To access their vouchers, youngsters need to follow slightly different steps depending on their age. Following their 18th birthday, the young adults need to create a *Pass Culture* account, where they provide personal information such as their name, address, email and phone number. Finally, they need to record a video showing their ID-card and face and submit it to the app. The request is then evaluated by the *Pass Culture* administration; if they approve it, the account is activated, and the users may proceed to spend the vouchers allotted to them. Youngsters do not need to hold a French citizenship to be eligible for the vouchers, as long as they provide proof of permanent residency in France.¹³ 15- to 17-year-olds follow a simplified inscription process by connecting through their EduConnect profiles, i.e. the national IT services provider for schools.^{14 15}

“

Today, 3,000 bookshops are part of the Culture Pass. For booksellers, it's an opportunity to strengthen their ties with young people, who, thanks to this initiative, often visit bookshops for the first time and keep coming back



GUILLAUME HUSSON

Executive Director of Syndicat de la librairie française (SLF)

”



When it comes to cultural vendors or providers seeking to advertise on the *Pass Culture*, only entities or groups that offer cultural goods or services are allowed to register as exhibitors on the *Pass Culture* platform. When registering, all prospective exhibitors must provide their unique identification number, known as the *SIREN* number, with which they are officially registered as economic entities in France.¹⁶ Similar to Italy, this number indicates directly in which sector the entity operates.¹⁷ If the exhibitor possesses an eligible *SIREN* number, they may proceed with the registration process and create accounts for all employees on the *Pass Culture* platform. The account creation process is fairly simple and quick: all employees who wish to create an account must supply their full name, telephone number, and email address, as well as the *SIREN* number of their company. As soon as the account has been validated by the *Pass Culture* platform, exhibitors must provide a second number, called *SIRET*, which indicates the location of their shop or venue. This number is essential for the vendor to be able to put offers on the website or app and make use of the *Culture Pass*' geo-localisation function, which allows the app's users to discover the cultural actors in their vicinity as well as their offers.¹⁸

As of 31 March 2023, 2,971 French bookshops had connected to the *Pass Culture* app.¹⁹ Bookshops that have registered with *Pass Culture* may add the titles they wish to offer manually, one by one, or they also have the possibility to import and synchronise their entire stock with the platform or app if they use a stock management provider which has partnered with *Pass Culture*.^{20 21} It is easy to imagine why this function is hugely beneficial to bookshops who offer books via the *Pass Culture*, as it releases a lot of time and simplifies their daily work.

Reception and impact

During 2022, 7,5 million books were reserved via the *Pass Culture* app, amounting to a total sum of €75 million. The same year, the total figure of the value of the entire French book market was 4.3 billion euros for 364 million books, according to the market research company, GfK.²² Overall, the *Pass Culture* represents 1,74% of the book market in terms of turnover and 2% in terms of volume, which are by no means negligible figures.

Moreover, in 2022, the *Centre national du livre* (CNL), a public body under the French Ministry for Culture which supports all actors in the book supply chain, commissioned a study from IPSOS, a Paris based consultancy, to analyse young people's cultural spending and reading habits. The results of this study, as well as two surveys carried out in March 2022 and 2023 by the *Pass Culture* on the opinions of its users – both young people and cultural actors advertising on the app – and data collated from the app on its users' activities give further key insights which will provide the basis for the reflection below.^{23 24}

As mentioned above, home deliveries are not allowed through the app, so young people who wish to purchase books have to reserve a title via the app, which must then be picked up at a local bookshop. This makes them not only discover a world of books, but also cultural places in their vicinity which they might not have visited otherwise. According to the *Pass Culture* survey, 48% of the young users of the app said the pass had made them discover new places to borrow or buy books. 30% said they discovered an independent bookshop for the first time and 88% said they'd like to go back to that bookshop.²⁵ Moreover, the survey showed that the app's users seemed to also be aware that by placing their order with a certain bookshop, they were also supporting that specific business. Interestingly, the survey also noted that 51% of all books reserved via the app were picked up at large bookshop chains while 49% were collected at independent bookshops.²⁶

Booksellers around France are confirming this heartwarming trend of a new demographic entering their bookshops. In the words of Morgane Payock-Monthé, bookseller at *La Malle aux histoires* in Pantin, France: ***“these are young people we have not seen in the bookshop before. [The *Pass Culture* customers] represent just under 5% of our sales, so it's not insignificant, and above all, it's a clientele that we're going to keep for the long term”. Similarly, booksellers from *La Librairie de Paris* in Saint-Étienne, said: “our experience of the *Culture Pass* has brought us relief: we've been able to see that young people can still read for pleasure, and not just because they have to at school. Young people want to read, they just need to be given the means to do so.”***

When analysing the behaviours of the users of the Culture pass, a clear trend appears: the app seems to not only create new readers, but also make already vested readers diversify their repertoire and explore new genres. Most often, the young culture pass users started with Mangas, i.e., Japanese comic books, but they then seemed to move on to other genres. This is clearly shown in the data, since in 2021, 75% of the books bought via the app were Mangas, while in 2022, Mangas only accounted for 42%.²⁷ Moreover, 49% of those who had bought a Manga book via the app said they had also bought books from other genres via the app.²⁸ We may then, perhaps, call Mangas an entry gate to literature and reading for young people of today. This phenomenon might also explain why French booksellers have reported a boom in the sale of Mangas over the past years. On a final note, the collected data confirms that new releases of TV-series seem to have a big positive influence on young people's book purchases, which shows that cultural practices are often mutually reinforcing.

For booksellers across France, the long-term viability of the Pass Culture scheme is sometimes brought up as a matter of concern. Anne Martelle, president of the Syndicat de la librairie française (SLF), and owner of the Librairie Martelle in Amiens, France elaborates: "Our bookshops are fully involved as partners in the Culture Pass. There's a lot at stake here, because it's all about giving young people a taste for reading again by making it attractive, making it a social thing and showing that books respond to their desires as well as their questions. This innovative scheme also allows us booksellers to question our own practices, and to bring ourselves up to date with a younger clientele. We applaud this scheme and sincerely hope that it will become part of a long-term cultural policy for young people."

Since the scheme is a project that was launched by the incumbent government, there is no guarantee of its continuation after the end of Emmanuel Macron's mandate in 2027. Moreover, the scheme has been met with critique from several voices in the French Parliament. As an example, in 2022, during a hearing of the French Minister for Culture, Rima Abdul-Malak, where the Pass Culture was evaluated, Members of the French Parliament in the Committee for Culture and Education raised concerns on multiple facets of the scheme. First, critique was directed towards the budget, which has

increased from €59 million in 2021 to €199 million in 2022 and a planned €208,5 million in 2023.²⁹ Secondly, some voices highlighted that the Pass Culture embodies a passive policy towards culture, i.e., a policy which is content to subsidise a certain cultural offer while not engaging in trying to enrich that offer, especially in sparsely populated places with limited cultural activity. Third and last, while the app does indeed collect data, as is clearly demonstrated by the study discussed above, members of the French Parliament emphasised that this data is not freely accessible, which limits its use and the possibility to evaluate the benefits of the scheme.³⁰

On the side of booksellers, critique is mainly directed towards the technical aspects of the Pass Culture app, such as inaccurate stock feedback from bookshops, a search engine that is not adapted to books and their numerous references and difficulties in processing collective offers. However, these weaknesses are technicalities that can be remedied relatively easily and fade in light of what is to be gained from the scheme. In the words of Guillaume Husson, Executive Director of Syndicat de la librairie française (SLF):

"Today, 3,000 bookshops are part of the Culture Pass. For booksellers, it's an opportunity to strengthen their ties with young people, who, thanks to this initiative, often visit bookshops for the first time and keep coming back. The books bought by young people are increasingly diverse, ranging from poetry to the humanities, manga and literature. The pass also encourages exchanges within a community of young readers who share their opinions and reading recommendations. There are still many technical improvements to be made to ensure that the application can be used more effectively in bookshops, but to encourage young people to read, we all have a vested interest in seeing this scheme become a permanent fixture."



Spain



47,9 million
POPULATION



BOOK MARKET SIZE
€1,1 billion
2022³¹



Bono Cultural Joven

<https://bonoculturajoven.gob.es>

IMPLEMENTED



BENEFICIARIES



Spanish citizens | Residents
Asylum seekers or former wards
who turn 18 in a given year



FORMAT

Prepaid card, either
in physical or digital
format (on mobile phone)

BUDGET



€112 million 2022
€210 million 2023

PER VOUCHER



€400 /person to spend
(up to €200 for type 1, up to €100
for type 2, up to €100 for type 3)

APPLICABLE WITH



- Type 1:** Theatre, museums, cinema
- Type 2:** Cultural products in physical format, such as books, music records and videogames
- Type 3:** Digital or online consumption of cultural content, such as music subscriptions and e-books

USED WITHIN



1 year to use it
after activation

Bono Cultural Joven

In summer 2022, the Spanish Ministry for Culture launched the “Bono Cultural Joven”, a cultural voucher and direct grant of €400 per person to those who turn 18 in order to purchase cultural products and enjoy cultural activities.

With a total budget of €112 million for 2022, the *Bono Cultural Joven* was set up with three overarching objectives: provide young adults with a financial incentive to discover and enjoy culture in all its forms, promote healthy consumer habits of purchasing cultural

content and, last but not least, revitalise and invigorate the Spanish cultural sector, which was hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who can benefit from the Bono Cultural Joven?

The cultural voucher is a specific measure for Spanish citizens, residents, asylum seekers or former wards who turn 18 in a given year. The scheme was launched in July 2022. Therefore, all young adults born in 2004 who turned 18 in 2022 were eligible and encouraged to apply. The same rule applies for the 2023 process, that is, all young adults born in 2005 and turning 18 in 2023, can apply once the application process has been launched.

How does it work?

The *Bono Cultural Joven* is a prepaid and non-transferable voucher with a total value of €400 per person. People who turn 18 in a given year can apply for the voucher on the *Bono Cultural Joven* website, regardless of whether they have already turned 18 or not by the time the application process opens.

First things first, all young adults who fulfil the criteria listed above, need to create an account on the *Bono Cultural Joven* website with a valid and in-use email account. Then, they will have to verify the account registration upon receiving a confirmation email.

Once the account is created, it is time to request the voucher via the official website. This can be done independently or with the help of an adult representing them and requesting it on their behalf. 18-year-olds who wish to request it themselves will need a valid form of digital identification: either via *Cl@ve*³², with basic or advanced registration, or with a Digital Certificate.³³ The basic *Cl@ve* registration is recommended, as it can be requested and validated through a videocall. Young adults who still have not turned 18 at the time of requesting the voucher will only be able to identify themselves via the *Cl@ve* advanced registration, which requires in-person validation. Meanwhile, for those delegating this task to a responsible adult representing them, the adult will also need to register either via *Cl@ve* or a Digital Certificate and send a pre-filled representation form via email upon registration.

Eventually, once the registration has been approved, pass-holders can either store the voucher on their mobile phones as a digital pass or instead collect it, in person, at a post office.³⁴ The latter is possible since the Spanish postal service (*Correos*) is the organisation

collaborating with the Ministry for Culture on this initiative. The voucher is, therefore, available in either physical format, as a card, as well as digitally, stored in the mobile phone as a digital card, and can be used on a number of activities and products for an entire year upon receiving and activating it.

More specifically, out of the total amount of €400, the voucher can be used as following:

- **Up to €200 for live arts, cultural heritage and audiovisual arts**, including tickets and season tickets for performing arts, live music, cinema, museums, libraries, exhibitions and performing, literary, musical or audiovisual festivals.
- **Up to €100 for cultural products in physical format**, including the purchase of books, magazines, newspapers, or other periodicals; video games, music sheets, records, CDs, DVDs or Blu-ray discs.
- **Up to €100 for digital or online consumption of cultural content**, for instance, subscriptions and rentals to music, reading or audio-reading or audiovisual platforms, purchase of audio books, purchase of digital books (e-books).

Cultural organisations and businesses across the country, including bookshops, have been encouraged to sign up online, on the cultural voucher's dedicated website, and register as a cultural space where the voucher can be used.³⁵ The Spanish Booksellers Association (*Confederación Española de Gremios y Asociaciones de Libreros, CEGAL*) welcomed this initiative and encouraged booksellers to register when the measure was announced.³⁶

The registration process for bookshops and other cultural spaces is fairly straightforward. All cultural entities, including bookshops, have to register on the website and provide certain information (namely a form of digital identification and proof that the goods and services provided comply with the scope of the voucher), which the Ministry for Culture reviews. Then, the Ministry either approves an entity, rejects them for not fulfilling the requirements or requests them to correct incorrect or incomplete information. Once successfully registered, cultural providers such as bookshops are approved and appear on the map of cultural entities subscribed to the *Bono Cultural Joven*, which can be consulted by other entities and users alike.

Impact and reception

Despite the enthusiasm and the positive reception of the scheme by cultural organisations and businesses alike, being a first, not everything ran smoothly.³⁷ Given the fact that it was a new scheme with a wide variety of offerings, and with the intention of avoiding fraudulent use by cultural entities and beneficiaries alike, the Ministry of Culture implemented procedures and checks that slowed down and complicated the process. For instance, for a period of time, many points of sale which had signed up as hosts, including bookshops, were unable to accept the voucher in their stores due to technical problems and additional formalities to be reviewed. Furthermore, many young people had to deal with additional technical and burdensome steps to activate their voucher digitally.

During this process, CEGAL acted as an intermediary between the Ministry of Culture and bookshops, with the intention of centralising these issues and, in particular, assisting the bookshops with the procedures. Once these months of checks and verifications were over, the *Bono Cultural Joven* began to operate successfully.



Out of the total €400 per culture voucher, only €100 is designated for books. I would therefore encourage the responsible authorities to raise this percentage to at least 50% of the voucher.



SARA SÁNCHEZ

Director of Confederación Española de Gremios y Asociaciones de Libreros (CEGAL)



In the words of CEGAL: “At CEGAL we believe that the *Bono Cultural Joven* is a very interesting and beneficial proposal, both for the young public and for bookshops. Although it is true that its first year has had some difficulties, the result is a very positive and favourable scheme for bookshops. We are in talks with the Ministry of Culture to try to increase the amount earmarked for the purchase of physical books”

In spite of these initial logistical issues, 2022 figures revealed that the first year of the scheme was a success. For example, considering the scheme was launched in July 2022, as of November the same year, over 281,000 18-year-olds (out of a total estimate of 489,000 across Spain) had already requested their cultural voucher.³⁸ This means that almost 58% of all Spanish 18-year-olds expressed an interest for the cultural vouchers in the scheme’s first year. Perhaps unsurprisingly, since the beginning of the process, the vast majority of 18-year-olds (225,153) requested the card online, while only 56,404 did so physically at the post office. By the end of 2022, 99,371 transactions had taken place in 3,114 venues, organisations, cultural businesses and points of sale subscribed to the

programme across the country, representing a total investment of €3.62 million.³⁹ December 2022 was the month of the year with the most activity: from 1 to 18 December, 55,577 purchases or acquisitions were made with the *Bono Cultural Joven* with a value of almost €2 million. Cinema, video games, shows and books were the most popular choices by Spanish young adults to spend their vouchers on.

Since the end of 2022, these figures have continued to grow at incredible speed. As of March 2023, a total of 730,000 transactions in cultural sector establishments have been carried out, with a total value of more than €27 million in revenues.⁴⁰ Young adults continue to spend the voucher primarily on live performance arts (58% of total expenditure), physical cultural goods (31.3%) and digital products (10.7%).

Taking these figures into account, as well as several surveys and meetings carried out with the cultural sector to assess the initial problems and setbacks, the *Bono Cultural Joven* was renewed and will also be implemented in 2023. In fact, as of 13th June⁴¹, the application process for 18-year-olds born in 2005 is now

open, meaning young people in Spain turning 18 this year can already apply for their voucher. In the meantime, cultural organisations and businesses can continue to sign up as a participating cultural entity.

In 2023, up to 500,000 Spaniards who turn 18 are expected to benefit from the Bono Cultural Joven. Sara Sánchez, Director of CEGAL and bookseller at Librería El Puerto, Valencia, believes that **“cultural vouchers work, and we applaud the initiative to introduce a cultural voucher for teenagers turning 18 every year. In our bookshop we are used to local vouchers from the City Council, and it is noticeable that they boost local points of sale. Out of the total €400 per culture voucher, only €100 is designated for books. I would therefore encourage the responsible authorities to raise this percentage to at least 50% of the voucher”**.





Germany



85,8 million
POPULATION



BOOK MARKET SIZE
€9.4 billion
2022⁴²



KulturPass / KulturPass für 18-Jährige

<https://www.kulturpass.de>

IMPLEMENTED



BENEFICIARIES



Every German citizen and EU/
non-EU resident who turns 18 in 2023
i.e., an estimated 750,000 young people



FORMAT
An app



BUDGET
€100 million 2023
(estimated)



PER VOUCHER

€200 /person to spend
cultural goods, experiences and events

APPLICABLE WITH

Cultural goods, experiences and events including music, theatre, concerts, and books. Money cannot be spent on large online brands or streaming services like Amazon and Spotify; only on local venues and shops



USED WITHIN

2 year to use it
after activation



KulturPass

Last, but certainly not least, we move to the most recent country to introduce a cultural voucher: Germany. In late 2022, the Minister of State for Culture and the Media (BKM), Claudia Roth, announced a pilot project to launch a KulturPass für 18-Jährige, that is, a cultural voucher for 18-year-olds, to get young people excited about the diversity of culture in our country⁴³

The scheme officially launched on 14th June 2023.

Who can benefit from the KulturPass?

With a budget of €100 million and heavily inspired by the French *Pass Culture*, introduced previously in this paper, the aim of the plan is to provide young people who turn 18 in 2023 with €200 to spend on cultural goods and activities. The initiative was also set up to provide the German cultural sector with additional financial relief following two years of limited business and consumer footfall brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

How will it work?

18-year-olds will be able to redeem the €200 credit via an app on their mobile phone, which will then lead them onto a digital platform that acts as a virtual marketplace. From there, they can book tickets for cinemas, museums, theatres and concert halls, or buy books, records and other cultural goods. Pass-holders will then be able to use it for a period of two years.

From mid-May 2023, cultural institutions and businesses, including bookshops, can already register on the KulturPass website.⁴⁴

The process is straightforward: interested parties register online via the website. They are then asked to provide an ELSTER certificate, which is an electronic tax declaration, as a form of identification. Once approved, cultural institutions and retailers can set up a 'digital shop', displaying the products, services and activities available to young adults in the virtual marketplace mentioned above. Cultural providers can set up their shops in three different ways: manually, through a CSV file or via API for data transfer.

Meanwhile, eligible 18-year-olds will also need to register online via the KulturPass website. To

“

The KulturPass is a unique opportunity to inspire 18-year-olds to read (more) books and to discover not only the wide variety of books but also the tremendous service and quality of advice available in bookshops



DR KYRA DREHER

Deputy Managing Director at Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels e.V.

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do so, they will either need an identity card with online ID function (for German citizens), an eID card (for EU citizens residing in Germany) or an electronic residence permit (for non-EU citizens residing in Germany).

Once they have registered and their account has been validated, they will be able to download the app and view the list of subscribed providers, as well as their ‘digital shops’. From there, they can reserve a product or book a service or activity. Then, the relevant business or institution has to approve the selection. Once approved, the 18-year-old receives a “pick-up” notification which must be presented and validated in-person at the point of collection. Once the purchase is complete, the amount will be credited to the relevant cultural provider’s registered account.

Essentially, this means that cultural goods, services and experiences can only be viewed and reserved online, but need to be purchased, collected or experienced physically in person.

Furthermore, a feature which is particularly helpful for the book sector is that the app will also provide a direct link to the German book trade’s books-in-print catalogue, allowing young readers to not only find the titles they’re looking for, but also a list of bookshops that sell them.⁴⁵

Impact and reception

The German Publishers and Booksellers Association (Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels e.V.) is very supportive of the KulturPass, having shared extensive resources

with its members and substantial information on its benefits for the German book trade, such as increased revenue and footfall opportunities.⁴⁶ It is also encouraging bookshops to sign up on the KulturPass website as soon as possible and advising them to advertise their participation on their own website and social media channels, as well as encouraging them to curate a dedicated selection of books for young adults.

Dr. Kyra Dreher, Deputy Managing Director at the German Publishers and Booksellers Association (Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels e.V.) believes that *“the KulturPass is a unique opportunity to inspire 18-year-olds to read (more) books and to discover not only the wide variety of books but also the tremendous service and quality of advice available in bookshops”*.

And how do booksellers feel? Iris Hunscheid, co-owner of the Bookshops Hoffmann in Achim and Jost in Bonn and Chairwoman of the Independent Booksellers Forum (IGUS), tells us that *“the KulturPass is a fantastic opportunity to draw young people’s attention towards smaller independent bookshops. Apart from appreciating the money they will hopefully spend in our shops, this is also a fantastic chance for us to present ourselves as a reliable and modern source for everything around books and book-related topics and trends. So, yes, we are very happy that we are following the example of other European countries like France and Italy now and glad to take part in the KulturPass”*.

What is also noteworthy under the German plan is that registration for the KulturPass is restricted to local cultural suppliers only. That is, large online platforms and streaming services, such as Amazon, Spotify and Netflix, are explicitly excluded from the scope of the initiative.

As of 14th June 2023, and at the time of writing this report, 5,600 cultural providers across the country have already registered and around 1.7 million products are currently available.⁴⁷

The KulturPass officially launched on 14th June 2023 and is expected to target over 750,000 young people in the country. If successful, the plan might be followed by additional funds for 15- to 17-year-olds, similarly to France.

Analysis: positive impact on the book industry

This section is a condensed summary and analysis of the positive impacts of the cultural voucher schemes, as reported in the four case studies above. The following points were highlighted by national booksellers associations and beneficiaries of the schemes, i.e., booksellers and teenagers or young adults. Additionally, under the subheading 'Lessons learned', we also briefly touch upon a few points that booksellers should be aware of in case similar schemes are introduced in their own countries.

Positive impacts

Creating new readers

As witnessed by booksellers in all countries where the scheme has been implemented, and confirmed by studies on reading and cultural spending habits conducted in France and Italy, the cultural voucher schemes have brought young people into bookshops in a volume not seen before, and young people seem to start reading for pleasure, and not just for school. As these new readers enter bookshops to pick up the books they ordered via the cultural voucher schemes, it might very well be the first time that they enter a bookshop; or at least, the first time they enter a new or unknown bookshop to them. It is clear that the schemes have been largely successful in introducing a wider group of young people to culture, and more specifically to literature.

A new demographic entering bookshops and engaging with their local cultural offer

All four cultural voucher schemes discussed above use some form of geo-localisation tools as an integral part of the design, with the objective to showcase the local cultural offer, bring people back together into the physical space and encourage young people to interact with the cultural actors in their proximity. This also reminds the younger generation of the added value of their own communities, particularly of brick-and-mortar (book)shops and face-to-face encounters with booksellers, who can listen to them and give recommendations based on their needs.

Encourage consumer spending on local culture

Thanks to the abovementioned design using geo-localisation so that the vouchers can be spent locally, cultural actors with physical shops, such as brick-and-mortar bookshops, greatly benefit from this measure. The scheme thus provides direct visibility, as well as indirect financial support and stability, to cultural retailers and grants young people access to culture in an innovative and practical way. From a sustainability perspective, spending locally is also preferable, given that lack of home delivery and local consumption results in fewer emissions.

Giving young people incentives to engage with culture

As observed by the President of the Italian Booksellers Association, Paolo Ambrosini, introducing young people to culture is not only a matter that concerns financial means, for it is not uncommon that those young people whose parents do have the financial means, still lack the exposure to culture and the habit of consuming cultural goods.

Therefore, schemes such as the cultural vouchers are crucial, as they give everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic background, the means and encouragement to forge their own relationship with the cultural offer in their vicinity.

Making vested readers diversify their repertoire and read more

As noted above, while the schemes have been successfully creating new readers, it also prompts already experienced readers to discover new genres and diversify their repertoire. As an example, as seen specifically in the case of France, data shows that most users start with Mangas but then move on to other genres. A possible explanation might be that by encouraging the young beneficiaries to go to physical, brick-and-mortar bookshops, where the entire stock is on display and a bookseller is there to give help and recommendations, the young readers are allowed to discover other books than they would online, where they would search for books they already were familiar with.

Supporting cultural sector and consumers in post-pandemic times and beyond

In two out of the four surveyed countries, namely Spain and Germany, the cultural vouchers were introduced as a key public support measure for the cultural and creative industries that were severely affected by the drop in customer footfall and revenues in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also an incentive for young people who had limited access to culture during the COVID-19 pandemic time to discover the true extent of activities and products available to them locally, regionally and nationally.

So far, figures indicate how much of a relief the cultural voucher system has brought to cultural businesses, following two years of drastic drops in sales. As seen above in the case of Spain, as of March 2023, the cultural voucher led to over €27 million in revenues for the cultural and creative sector. In addition, the case of France shows the direct impact of the scheme on the book sector, as 2022 figures showed that the cultural vouchers represented 1,74% of the book market in terms of turnover and 2% in terms of volume.

More is more: cultural practices are mutually reinforcing

Culture converges: a book is often turned into a film, tv-series or even into a theatre play, while the scripts of plays are often published and read as books. We rarely consume culture in just one format, and the culture voucher schemes confirms just that: cultural practices are mutually reinforcing. The more you are exposed to one cultural outlet, the more you will consume others. A brilliant example of this can be found in the hard data provided by the cultural vouchers: books that have recently been adapted into TV-series are the most reserved titles by the young beneficiaries of the scheme.

The cultural sector can therefore be described as a sort of interlaced cluster: when you support one actor, it often, by extension, leads to the support of the whole sector. Following this line of reasoning, through the Spanish scheme, young adults have to spend their voucher across three different types of activities, namely live performances, physical goods and digital products, encouraging and enabling them to consume and enjoy a wide range of content, instead of just prioritising one type of cultural goods or activities.

Lessons learned

The culture vouchers are not reliable sources of income

While this measure was set up to enable young adults to discover their country's rich cultural diversity as well as, in some cases, to support the cultural and creative sector overcome the COVID-19 challenges, cultural vouchers should be seen as additional financial support measures and not as a source of reliable or dependable income. Since the schemes are dependent on political support and each new government may decide to adapt the overall budget and implementation of the scheme, there is, unfortunately, no guarantee that the schemes will run permanently. Therefore, cultural providers should take care not to become dependent on the cultural voucher schemes, but rather see them as an additional source of income and a chance to diversify themselves as they reach an audience that might be different from what they are used to.

The proximity feature and presence of cultural actors go hand in hand

As highlighted above, by showing the cultural actors in a given area with the use of geo-location, the culture voucher schemes are designed to make young people discover the cultural wealth in their proximity. This "proximity feature" is the defining feature of the schemes and a massive asset, as we have seen through the many positive impacts outlined in this paper. On one point, however, this precondition falls short, namely what happens to those who live in remote areas, with few cultural actors present?

For a scheme like this to work, the cultural offer needs to already exist, not just in cities and well-populated areas, but also in rural and sparsely populated places. Otherwise, it enhances a geographical disparity, where those who live in cities receive more advantages and offers than those who live in remote areas.

The cultural sector needs diversified support

Since the cultural voucher schemes do not offer any investment supporting the creation of new cultural actors in remote areas, it can be argued that the scheme only "passively" supports those actors that already exist. In this sense, the voucher scheme needs to be complemented by additional, overarching cultural policies and funding opportunities to enrich the cultural offer also in rural and remote areas so that everyone can have access to culture and benefit from the scheme equally.

Technical issues with the software and apps

In some cases, such as Spain and France, booksellers have reported concerns with technical issues with the respective platforms, which influenced the capacity to display their goods accurately and reach the users of the app or platform. For Spain, the first year of implementation of the cultural voucher was far from easy, both for cultural providers and young adults alike. The Spanish Ministry for Culture set up extensive checks and burdensome steps, which led to registered cultural providers being unable to accept the voucher and 18-year-olds unable to activate their vouchers during some time. However, following extensive consultations, CEGAL is now confident that for the 2023 cycle, measures have been put in place and solutions found to make the process run more smoothly.

Among other things, this demonstrates the crucial role of national booksellers associations in liaising between booksellers and public authorities with regards to issues encountered and necessary changes.



Conclusion

Through the four case studies presented in this Industry Insights paper, we have travelled through Italy, France, Spain and Germany and discovered the positive impacts, as well as the challenges, of the four different cultural voucher schemes designed to introduce young people to the cultural wealth in their proximity. We have seen that the schemes have had a noticeable financial impact on the cultural sectors in each respective country, except of course for Germany where the scheme has only just been introduced at the time of writing this paper.

As with any scheme of this size, there have also been challenges. From technical issues with the software that connects vendors to consumers, to the contingency of schemes that are dependent on the support of the incumbent government and concerns that the schemes are measures that only support already existing cultural actors without investing in the creation of new offers, especially in sparsely populated areas. As we move forward, these challenges must be taken into account if the scheme is to be incorporated into long-term cultural policies.

However, from the perspective of the book sector, the perceived weakness of the scheme fades in light of what is to be gained

from it. What is particularly positive for the sector, besides the growing revenues derived from the voucher, is that the scheme seems to have succeeded in creating new readers of those young people that did not read before, while also making already vested readers explore different genres and diversify their repertoire. This is shown in the results of surveys and statistics from the voucher platforms, as well as the reported experience of booksellers who have witnessed a new demographic entering their bookshops for the first time.

By giving young adults the means to explore the rich cultural offer that exists on their doorstep, the cultural vouchers also encourage young people to form their own relationship with culture and connect to the different cultural actors in their surroundings. In turn, this allows them to explore their own identities through books, theatre plays, magazines, music etc. which the cultural vouchers grant them access to. As such, by creating a new bookshop clientele that stays for the long run, the schemes are effectively also fostering the next generation of readers. In that sense, a scheme like the cultural voucher, which invests in the youth of today, can be reflected in tomorrow's generation.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank EIBF members, national booksellers associations, in the respective countries for providing us with information and material for this Industry Insights research paper.



Syndicat de la librairie française (SLF)



Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels e. V.



Associazione Librai Italiani (ALI)



Confederación Española de Gremios y Asociaciones de Libreros (CEGAL)

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This paper was produced in June 2023



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

RISE Bookselling is a network programme organized by the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) and co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.