

# **The 21st century public library in England and Scotland: epistemic, community and political roles in the public sphere**

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Edinburgh Napier University for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, and that it is the result of my own independent work.

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13<sup>th</sup> March 2020

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Date

# The 21<sup>st</sup> century public library in England and Scotland: epistemic, community and political roles in the public sphere

## Abstract

This work is concerned with the role of the public library in England and Scotland in the twenty-first century. The findings derive from the analysis of empirical data collected in 24 focus groups over a period of four years between 2014 and 2018.

The main contribution of the thesis is that it extends understandings of the significant part that the public library plays as a 'public sphere', achieved through the fulfilment of three fundamental roles: (1) epistemic; (2) community; and (3) political. This is manifest in the provision of secure, neutral spaces where social, human and transactional capital is exchanged. The contribution is significant because previous research in Information Society Studies has presented public libraries merely as peripheral players in the public sphere. In this prior work the focus has fallen on the epistemic function of public libraries in furnishing access to information: there is little acknowledgement of the generation of social, human and transactional capital amongst active public library users. Similarly, in the Library and Information Studies (LIS) literature, the role of the library as a public sphere is under-played at the expense of attention paid to value, impact and performance measurement - currently in respect of societal outcomes and, in the past, by usage.

A further contribution of the thesis is to methodologies in LIS research. The empirical study demonstrates the value of the implementation of a flexible, multi-locational, longitudinal, focus group method to explore perceptions of public libraries held by active users. This approach may be transferable to other library sectors.

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### Publications associated with this thesis

Appleton, L., Hall, H. Duff, A, Raeside R. (2017) Using a longitudinal focus group methodology to measure the value and impact of public libraries, *Proceedings of the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries, 31<sup>st</sup> July – 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2017.*

[https://northumbria12.exordo.com/files/papers/102/final\\_draft/Using\\_a\\_longitudinal\\_focus\\_group\\_methodology\\_to\\_measure\\_the\\_value\\_and\\_impact\\_of\\_public\\_libraries.pdf](https://northumbria12.exordo.com/files/papers/102/final_draft/Using_a_longitudinal_focus_group_methodology_to_measure_the_value_and_impact_of_public_libraries.pdf)

Appleton, L., Hall, H. Duff, A, Raeside R. (2018) UK public library roles and value: a focus group analysis, *Journal of Library and Information Science*, 50(2)

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0961000618769987>

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose, rationale, and aims

This research presented in this thesis concerns the role of the 21<sup>st</sup> century public library system in England and Scotland, as a public sphere within the information society. Two broad research themes have been investigated: how public libraries impact upon citizenship in the United Kingdom; how citizens use public libraries within the information society. These themes are addressed with reference to the broader Library and Information Studies (LIS) and Information Society literature which in turn provide context for the research. A further significant context for the research is the current political and economic climate in the United Kingdom with regard to the funding and sustainability of public libraries. Many public library services have been cut or significantly reduced over recent years in the United Kingdom. This has brought into question the value of public libraries, particularly by those who use and need them (the citizenry), and those who are responsible for them and fund them (government and local authorities), and has resulted in a perceived 'public library crisis'. To this end, this doctoral research will assist the comprehension and understanding of how public libraries in England and Scotland are used. The empirical study could also provide a qualitative evidence base which can be used by citizens, policy makers and local authorities alike to help inform their interactions with the public library system. All are beneficiaries of the research and consequently the findings and contributions of the research could have some political use and impact within the current public library environment in England and Scotland.

The purpose of the research is to empirically demonstrate the perceived consumer perceptions of public libraries in England and Scotland, within the current political and economic environment. In achieving this the themes of how libraries advantage those who use them and how libraries operate within the information society are addressed. The main aim of the research is to discover how citizens use public libraries and how they perceive their usage within the current climate. Objectives of the research include: providing clarity and understanding of how public libraries are used; understanding consumer perceptions of how public libraries contribute to

individual and community citizenship; greater understanding of how public libraries operate as public spheres within the information society.

### 1.2 Geographic scope of research

Public libraries in the United Kingdom are governed differently, depending upon which of the four constituent home countries they are located. They are funded and either run or commissioned by local government or devolved national assemblies. In England and Scotland governance is the responsibility of local library authorities (unitary, county or metropolitan borough councils). Northern Ireland has a single unitary library authority and in Wales library provision is a devolved responsibility of the Welsh Government. Whilst a full United Kingdom wide study is desirable, the focus of this research is on public libraries in England and Scotland. This is due to methodological reasons around sampling and access to library authorities in Wales and Northern Ireland. Whilst the focus remains on public libraries in England and Scotland, some of the policy, legislative and advisory literature referred to in the research overlaps into coverage of library provision in Wales and Northern Ireland. Similarly, some of the findings and discussion, whilst informed through empirical work conducted in England and Scotland, could be generalizable in a United Kingdom context.

### 1.3 Contribution to knowledge

The main contribution to knowledge to come from the thesis is that it extends understandings of the significant part that the public library plays as a 'public sphere', achieved through the fulfilment of three fundamental roles: (1) epistemic; (2) community; and (3) political. This is manifest in the provision of secure, neutral spaces where social, human and transactional capital is exchanged. Previously, information society studies research has presented public libraries merely as peripheral players within the public sphere, where the focus has been on the epistemic function of public libraries in furnishing access to information. Similarly, in the LIS literature, the role of the library as a public sphere is under-played, but the findings and discussion contained within this doctoral study re-position the public library fundamentally within the public sphere. A further contribution of the

thesis is to methodologies in LIS research. The empirical study demonstrates the value of the implementation of a flexible, multi-locational, longitudinal, focus group method to explore perceptions of public libraries held by active users. This approach may be transferable to other library sectors.

#### 1.4 Theory and research methods

The research is situated within the discipline of information society studies, and is relevant also to library and information studies, both of which sit under a broader information science domain. The theoretical framework which has been used to conduct the research borrows theories including information society theory, social exchange theory and social capital theory. This theoretical approach was developed through an initial extensive literature review, which informed the empirical work of the project. Gaps in the existing research and literature were also identified during the literature review and research questions were formulated in order to address this. A flexible research design was used in developing the longitudinal methodological approach for the study, which resulted in substantial data collection.

#### 1.5 Key concepts and definitions

The key concepts which appear throughout the thesis and which have underpinned the research are expounded in the literature review and the discussion chapters (chapters 2 and 8). Brief definitions and explanations of the concepts are provided below by way of introduction.

##### 1.5.1 Public libraries

“There are five fundamental characteristics shared by public libraries: they are generally supported by taxes (usually local, though any level of government can and may contribute); they are governed by a board to serve the public interest; they are open to all, and every community member can access the collection; they are entirely voluntary in that no one is ever forced to use the services provided; and they provide basic services without charge.” (Rubin, 2016, p. 58)

One of the aims of the research is to achieve greater clarity of the role of the public library in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The above definition and concept of a public library is widely understood and several of these different aspects of public libraries are covered in the literature review. Both the literature and the findings have enabled a

distillation of the understanding of public libraries into three specific roles. The first of these has been labelled the epistemic role, which is grounded in epistemology, the study of knowledge. In the context of the epistemic role of the library however, the focus is on the infrastructure and the ways in which the library generates and makes knowledge available. The second role is the community role of the library, which concerns itself with both the physical library building and the more abstract library service and its position within society and local community. Investigations into the community role of the library can often bring out sociological elements and discussions, and this has proved to be the case in this thesis. The third role has been identified as the political role that the library plays. This encompasses the debates about information poverty and wealth and how information is a commodity used in economic growth. It also includes the concept of how libraries themselves are political and enable political participation.

#### 1.5.2 Performance measurement of public libraries

In order to discuss how library users value public libraries, there needs to be an understanding of what individuals and groups expect of their libraries in respect of achieving outcomes and meeting user expectations. With this in mind the sub-theme of 'performance measurement of libraries' is included as a key concept in that techniques and strategies which assist the measurement of a library's performance can result in insight into how libraries are valued by those who use them. Within this sub-theme financial value, perceived social value and societal impact are considered. Similarly, social, economic and political impact on individuals and communities are also outcomes of public library usage that can be addressed through applied performance measurement.

#### 1.5.3 Information society studies

Information society studies is an academic discipline in itself and consequently there are several theses and models of the information society which will be discussed as part of the literature review in section 2.2.2 and 2.2.3. For the purposes of providing a working definition, a simple way of considering the concept is provided by Buckland, when he suggests that it "concerns information in relation

to everyday human experience, and thus with the complex multiplicity of messages, records, documents, and perceptions in our lives; the difficulties associated with meaning and finding the most relevant information; the need to trust sources and documents” (Buckland, 2017, p. 5).

#### 1.5.4 Public sphere

The public sphere was originally conceived by Habermas, who defined it as ‘society engaged in critical debate’ (Habermas, 1962). It has also been defined as ‘a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible to reach a common judgement about them (Hauser, 1999, p.61). Therefore, in relation to the information society, the public sphere is a space or platform which enables citizens to access, navigate and consume information, and is often discussed in relation to the role of the state within the information society. In information society terms, the main aim of public sphere institutions is to provide an information infrastructure for the exchange and formation of public opinion.

#### 1.5.5 Intangible capital

Where libraries are regarded as physical entities and spaces, discussions around value and impact tend to focus on how users interact with the library’s physical assets (e.g. books, spaces, PCs, photocopiers, newspapers, etc.). These physical assets, because costs and value can be directly applied to them, can be known as tangible assets. In libraries (and indeed in other organisations) these tangible assets are complemented with several intangible assets such as human interactions (e.g. with library staff or amongst library users) or the generation of new knowledge and information. It is more difficult to associate a direct cost or value with these intangible assets and interactions, and therefore they become known as intangible capital. Specific types of intangible capital include: social capital; human capital; intellectual capital; transactional capital; relationship capital, etc.

#### 1.6 Research questions

The information society, performance measurement and social capital lenses have proved particularly useful lenses through which to review the perceived role and

value of the public library in England and Scotland. Together, and through appropriating other elements of social, economic and exchange theory, they provide a framework through which to question how public libraries deliver their societal functions and fulfil their citizenship agendas. In order to address the gaps in the literature, the research investigation needs to take into consideration the multi-disciplinary nature of problem. Any such investigation needs to resonate with both information society studies and library and information studies. With this in mind there are three broad research questions, which have been developed in order to inform the empirical research of this doctoral study. These are articulated in table 1.

Research question one	To what extent is an individual's position advantaged as a result of using public libraries?
Research question two	What is the impact of using a public library service on individual and community citizenship?
Research question three	What is the role of the public library in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century?

*Table 1: Research questions*

The findings from the literature review have been used to develop appropriate research questions, which have then informed the empirical work of the thesis. Subsequently, an appropriate qualitative research method has been designed and developed in order to carry out the empirical investigation into the role and value of the public library in England and Scotland, as a public sphere in the information society.

### 1.7 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured as follows:

Literature review - this chapter will further set the context for this work covering the main themes of the role of public libraries in the twenty-first century, an assessment of their value and their place in the Information Society as a public sphere. The literature review concludes with the research questions.

Method – a three-phase longitudinal, multi-location, focus group methodology was employed for the study. This chapter describes the methodology. The methodological contribution which resulted from the research is included in this chapter.

Findings – the research findings are presented in four separate chapters. The first findings chapter, by way of introduction, reports on each of the 24 focus groups conducted for the research and situates each geographically and demographically. The following three findings chapters each address one of the research questions, and the findings are presented chronologically by longitudinal phase for each.

Discussion – The discussion links back to both the literature review and the research findings in order to develop narrative around the theoretical contribution that this research makes to information society and LIS scholarship. The discussion is presented under three broad headings: the epistemic role of the public library; the community role of the public library; the political role of the public library.

Conclusion – The conclusion provides a summary of the main research findings and a detailed overview of the contributions to knowledge which are made in this thesis.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

In order to fully inform this doctoral study, it is necessary to visit the literature available about the role and value of the public library in the United Kingdom and also on contemporary usage of public libraries in the information society. This research is situated within the domain of information science, and in particular within the disciplines of library and information studies (LIS) and information society studies. A range of literature from both of these disciplines have contributed to the body of work in this literature review.

The main focus of the research is the role of the library within the information society, but the first half of the literature review concentrates on the narrative and scholarship about the public library from within the library and information studies (LIS) literature. Attention is given initially to the literature pertaining to the traditional and historic roles and purposes of the public library system in the United Kingdom. The review then turns to the current modern day usage of public libraries in the United Kingdom, where the measurement of value and impact of library services, and performance measurement in general are considered. This leads to a section which focuses on the modern day 21<sup>st</sup> century role of the public library and the current 'public library crisis' in the United Kingdom is given due consideration at this point.

By way of providing an alternative scholarly viewpoint about public libraries, the second part of the review focuses on information society studies literature, and in particular works which deal with the concept of the public sphere within the information society. The public library as public sphere features during this section, which is then followed by discussion about the role of the librarian in the public sphere. The closing sections revert back to a review of LIS literature, this time concerned with the measurement of intangible assets in libraries, in particular social and human capital. Finally, theoretical frameworks through which to conduct the doctoral study are considered, which help to situate the research academically, and to develop the research questions.

## 2.2 A brief history of public libraries

Public libraries in the United Kingdom have been around for some 170 years, since the inception of the Public Libraries Act of 1850, which gave boroughs the power to establish their own free public libraries. Prior to this, subscription libraries had existed in the United Kingdom, but it is not until the Public Libraries Act that a national institution was created which enabled free access to information and literature. Early libraries were highly popular with those that made use of them and they were developed as places of learning and education, and located in urban areas, accessible to all. Consequently, public libraries were regarded as central to the improvement and opening up of society and were often spoken or written about with a huge sense of civic pride:

“Regarding the perception of public libraries as centres of high culture, it was common for libraries to be cited as ‘jewels in the crown’ of civic society. They were places where readers could access works that summoned up the ‘spirits of the ages’. Reflecting a democratic ethos, readers in public libraries were treated to a spectrum of political and social opinion.”

(Black & Pepper, 2012, p. 465)

Black and Pepper suggest that the above metaphor and figurative language was very common when describing public libraries, both in respect of what the library provided, but also in the description of the physical library. They go on to say that “the impressive designs that characterised many library buildings celebrated civic ideals of self-help, citizenship, and duty – ideals which also promoted in the discourses of the philanthropists who gave such a boost to public library provision in the generation before the First World War” (Black & Pepper, 2012, p. 466). Libraries had been developed as physical information systems, designed for discovery and for serendipity in order that the public could learn and be informed. Library users would be encouraged to learn and develop through browsing shelves and satisfying their curiosity (Rice, McCreadie & Change, 2001; Foster & Ford, 2003). These are information seeking behaviours that still exist today, in both the physical and digital library.

The public library was seen very much as being a force for good and at the heart of civilised British society, and according to Black (2000, pp. 3-4) was “widely viewed, among its supporters, at any rate, as an institution of emancipation and inclusion.” However, Black also asks whether public libraries have ever been truly classless and suggests that they have always been an expression of liberal middle-class ideals and subsequently met some criticism (Black, 2000, pp. 6-7). For example, Norcup, writing through a cultural studies perspective, highlights how while the public library continued to become a space for cultural emancipation, critics of the public library began to question the merit of them (Norcup, 2017). Norcup suggests that for the likes of Hoggart (1957) and Williams (1966) providing spaces through which literacy could be encouraged and acquired, through reading was not enough to justify the existence of the public library service, and they were of the opinion that libraries should focus more on serving the needs of their communities. The Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964 legally protects the access to free lending of books and cultural materials. Norcup suggests that in order to answer their critics and really start to demonstrate the cultural emancipatory values of libraries the progressive and community librarianship movements of the 1960s and 1970s built on this statutory right and began to focus on encouraging and supporting citizens to engage with their own learning and aspirations.

The library and information studies (LIS) literature which deals with public library history suggests that from their inception until the 1980s, public libraries flourished in the United Kingdom and were held in high regard and esteem both by those that used them and those that provided them. Their role was essentially an epistemic one, in that public libraries were the places where citizens were encouraged to visit in order to access books and resources for educational and self-development purposes.

### 2.2.1 [Current narrative on the role of public libraries](#)

For the purposes of this literature review ‘current’, in respect of public libraries in the United Kingdom, shall be regarded as post 1990s. This time point is significant as it is during the latter decades of the twentieth century that spending by local authorities came under increasing scrutiny and the role, value and impact of the

public library system began to be questioned in a way not previously experienced. Until this point, and on a very basic level libraries were described as “collections of materials organised for use” (Feather & Sturges, 1997, p. 254) or as both “a collection of books and the space that houses them” (Campbell, 2013, p. 8) Chowdhury argues that “this picture is very limited and unhelpful in that the library as a place of reading is not a complete definition as it omits the various other activities which take place within a library, as well as the roles played by a library in human life and society in general.” (Chowdhury et al, 2008, p. 4). Similarly, these more traditional definitions of ‘library’ do not appear to take into account the developments of the digital and electronic information resources and perhaps a more accurate understanding of ‘libraries’ can only come about when addressing contemporary issues alongside the traditional roles and functions of the library. Many public library commentators write enthusiastically and positively about public libraries, often describing them as being at the centre of their society:

“Libraries are at the heart of social systems; they exist to serve the needs of people, to help them live, learn and develop and to act as part of the social glue which holds communities together.”

(Brophy, 2006, p. 3).

Much of the contemporary LIS literature demonstrates a very pro-library bias in which the use of public libraries is only ever regarded as a beneficial activity for those using them. Brophy (2001) examined what constitutes a contemporary library service and takes into account historic and traditional functions as well as the emerging technological developments which have had a huge impact on librarianship in the twentieth century and anticipated the continual changing nature and role of libraries moving into the twenty-first century. He argued that ‘libraries provide a very wide variety of activities and services for people in all walks of life’ and that the key concepts of this activity are “education, information storage and retrieval, and the transmission of knowledge.” (Brophy, 2001, p. 14). Brophy’s discussion represents a shift in the narrative, when compared to the more historical

LIS literature, in that technological and digital developments are now considered when defining the role of the public library.

Totterdell (2005) discussed the contemporary role of the library in society and suggested that the traditional public library in the United Kingdom is based on four keystones: culture, education, leisure and recreation, and information, and that different political viewpoints have placed various emphases on these four keystones. This suggests a multi-functional role for the public library spanning across different types of community provision. The idea of public libraries having this variety of societal roles means that they can potentially have different types of impact and value depending upon who is using them and for what purpose. In effect it gives public libraries a greater outreach than would be possible if they fulfilled only one of the functions identified. Totterdell suggested that the political environment at any one point in recent history has an impact on the focus, and indeed the status of the United Kingdom public library system (Totterdell, 2005, p. 5).

A comprehensive account of public libraries in the United Kingdom at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be found in Goulding's book *Public Libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. In it Goulding provides a thorough guide to the contemporary discourses surrounding issues of identify, purpose, value and strategy of the public library service and explores the context within which public libraries in the United Kingdom are operating. In analysing public library activity in both local and national contexts, Goulding recommends areas in which libraries need to effectively operate, and more importantly to adapt in order to survive (Goulding, 2006). Digital provision is regarded as important and Goulding discusses the significance of access to Information Technology (IT) and the 'People's network', as well as regenerating and building communities as fundamental functions of the library. In bringing together the different definitions and perspectives of the role of library, it is possible to see that the current narrative on the role of the public library encompasses more than simply the access and provision of knowledge and learning. The literature suggests that public libraries have a role in providing access to and navigation of digital

information and in addition also have a distinct role at the heart of their communities.

A noticeable trend in the current literature is a lack of consensus, amongst LIS scholars as to what public libraries in the United Kingdom need to do in order to fully define their role and identity. The differences between Totterdell's, Goulding's and Brophy's narratives are indicative of this and these commentaries are all written within six years of each other at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are other different narratives available including many which continue to extol the virtues of freely accessible library services focusing on the provision of knowledge and information. However, where this is the case, commentators have been clear to point out that public libraries are no longer just about the loan of books (Pateman & Vincent, 2010, p. 143) but that digital provision and access to information and resources is equally as important. More recent commentary suggests that "there has been increasing acknowledgement that libraries have a role to play that extends beyond the physical confines of the building and now incorporates an online dimension, which further challenges the measurement of use and value to the local community." (Casseldon, 2016, p. 11)

Whilst this shift to digital information provision has forced discussion about the role and identity of public libraries, it is this latter point, made by Casselden, of being able to measure the use and value to the local community which has shaped the most recent discussions. Pateman and Vincent suggested in 2010 that there was even then, a lack of clear vision, nationally, about what the role of the library is in modern society and advocated an increasingly decentralised model of public library service, which is responsive to its community (Pateman & Vincent, 2010, p. 140). Such lack of clarity and consensus means that, although the public have an understanding of what a public library service is and does, many still have 'an outdated and often negative image of a boring institution, filled with dusty books and even dustier staff.' (Pateman & Williment, 2013, p. 59). These outdated images and the lack of clarity prove to be unhelpful in defining the role of the modern public library, particularly when considering the increasing breadth and scope of public library activity in the United Kingdom.

### 2.3 Measuring performance, value and impact of public libraries

In order to achieve a greater understanding of the role of the modern public library it is necessary to consider how the performance of libraries is measured, with particular focus on the value and the impact of public libraries. Whilst value and impact are often considered together and indeed are aspect of service which need to be measured, they are quite different and need to be understood as separate entities. The dictionary definition of 'impact' refers to 'a powerful effect that something has on a situation or person' while value is defined as 'how important something is' or 'the importance or worth of something for someone' (Cambridge University Press, 2020). Therefore, value is interpreted differently by different people, so the 'value' of a library service is subjective and is perceived differently by different customers and different stakeholders. Consequently, 'the need to communicate the value of the organisation to a complex network of stakeholders, both internally and externally is receiving increased recognition and awareness' (Broady-Preston & Lobo, 2010, p. 123). Palmer suggests that 'demonstrating the value of the service to a range of stakeholders such as employees, government agencies, etc. may take preference over communicating value to customer groups' (Palmer, 2008, pp. 485-6). Essentially value needs to be articulated and conveyed differently to different groups.

Halpin (et al) discuss the value of public libraries in a broader 'social impact' context and suggest that the 'impact-oriented' evidence base used to make decisions about libraries is not always clear and can appear to be based on statistics such as the footfall of those coming into library buildings and book borrowing rates. These are quantifiable metrics and although there is recognition that this is a well-researched area in some respects, there does not appear to be an accepted methodology for providing evidence on the actual perceived value of public libraries (by those who use them), or a consensus on how that value is defined (Halpin et al, 2015).

Although there is much in the library and information studies (LIS) literature about what the public library service provides to the user community, it is more difficult to present this in terms of perceived value. Reviews by Stanziola (2010) and Rooney-Browne (2011) expound upon this and identify different ways in which the

value of the public library can be segmented, the two overarching value types being economic value and social value. Economic value is determined by looking at libraries through a return on investment (ROI) or value for money (VFM) whilst understanding social value involves understanding how libraries are meeting the expectations of users and benefiting them on many different levels. Rooney-Browne identifies a huge tension and difference between the two and concludes that 'it is unrealistic to expect to be able to measure social value with as much confidence as we do economic value because as a methodology it is still underdeveloped' (Rooney-Browne, 2011, p. 29)

Broady-Preston and Lobo discuss how understanding and measuring concepts of value and impact in a service environment remains challenging and problematic for service providers, especially when attempting to measure service provision from a customer stakeholder perspective. However, they argue for a customer-centric approach to developing library services and suggest that communicating the value of the service to external and internal stakeholders becomes a key factor (Broady-Preston & Lobo, 2010, p. 132). This involves considering different ways in which to articulate and communicate the 'worth' of the public library.

Performance measurement has become a significant sub-discipline of library and information services management and one which is well documented. There are many aspects of performance measurement including the measurement of performance through metrics (often associated with economic or financial value) as well as the measurement of outcomes, which are less tangible and associated with social impact.

### 2.3.1 Measuring the financial value of public libraries

The financial value of public libraries is often questioned with 'value for money' and 'return on investment' being used to justify resources and budgets allocated to public libraries. Financial value, and value in general, is often linked to statistical evidence, particularly when it comes to gaining value from tangible assets (Halpin et al, 2015, p. 31). Therefore, the culture of library evaluation has focused on figures and usage statistics (e.g. amount spent on books, number of active users, number of loans, number of loans per user, amount spent per user, etc.) Such

statistical data about the quantity of usage can show, to some extent, how much a library's services and resources have been drawn upon and there is a perception that high usage indicates that the service is beneficial to its users.

However, usage is not synonymous with value, and many commentators are wary of measuring library service value purely in economic terms. Troll (2001) argued that as libraries had been developing their collections and resources very responsively in preparation for the digital age that we now live in, they had also failed to develop strategies and frameworks for measuring library usage in such a way that impact could be demonstrated. She suggested that libraries were trying to demonstrate impact and value through usage figures, whether it be a decline in gate counts and inter library loan requests to large increases in e-resource usage, whereas in actual fact this simply demonstrates usage of a library which reflects the changing nature of the information and knowledge resources being made available to library users, and not the changing nature of the professional, technical and administrative skills required to deliver library services in the digital age. Similarly, Town (2011) argues that performance measurement techniques which focus on library output, activity based costing and management information is insufficient and suggests that libraries require an 'indication of transcendent contribution that is beyond the immediate or currently recognised temporal, spatial, and influential boundaries of libraries' (Town, 2011, p. 111). Town argues that the human resources contained in the library environment, through both professional and administrative library staff, contribute to the value and impact of the library. He suggests that it is through the human and transactional capital generated through interaction between library staff and library users which ultimately achieve the outcomes of the library and it is these non-tangible assets which need to be measured.

The works of Town and Troll further validate the viewpoint that libraries are a far greater resource than the tangible assets contained within them and that value and impact can only be realised when analysing the outcome of library usage rather than the actual metrics and outputs of library usage. However, the local and central government funders of public libraries often want to see the value and impact of

services illustrated in economic measures and subsequently an illustration of return on investment is often requested. An alternative approach is suggested by McMenemy (2009) who argues that measuring outputs alongside the measurement of economic impacts should provide evidence of value for money (VFM).

McMenemy introduces the system of contingent valuation, which aims to survey users as well as non-users in assessing a public library's economic value. He draws upon the work of Aubo and Audunsen (2002) who discuss in greater detail the rational choice theory behind contingent evaluation in that individuals must anticipate the outcomes of alternative course of action and calculate that which will be best for them. For example, a person who does not use the public library will have no opinion on the quality of its collections, but they may still place value on the public library's collections in terms of its worth to society (McMenemy, 2009, p. 156). This method has been used to demonstrate return on investment for every pound/dollar spent on a public library service. An example of where this method has been applied is the British Library, where findings suggested that for every £1.00 spent on the service, a return of £4.00 was generated in terms of public good, knowledge transfer, intellectual capital, etc. (Pung, Clarke & Patten, 2004, p. 88).

A similar example of alternative return on investment measures is that of the Volunteer Investment and Value Audit (VIVA) toolkit that has been used to assess the 'output' of volunteer programmes in public libraries (Broady-Preston, 2014). This measurement tool regards outputs as the value of the volunteers' time, which is assessed in relation to the 'inputs', which are regarded as the resources required to support volunteers (Gaskin, 2011). In her paper, Broady-Preston discusses the practical value of being able to calculate the direct and opportunity costs of volunteer programmes in libraries and argues that the VIVA toolkit allows for both outputs and outcomes to be measured (Broady-Preston, 2014)

### 2.3.2 Measuring the societal value of public library services

An alternative to attempting to demonstrate financial value is to measure the societal value of the public library. Where local authorities and library managers may have focused on quantitative outputs based measures for articulating the

value of the service, the LIS academic community has shifted towards looking at how societal value is evidenced through outcomes measures. SocialValueUK is a national network which seeks to shift the way in which value is regarded as an economic concept, to one where the social impact of decisions, interventions and activities are assigned value (SocialValueUK, 2020). SocialValueUk provides guidance for public bodies about how they can maximise their impact through having clear stakeholder focused outcomes, which have social value assigned to them. According to this guidance, social value is a way of quantifying the relative importance of impacts that are not already captured in financial or market transactions (Aps, 2017). The intended social outcomes of the public library service, and associated benefits to the library user therefore need to be explicit in order that social impact can be demonstrated. Understanding the library user or stakeholder, their demands and expectations and their loyalty, is essential for identifying success criteria and impact indicators when placing value on outcomes (Hernon & Altman, 2010, p. 10). In this respect, Markless and Streatfield (2006) illustrate how meaningful success criteria need to be set around outcomes of library usage rather than through metrics associated with usage, such as number of library visits, number of book loans, number of electronic downloads, etc. They argue that this is not helpful when trying to demonstrate value, therefore both the process of identifying indicators and their association to outcomes need to be considered in when measuring value.

An academic study of public library outcomes was presented by Vakkari and Serola (2012) in which they produced an extensive and systematic categorisation of areas which affect citizens and which might be benefited by public library use. They divided the benefits into 22 separate areas, covering, work and business, everyday activities and leisure time activities. These benefit areas were then reduced by factor analysis into three major outcome types: benefits in everyday activities; benefits in cultural interests; career benefits. Vakkari then modelled perceived benefits of public library use using the three outcome types. This research took place in a selection of Finnish libraries and Vakkari was able to demonstrate that the role of the public library differs between different users and different social and

demographic groups, depending upon the outcomes delivered (Vakkari, 2013). Whilst limited in its scope, such research begins to position public library outcomes as focus on which to measure the impact and the value of public libraries.

Another significant study during the same period comes from Huysmans and Oomes (2013) who carried out a methodological research programme in the Netherlands in order to develop a framework by which the value of public libraries can be measured. Huysmans and Oomes argue that there is a growing need for public libraries to demonstrate their worth, not just in economic terms, but in a more sociological sense. The subsequent theoretical framework uses five domains of impact through which the value of the library can be measured: cognitive, social, cultural, affective and economic. These are further examples of broad, general outcomes against which libraries are able to measure their performance and impact. These studies demonstrate the need for public libraries to move towards using more qualitative measures of performance in order to articulate the value of the library against pre-determined social outcomes.

LIS scholars from northern Europe (particularly Scandinavia) have produced a significant amount of recent literature on societal outcomes measurement in public libraries. Vakkari et al (2015) compare the perceived benefits of public library usage across five culturally different countries (Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, South Korea and the USA), and highlight the differences in societal outcomes for the public library services in each country. This study again concludes that public libraries need to look beyond metrics and usage figures and focus on outcomes. As Vakkari et al suggest, outcomes are different depending upon the country, the social and political environment and the demographics of the user population, but in each instance the outcomes are associated with knowledge and learning; society and community; self-development; and, cultural enrichment.

### 2.3.3 Measuring the impact of public library services

In discussing 'library outcomes' there is a general acceptance that libraries need to demonstrate beneficial epistemic and societal 'outcomes' to their users. Examples of such outcomes could be around: knowledge gained by users; higher information

literacy competencies; higher academic or professional success; social inclusion; or, an increase in individual wellbeing (Poll & Payne, 2006, p. 550). However, with regard to impact, Kerslake and Kinnell (1997, p.12) claimed that the impact most frequently associated with public library services is the social impact that they have on their communities and constituents. Public library services can only really demonstrate this if they articulate 'social wellbeing' or 'social inclusion' outcomes. Where such outcomes are planned for, and subsequently achieved, then anecdotal or testimonial evidence from library users can be a very powerful tool by which to measure the impact (and value) of such outcomes:

"I didn't cry when I was homeless. The tears came later. I needed to care for my son and the library provided me an enchanted world to share with him. We arrived every day as the doors opened. My eager boy discovered dinosaurs, befriended librarians, and developed an on-going love of books. I devoured stories of others who face challenges. We shared story time and played on the lawn. Though homeless, the library helped me to mother my son by allowing me to give when I had nothing to spend (Dowd, 1996, p. 162).

This quotation from Dowd's study of homelessness and public libraries in 1996 provides an example of how library impact can be demonstrated and documented qualitatively. Assuming that public library outcomes are around access, inclusion and support for those citizens who find themselves marginalised, then in this instance, the library has clearly had a positive impact upon the individual mother and son in the example and this is evidenced in the testimonial.

Acknowledgement should be given to the fact that this example is over twenty years old, but the use of such evidence to demonstrate impact has not progressed in the public library performance measurement domain and there are very few more recent examples. Writing in 2007, White suggested that there was still no consensus of a definitive model of intangible assessment in public libraries (2007). He described how libraries used an inherent mix of tangible assets (books, spaces, PCs) and intangible assets (human capital, intellectual capital, relationship capital) in delivering the end product to their customers, that of a library and information

service. White also argued that the human and relationship capital of a library need to be fully considered when attempting to measure the value and impact of the service as a whole, and at the time this was not common practice.

One way in which libraries have addressed the problems associated with measuring performance against outcomes is through applying a Social Return on Investment (SROI), which whilst closely aligned with the financial value based ROI model allows for demonstration of impact through evidencing outcomes and giving them a value. SROI is a framework developed by the Cabinet Office (2009) and allows organisations to measure change (i.e. impact) in ways that are most relevant to the organisation. SROI allows for a performance narrative to be generated by measuring social, environmental and economic outcomes and uses monetary values to represent them, even though the focus is on subjective value, rather than money. For example, the Welsh Government's 'Libraries for Life 2008-11' strategy effectively used a SROI framework in order to demonstrate successful social return on investment in monetary terms. Where social outcomes had been assigned value and impact in the form of positive change had been identified, several strands of the strategy achieved clear social returns on investment for every pound (£) of financial capital invested in them (Kennedy & Tyler, 2012).

A further alternative framework for measuring performance and demonstrating the social impact that libraries have is the balanced scorecard. Social Enterprise London's (SEL) version of the balanced scorecard (BSC) was developed expressly to help social enterprises to clarify and articulate their strategic objectives, to give organisations a mechanism to track performance holistically through both quantitative and qualitative information (New Economies Foundation, 2020). It is the combination of quantitative metrics and statistics along with more qualitative social impact indicators (e.g. outcomes with values) that make this method attractive to libraries. Reid (2011) and Lloyd (2006) make the case for libraries to use the Balanced Scorecard as a performance measurement tool acknowledging the benefit that combining library usage statistics and costs with qualitative outcomes have on articulating the strategic vision of the library and accounting for performance accordingly. Broady-Preston (2005) and Corrall (2015) take these

discussions further in providing discussion and examples of the intellectual capital outcomes of library usage, and measuring the subsequent value of this through the Balanced Scorecard.

Like SROI and the Balanced Scorecard, the contingency valuation approach and VIVA toolkits discussed in section 2.3.1 are also regarded as alternatives to pure financial return on investment measures. The important attribute in these alternative methods, which seek to measure impact, is that they rely on ascertaining library outcomes and assigning value to them in a strategic sense.

These outcomes based approaches of measuring the impact and value of the library need to consider the community and societal position of the library and include the human resource and transactional capital which is present in the library system. Whilst learning and literacy continue to be important outcomes for libraries, the community and cultural elements of service have become high priority areas for public libraries in the United Kingdom.

#### 2.4 The 21<sup>st</sup> century public library in the United Kingdom

Defining the role of the public library and establishing systems of performance measurement have been problematic in the United Kingdom in recent years. In 2000, the Library and Information Commission reported how public libraries were proving to be failing in tackling social exclusion and concluded that “many of the UK’s most marginal and excluded people are not considered to be a priority in public library authority strategy, service delivery and staffing” and that this “applies especially to a number of social groups who commonly face stigma and discrimination” (Muddiman *et al*, 2000, ix). Similar research conducted in northern England in 2014 into reduced library opening hours shows that the curtailment of services reduces life chances for users, and denies them to would-be users (McCahill, Birdi & Jones, 2018). These examples focus on the public library’s role in society and are typical of the recent and current narrative about public libraries underperforming against their intended and expected outcomes.

The United Kingdom government exclaimed in 1998 that it ‘believes that public libraries play a vital social, economic and educational role in the daily life of the nation (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 1998, 5). This re-envisioning of the public library as the ‘street-corner university’ acknowledged the fundamental role that they were regarded as having, at the turn of the century, in respect of ‘promoting education as well as tackling social exclusion by giving information to the ‘have-nots’ with access to new technology that they would not otherwise have’ (Lister, 1999, p. 8). Broady-Preston and Cox (2000) argued that this concept of the public library service becoming a street-corner university heralded a return to the original epistemic and social ethos of the public library provision. They described the it as ‘one which views the service as empowering and enabling its users, and contributing to achieving economic regeneration and social inclusion policies’ (Broady-Preston & Cox, 2000, 160).

In some of the more recent LIS literature the increasing diversification of services that public libraries either currently offer or should be offering, is discussed. On reporting the findings of five years’ worth of public library usage data and qualitative research conducted by the Carnegie Trust (Peachey 2017a), Peachey suggests that “the best public libraries enable citizens to fulfil their potential and act as a trusted and safe space that enables engagement and participation” (Peachey, 2017b). The CarnegieUK Trust report describes public libraries as enabling economic, social, cultural and educational policy goals which result in improving people’s wellbeing. This is achieved by: supporting individuals navigate the digital society and providing appropriate training and development; providing safe spaces for connecting local communities; making cultural opportunities available; enabling learning and literacy (Peachey, 2017b). The Chartered Institute of Library and Information professionals suggest that modern day public libraries stand for “intellectual freedom, democratic engagement, community cohesion, social justice and equality of opportunity” (CILIP, 2010, p. 1). Mission and objectives such as those claimed by CILIP and the Carnegie UK Trust are ambitious and demonstrate how libraries are expected to be much more than simply collections of books, or places for facilitating learning and literacy.

#### 2.4.1 Digital inclusion

Digital inclusion also features as a key public library outcome. In the *Independent Library Report for England* [Sieghart Report] (DCMS, 2014), Sieghart sees that role of the public library as being very multi-faceted including rectifying literacy standards and enabling digital literacy and digital fluency. Digital inclusion for all citizens is a particular focus of the Sieghart report, particularly in respect of reaching out to marginalised groups. One trend in this area is the notion that use of digital and print media is affected by users' age, in that those born within the last two decades are likely to be users of digital material over print and that older generations are less likely to access digital resources and are over-reliant on print media (Jones & Czerniewicz, 2010). Several theories about 'digital natives versus digital immigrants' and 'digital residents versus digital visitors' exist (White & Le Cornu, 2011), where the focus is usually on the digital competencies and capabilities of being able to use particular technologies in day to day life. This is a fundamental element of digital citizenship, and therefore of digital inclusion with regard to public libraries enabling users to develop competencies and capabilities.

#### 2.4.2 Localism and place-making

Sieghart also places a lot of emphasis on the localism of libraries and the changing demands being placed on the professional library workforce (DCMS, 2014). In doing so, Sieghart acknowledges the ever increasing reliance on digital information and the role of the library workforce in making this accessible and navigable for citizens within the community. There are several examples of both academic and policy oriented literature which demonstrate and discuss this growing diversity of the expected roles of public libraries. Sieghart's arguments for libraries harnessing and emphasising their localism manifests itself in literature about libraries demonstrating impact through 'place-shaping' and 'place-making' (Arts Council England, 2017). Place-shaping itself is defined as "the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens through building and shaping local identity and understanding local needs and preferences, making sure that the right services are provided to local people" (Lyons, 2007)

### 2.4.3 An existential crisis for public libraries

Until recently perceptions and understanding of public libraries, both by those that fund them and those that use them was varied due to the increasing variety of demands and expectations placed upon them. This included a continued lack of consensus of understanding of the holistic role of the public library amongst local government and local authorities, even though some of the literature reviewed has been able to acknowledge some of the failings of the public library system (Muddiman *et al*, 2000; DCMS, 2014; McCahill, Birdi & Jones, 2018). As a result of this, those that used public libraries were themselves not always clear as to what their expectations of the service were and the identity of the library and the library professional was at risk of diminishing. This has all been to the detriment of the image of public libraries and subsequently the funding and sustainability of them.

Between 2010 and 2016 the number of UK public libraries decreased by 14% (BBC, 2016), the number of library visits by 15% (CIPFA, 2017) and the number of active borrowers by 23.5% (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016).

Commentators were therefore now arguing that UK public libraries were at a crisis point in their existence. One such commentator made the point that “an impending cultural catastrophe looms resulting from public spending cuts and a drive by government to support localism (McSmith, 2011). Recent library closures, and associated cuts to continuing services, have prompted strong, and often emotional responses amongst active and passionate public library users, as well as within professional groups such as librarians and authors (Blackmann, 2013; Cassidy, 2015, Library Campaign, 2018). Such reactions have been framed in terms of a current “public library crisis” in the United Kingdom, with attention drawn to contravention of the requirements of legislation<sup>1</sup> that authorities provide comprehensive and efficient library collections to the communities that they serve (Barron, 2012). The global recession of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a lot of cutbacks to public services in general within the United Kingdom and public libraries have suffered massively as a result. From a public viewpoint this does not seem to be improving with the popular press continuing to articulate negative stories about library closures,

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<sup>1</sup> The Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964

unstaffed libraries and volunteer led community libraries (Finch, 2019, Guardian, 2019, Murray, 2019)

For many years, academics such as Brophy (2006), McMenemy (2009), Goulding (2006), Totterdell (2005) and Broady-Preston (2010) have been articulating the need for public libraries to become more flexible and innovative in order to survive. The existential crisis that public libraries in the United Kingdom have recently experienced is due in part to public library policy makers and advisors not heeding this advice at the time. However, due to the high profile of the public library crisis and its visibility in the media in the last few years, public library policy makers now appear to have intervened. In the last five years there has been a definite and deliberate shift towards promoting public libraries in the United Kingdom as 'being more than just about books' (Cavallaro, 2014; Rhind-Tutt, 2017).

The 'crisis' resulted in a response from the government in order to try to address the situation. For example, the *Sieghart Report*, as discussed in section 2.4.1, set out a series of recommendations that included a focus on digital information resource provision and a strategic framework for local authorities to help them improve and revitalise public libraries through encouraging community engagement (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2014).

Whilst negatively received by the press when first published (Independent 2014; Farrington, 2015), the *Sieghart Report* effectively provoked further debate about public library provision and this has been played out very publicly in the media ever since. The growing pressure from the media, the popular press, the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (Cilip) and pressure groups such as Speak up for Libraries has ultimately led to further government action and an increase in research into the impact that the current public library situation is having on local communities.

#### 2.4.4 Repositioning public libraries in the United Kingdom

In recent years several agencies have set about developing strategic advice and guidance in order to affect the policy and activity of public libraries. This next section reviews some of the advisory and strategic documentation that has been

produced by relevant professional associations, QUANGOs and governmental advisory bodies in response to the public library crisis in the United Kingdom. An understanding of this recent body of literature is significant as it affects the context of the doctoral investigation.

The Libraries Taskforce was established in 2016 to provide leadership and help invigorate the public library sector in England. Commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Local Government Association (LGA) it has developed a vision for the future of public libraries in a report entitled *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England, 2016-2021* (Libraries Taskforce, 2016).

Until 2018 the professional body, responsible for developing and delivering public library strategy in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, was the Society for Chief Librarians (SCL). In 2018 SCL rebranded and became Libraries Connected<sup>2</sup>, a charity, part funded by Arts Council England and representative of public libraries themselves. Whilst Sieghart (DCMS, 2014) and the Carnegie Trust (Peachey, 2017) have been making recommendations to the sector in recent years, SCL and Libraries Connected have simultaneously been responding to the current climate by looking at the current demands placed on public libraries and strategizing accordingly. At its re-launch in 2018 Libraries Connected declared that its vision is “an inclusive modern, sustainable and high quality public library service at the heart of every community in the UK.” (Libraries Connected, 2018)

SCL developed and launched four universal offers in 2013 which became strategic areas for public libraries to focus on: Health; Reading; Digital; Information. These universal offers were effectively a response to the demand for a clear national approach to library strategy, but within a community environment (Farrington, 2013). A fifth universal offer, that of ‘Learning’ was later added, and more recently, and possibly most significantly a sixth universal offer, ‘Culture’, in 2017. Learning complements the existing offers around ‘Literacy’, ‘Digital’ and ‘Information’ and represents a comfortable (and traditional) area in which public libraries need to

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/about-us>

have clear strategies, but the inclusion of 'Culture' extends outside of the library's traditional epistemic function and moves it further into the local community. The demand behind this sixth universal offer is to bring new and diverse cultural experiences to local communities, another clear and deliberate strategy to be more community oriented. However, as the editorial in Public Library News pointed out shortly after the announcement, some critics may take this as 'a step too far' in a climate where there is a feeling that public libraries are now trying to achieve too much by being a 'jack of all trades', whilst not being adequately funded to do so (Public Library News, 2017)

Libraries Connected continues to represent public libraries in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, whereas in Scotland the Scottish Libraries and Information Council (SLIC)<sup>3</sup> is the independent advisory body across all library sectors and acts in a similar capacity as Libraries Connected in advising on public library usage, strategy and outcomes. Where Sieghart and the Libraries Taskforce advised government about how English public library infrastructure and strategy needed to be transformed, SLIC have acted in more of a strategic advisory capacity to the Scottish Government, and research outputs such as the guide *How good is our public library service?* Have helped to scrutinise and demonstrate the impact of libraries on communities in Scotland (2015). To complement this, SLIC and the Carnegie Trust have also developed a national strategy for public libraries in Scotland (SLIC and Carnegie Trust, 2015). This strategy suggests that the mission of Scottish public libraries is to be part of a shared civic ambition to fulfil the potential of individuals and communities and that the outcome of such a mission will be to contribute to the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of Scotland. The six key aims of the strategy are to promote: reading literacy and learning; digital inclusion; economic wellbeing; social wellbeing; culture and creativity. This is very similar to the Libraries Connected universal offer themes which are currently shaping the strategic direction of public libraries in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.scotlandstowns.org/scottish\\_library\\_and\\_information\\_council](https://www.scotlandstowns.org/scottish_library_and_information_council)

The media and academic reporting of the current public library crisis is off-set somewhat by the gradual positive messages coming from the recent policy and advisory interventions. Writing in 2019, Green discusses the reinvigoration occurring in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough libraries since the recommendations of the Sieghart report, and how libraries are now involved in looking at what makes communities successful and vibrant, tackling issues of health, wellbeing, loneliness and isolation (Green 2019). Similarly, Mackinlay reports on the positive vision generated from the Libraries All Party Parliamentary Group, where the conclusion was that “the fundamental purpose of libraries and librarians is to help people to expand their knowledge and understanding of themselves, their lives and the world about them, in the wider interest of building strong knowledgeable communities (Mackinlay, 2018).

*Libraries Deliver* attempts to address that which the literature has been lacking over recent years, a clear and defined vision for public libraries in the United Kingdom. The focus of delivering services locally, responsive to local community needs and expectations stands out in this manifesto. Similarly, the report presents an agreed set of outcomes that public libraries must strive for in developing and delivering 21<sup>st</sup> century public library services: cultural and creative enrichment; increased reading and literacy; improved digital access and literacy; helping everyone achieve their full potential; healthier and happier lives; greater prosperity; stronger, more resilient communities.

This has been supplemented further by the research recently undertaken by the Carnegie Foundation, into the role, purpose and future of public libraries in the UK and Ireland. In the Carnegie Trust’s *Shining A Light Report*, it is acknowledged that two different pictures of public libraries surface around discussions around the future of libraries: one of libraries in decline, with fewer resources and staff and compromised models of service delivery; and one of a forward- thinking, innovative, flourishing service with high levels of use, with a unique and growing role in the knowledge economy. This second picture comes from the emergence of several ‘super-city libraries’ which have been developed in recent years (Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Camden, Newcastle, Glasgow) and Peachy, author of the

report suggests that there is truth in both views, but also a severe tension between those who adopt an optimistic 'super-city' view of the future and those who fear for public libraries in the future (Peachey, 2017a). The Shining Light Report contributes to the debate by using the public library data available to describe and analyse current usage of public libraries and makes universal recommendations for libraries to adopt.

The focus on localisation of services and being responsive to local communities is a recurring theme in the current public library narrative and one which is significant in how local authorities respond to the current demands on public library services. This is also significant in clarifying the modern role of public library in respect of its respective societal and community functions alongside its epistemic and information functions.

## 2.5 Public libraries in the Information Society

Whilst still within the broader discipline of Information Science, the information society studies literature conveys quite a different narrative from the LIS literature in respect of the role of public libraries. In order to review this within the context of this doctoral research it is necessary first to review some of the fundamental information society theories, theses and models. This also helps to appropriately position public libraries within the information society.

### 2.5.1 Information society theory and theses

Globally, most areas of social, political and economic activity have been affected by the development of information and communication technology. This manifests itself as the information society, which has been conceptualised as a theoretical concept, as well as a global policy making tool, impacting upon people on a vast and continuous scale (Mattelart, 2003). Machlup's *The production and distribution of knowledge* (1962) is often regarded as the source from which information society discourse stems introducing the concepts of 'knowledge industries' and 'knowledge economies' and the global economic impact of knowledge production. This is followed by Marc Porat's *The Information Economy* (1977) which takes some of Machlup's ideas forwards but focuses on information systems and communications

technology. Both Machlup and Porat were concerned with the information economy and with creating an understanding of how such an economy would continue to grow and have social, economic and political repercussions.

In his book *Information Society Studies* (2000) Duff presents three different versions of the information society thesis in order to provide an 'adequate conception' of the information society. He suggests that without doing so it is difficult to project social problems within an information society and that in order to prove that the information society exists, one must provide a method of verifying its existence. Duff's approach is to dismiss the notion of a single information society thesis and presents three distinct theses in which he discusses individual information society theorists and scholars. His first version of the information society thesis is the information sector thesis. Machlup features heavily in this version as it explores the various platforms by which information and knowledge are generated, distributed and exchanged through education, research, communications media, etc. Machlup tried to measure the production of the knowledge sector in the US, trying to prove its economic significance. Duff is critical of Machlup's information sector thesis and argues that it is inaccurate to equate knowledge with information and industry with society. Duff goes on to contest that Machlup was ever studying society as a whole which makes the thesis flawed, preventing it from ever fully presenting a fully convincing account of the role of information within modern society (Duff, 2000, pp. 19-20).

Duff's exposition of the information flows version of the information society thesis focuses on the volume of information available and its consumption, rather than that of production. The information flows version discusses the problems and issues around information explosion and information overload and introduces the inequalities in access to information. Duff relates this to the Japanese 'Joho shaki' [Information society] concept which acknowledges the explosion of information and is widely believed to be the origin of the notion of the information society (Duff, Craig & McNeill, 1996, p.119). Finally, the information technology version of the thesis regards the ever pervasive impact of information technology as being the dominant force in the information society. A further interpretation of the

information society is provided in a synthetic methodology of the information society thesis in which Duff critically discusses Daniel Bell (Bell, 1973), remarking that as a theorist Bell has successfully synthesised all three versions in an attempt to bring some order and understanding to the information society debate. Duff's critique of Bell's thesis suggests that his interpretation of the information economy relies too much on theoretical knowledge, unsupported by evidence. He also argues that Bell's account of information technology shifted over time to focus too much on the role of the micro-computer (Duff, 1998, p. 380).

Similarly, Webster and Robins (1986) are highly critical of Bell's post-industrial society thesis arguing that he never explains the origins of 'intellectual technology' and that he simply presents a catalogue of effects with causes rather than a thesis on social structure. Even though his work receives such criticism, Bell is highly regarded (by Duff, Webster, Robins and other commentators) and his post-industrial society thesis does evidence the early thinking about the information age and provides an adequate introduction to the notion of the information age, and the post-industrial society which saw the real rise of the information and knowledge economies.

The success with which any one or series of commentators has achieved a comprehensive synthesis of the information society is debatable. However, in establishing different versions of the thesis Duff clarifies the plurality of approaches to information society studies. It allows for an acceptance and understanding of the complexity of the information society and the many different theses, theories, characteristics and attributes from which it is comprised and the subsequent problems, issues, challenges and outcomes.

#### 2.5.2 Information society models

In trying to establish a conceptual framework in which to set the information society, John Feather, concedes that the task has been further complicated by a lack of agreement on what exactly is meant by the phrase information society and indeed how it relates to other descriptors such as information age or post-industrial society (Feather, 2003, p. 3) This can be seen even in the identified criticisms of Bell's work above, but Feather goes on to suggest that the terminological issues in

themselves may well reflect the pervasiveness and visibility of information in contemporary society and the extent to which it is considered a significant subject for study. Feather identifies four broad frameworks in which information society appear to work.

Feather's first model is the one which has already partly been discussed that of the economic model in which he suggests that "the information itself, rather than merely the information carrier, is argued to have been commodified. The underlying assumption is that information is a construct, which can be understood as an artefact in whose manufacture value has been added to pre-existing material" (Feather, 2003, pp. 4-5). Feather's second model is the technological model which accounts for the huge growth in technological innovation during the 1980s and 1990s and the widespread adoption of such technology in every aspect of the information economy. Feather argues that the society of the 21st century is critically dependent on information and communication technologies, but that very few of these are inherently new concepts. Many technologies have replaced older systems, such as email with paper based communications, or have been developed for convenience (mobile phones), business efficiency (e-mail) or economic necessity (financial information systems). The technological model accepts that the technological developments of the last 50-60 years did not happen by accident but have been identified and developed to resolve societal problems and issues, such as information overload.

The third of Feather's models is the sociological model which accepts that "both economic and technology are called into play as necessary elements in a broad sociological analysis of the information society, but so are wider social issues and social theories" (Feather, 2003, pp. 10-11). At the heart of this model is the argument that the new forms of information and communication technology, storage and processing will eventually determine everything that we do and will change the way that society operates. The sociological model explains how information and knowledge economies within the information society will create new types of information wealth and poverty and how political systems will evolve

which will be responsive to the demands of a better informed population who have easy access to a greater quantity of information.

In explaining his fourth and strongest model, the historical model, Feather argues that throughout history all organised human societies have always been dependent on information. Information has always been generated, stored, recorded, retrieved and exchanged and the principles of these have essentially remained unchanged. What has changed is the ease of access to the media and systems and widespread capacity to use them. Feather goes on to say that every piece of information itself also has history (i.e. where it came from, how it was generated, what it has been used for) and suggests that the “importance of the historical perspective is in its ability to diffuse the fierce political and economic arguments which rage around the concept and impact of the global information society.” (Feather, 2003, pp. 14-15).

### 2.5.3 The citizenry in the information society

Regardless of which information society thesis or model is considered, the global citizenry is affected by the information society in which they live and need to be able to adapt, in order to operate within it. Citizens are involved in the generation, consumption and exchange of information and in the context of this doctoral study, with regard to citizenship in the information society, there are two specific areas which should be considered: information overload; and, information poverty.

#### 2.5.3.1 Information overload

One of the fundamental issues at the heart of information society is the sheer speed with which new knowledge and information is produced and the impact that this has on its dissemination, let alone critical consumption and ultimate impact and value of the knowledge and information. It is claimed that the amount of published research output alone doubles every nine years (Van Noorden, 2014) and that “over the last two years ninety percent of the world’s data was generated” (Marr, 2018). Bell (1973) and Duff (2000) talk about information flows and in doing so acknowledge the problem of information overload. Duff’s later work presents a normative theory of the information society, a theory which attempts to bring together and address the issues surrounding information in its broadest context in

the 21st century, and which considers the ever increasing production, distribution and consumption of information (Duff, 2013). He identifies how the ever increasing volumes and formats of information through an ever expanding mass media have affected how people view and subsequently interact with information:

“Shifting, elastic, fuzzy borders have indeed developed between the private and the public, as well as between other social categories, such as commodity and resource, news and entertainment, the nation and the world system.”

(Duff, 2013; p. 11)

Feather argues that “new systems of information storage and communication have supplemented rather than supplanted what existed before” (Feather, 2013, xi) Both Feather and Duff are suggesting that the volume of information channels available simply gets bigger and bigger and that the diversity of the media available to us provides greater power to communicate in the most effective ways.

Whitworth (2009) argues that the volume of information channels available is a significant problem within the information society, leading to: a lack of understanding of technological change and its consequences, within individuals, communities and education systems; insufficient opportunity to reflect upon information before absorbing it; economic pressures on citizens to consume information, due to the profits it makes for the information industries; lack of management of the informational environment; lack of creativity within many organisation roles. Whitworth discusses how these challenges might be mitigated through developing educational strategies for coping with the overwhelming amount of knowledge and information (produced through an information society) and build resources for empowering communities. Whitworth suggests that the information society is responsible for the emergence of new literacies and questions how individuals and communities are to develop such skills (e.g. digital literacy, media literacy, information literacy).

Information overload is also associated with the generation and dissemination of user generated content from social media platforms and increasingly the

broadcasting of fake news. Albright (2017) suggests that society has an increased understanding of these types of information and that they contribute to information overload. Some scholars suggest that in response to the ubiquity of fake and untrusted digitally disseminated news, there are trends suggesting an increased trust in printed news and current affairs over online news and current affairs (Kiouisis, 2009, Tsfat, 2010)

#### *2.5.3.2 Information inequality*

Duff's *Normative Theory of the Information Society* (Duff, 2013) discusses the normative crisis of information overload and the subsequent problems arising from this such as unequal access to information and divisions between information rich and information poor citizens. The production of knowledge and information is perpetual and ever increasing. In establishing his normative theory, Duff synthesises the work of two political commentators, Richard Tawney and John Rawls, in order to situate it in an ethical social-democratic framework. Duff's Rawls-Tawney theorem therefore is grounded in social justice, where information is seen as a public good or commodity, which everyone has the right to access in order to function democratically. Duff's normative theory explores the role information on democracy and citizenship and highlights the issues and problems of information overload and information inequality within the information society.

In addition to the overwhelming increase in the amount of information available, there is also growing political pressure for all publicly funded information and research to be made freely available to the public and for academic institutions in particular to make their research accessible (Finch Group, 2012; European Commission, 2012). In an information society context this pressure comes about due to the social and economic impact of information itself. Feather's work on the information society explains the use of information within a variety of economic and cultural environments and also discusses in detail how the commercial value of information becomes increasingly important in a world in which data can be transmitted across the globe in a matter of seconds (Feather, 2013, p. 36). This in itself suggests a certain pressure on individuals, communities and organisations to

be able to adequately seek, absorb, critique, discern, process and effectively use information and knowledge.

This is significant when considering individual and community access to the resources required to engage in information. Duff discusses modern-day information poverty when he addresses what he refers to as “one of the main paradoxes of post-industrial society: information poverty” (Duff, 2015, p. 63). He illustrates this through a contemporary case study in which he researches everyday information needs of marginalised people living in Edinburgh, Scotland. His research concludes that even in the developed world, information poverty and digital exclusion are having a detrimental effect to individuals being able to fully participate in society. Dijk (2005) illustrates how the ‘digital divide’ is far from closed and that parity in access to information in many societies and communities is as unequitable as it has ever been. Whilst access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has increased massively in developing countries, the ability to make effective use and the opportunities for acquiring the literacies and skills in order to be able to do this has simply not kept pace with the manufacture, distribution and affordability of the technology (Dijk, 2005, pp. 12-13). In a similar context Hamilton discusses how in some developing countries public libraries are deemed essential for enabling agriculture and local enterprises to gain digital access in order to survive and thrive, even within a digital divide environment (Hamilton, 2013)

#### 2.5.4 The public sphere in the information society

Throughout the information society literature and discussion there is a general acceptance that individuals and organisations need to maintain access to and proactively engage with information in order to benefit from it. This becomes all the more important when considering how, due to its continuous generation and exchange, information overload can overwhelm individual citizens. Consequently, the information society has created a demand for a ‘public sphere’ which enables citizens to access and navigate information. According to Habermas (1962) and Larsen (2018) a main aim of public sphere institutions is to provide an information infrastructure for the exchange and formation of public opinion. In his work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Habermas discusses how public

spheres need to be spaces where all are equal and where individuals voluntarily discuss and engage with each other intellectually. Habermas argues that a well-informed citizenry is a fundamental outcome of an effective bourgeois public sphere. He talks about a 'reasoning public', able to discover and express their needs and interests and form a conception of the common good, and in doing so act as a check on the legitimacy and powers of government (Habermas, 1962). Positioning such concepts and ideologies within the information society, Webster argues that the public library network is the nearest thing that the United Kingdom has to a public sphere and that they play a fundamental democratic role in informing the citizenry. Webster argues that the information made accessible through public libraries plays a very powerful role within a democracy and discusses a 'public sphere', that is "publicly available and provides reliable and adequate information which will facilitate sound discussion and inform opinion and debate" (Webster, 2007, p. 169)

#### 2.5.5 Public libraries as public spheres

Public libraries in the United Kingdom are used purposefully every day as public spheres as a means to access and navigate information. At the heart of this are the learning and development functions of the library: "supporting the self-education of the citizenry in order that they may become fully participating members in a democratic society." (Alsted & Curry, 2003, p. 2). Jaeger and Burnett (2014) explain how the public library has developed its epistemic role within the public sphere through delivering physical public library services and adapting them to the digital age. They discuss how digital citizenship is afforded by the public library and in doing so libraries have begun to deliver their social goals and objectives (Jaeger & Burnett, 2014, pp. 72 – 85). A key factor of public libraries being well placed to be public spheres is their localities within communities. Public libraries are regarded as 'local' and for the most part central to their communities. It is claimed that public libraries "act as an affirmative public institution linking the locality to a wider public sphere" (Greenhalgh et al, 1995, p.96). The public library is often discussed in the context of its position within its community and its roles and responsibilities with regard to citizenship and democracy. They are perceived as being strong civic institutions, whose history is closely implicated with the notion of participation and

democratic responsibility (Robinson, 2014, p. 22). In respect of how the public library is regarded as a civic institution within the community, Newman sees “the public library as an icon of the liberal public domain in its own right” and as “an institution that exerts an iconic force-field of its own, both occupying a space of intense public recognition, but simultaneously open to shifting re-formations of itself as a public space” (Newman, 2007, p. 888).

Batt illustrates “the information society concept is noticeably entrenched in discourses of the information professions. Librarians, for example, have been keen to see themselves at the core of the information society, their institutions functioning as the heart and brain of a new age” (Batt, 1997, p. 120). This positioning of public libraries by the contemporary information society scholars (Batt, Duff and Webster) is significant in that they all agree that the public library system and the profession of librarianship are fundamental to enabling a public sphere, whose role is access to and navigation of information. Their focus is on the role of the library in managing information and enabling access to citizens, and this is especially important when considering the rapid development of the digital information age, and the continuous production of information. In these information society commentaries, public libraries are presented as powerful institutions which allow access to and navigation through a wealth of information and in doing so can break down information poverty and enable democracy and are highly regarded as the public sphere.

However, Varheim et al (2019) recently carried out a systematic literature review on libraries as public sphere institutions and concluded that this important area remains very much under-explored. They found that only seven such studies have been published since 2010, and only one of them (Audunson & Evjen, 2017) has statistically generalisable findings. The other research outputs are mainly case studies, but have the potential for contributing to theory development by serving as the basis for new research propositions into the public library as the public sphere (Varheim, Skare & Lenstra, 2019, p. 99). In the paper, the case is made for further theory-driven empirical research into research into public libraries as public spheres

in order to address the lack of research into this key theme of the role of the public library.

## 2.6 The role of the librarian

Librarians and the profession of librarianship are significant agents when discussing the role of the public library, both in the LIS and information society literature. Feather (2013) suggests that the library and information professions themselves are actually a consequence of the information society. He explains how the most systematically assembled libraries are only effective if the information contained within them has been recorded in an equally systematic way. This can be applied to the print media of a physical library or the digital resources and objects within an electronic information system and behind them all is a librarian or information professional (Feather, 2013, p. 178).

This concept is recognised by Sieghart (2014) when he describes the role of the library workforce in enabling access to digital information as being a key element of a contemporary public library (DCMS, 2014). Similarly, when discussing the physical library building, Elmborg acknowledges that professional library staff are also a significant feature of the absolute library space:

“A library is a fundamentally different place than a bookstore or the cloud, and one profound difference is the presence of librarians. If we allow our space to become abstract, then we will lose that difference. Third space is not a panacea for all that is wrong with the world or libraries.”

(Elmborg, 2010, 349)

There has been much debate in the popular press about the role and value of librarians and professional library staff in public libraries, and how they become part of the role of libraries themselves. A Guardian editorial from 2019 argues that the closure of libraries and reduction of services is as much about the loss of the profession of librarianship as the loss of physical buildings (Guardian, 2019). This notion has been exacerbated through the increased introduction of volunteers in UK public libraries in recent years. Professional staff are regarded as keeping up standards of librarianship and maintaining traditional library skills and replacing

such resource with volunteers through cost-cutting exercises in the interest of efficiency has alarmed many commentators (Hill, 2010). The professional association CILIP also opposes the loss of skilled staff suggested that volunteering should be used to supplementation rather than job substitution (CILIP, 2012). The main issue which is being discussed here is about the integrity of the profession of librarianship and the value that professional librarians add to the library fulfilling its information discovery and retrieval functions. As illustrated in the information society literature, this professional and technical expertise is regarded as fundamental to the library operating as a public sphere. However, the narrative coming from the LIS literature and the professional press and associations is slightly different with the focus being more about how the profession needs to sustain within and throughout the increasing diversity of services being offered through public library. The messages coming through appear to be more about the interest of the profession, rather than the impact and value that the profession has on the community and citizenry that it serves. For example, Finch argues that library workers are now required to work well beyond the parameters of their professional training and that for every council service that is cut in the community (i.e. care in the community, mental health services, counselling services) “the public library is expected to pick up the slack, but library workers have had little or no training in this and their own mental health is suffering (Finch, 2019).

The role that the library staff play in the delivery of library services takes on slightly different significance, depending on whether it is being considered through a LIS or information society perspective. In respect of delivering library missions and outcomes, librarians become part of the infrastructure which enables this. The interactions that the library staff and volunteers have with the citizenry in assisting them with using the library are inputs which need to be considered when measuring the overall performance of the library. However, human interactions are intangible and the value of intangible library assets is a further area for investigation as part of this literature review.

## 2.7 The value of intangible assets in public libraries

As discussed in section 2.3, public libraries have been criticised for their over-reliance on the use of quantitative measures of library outputs, and subsequently the value and impact of some of the more societal and community oriented functions of the library are not fully and fairly evaluated. This is due in part to the fact that library performance measurement has struggled to incorporate the measurement of the value and impact of intangible assets and capital into their performance measurement strategies. However, there is a wealth of literature from the LIS discipline which considers the role of intangible capital within public libraries, and a brief review of this will complement the LIS and information society literature reviewed so far as part of this doctoral study.

### 2.7.1 Exchange of capital in public libraries

Knowledge and information are the commodities which first come to mind, when considering the exchange of capital within the public library environment. Kostagiolas explains how on a macro-level “the management of information and knowledge, knowledge sharing, as well as the management of intellectual capital have become very important [to organisations, enterprise and society]” (Kostagiolas, 2013, p. 677). With this in mind public libraries need to play a role in managing and distributing intellectual capital, ensuring that libraries and librarians turn such capital into a “comparative advantage” (Koenig, 1997, p.114). Describing the library system’s management of intellectual capital, Kostagiolas provides a simple framework through which he segments intellectual capital into a sub-series of: human capital; organisational capital; relational capital (Kostagiolas, 2012). In this instance: human capital consists of the knowledge, experience, competencies and creativity of the library staff; organisational capital is the infrastructure of the library (i.e. the cataloguing and classification system, the automated circulation system, access to catalogues and databases, etc.); relational capital comprises if relationships with stakeholders and users and also the resources external to the public library (e.g. with other organisations, inter library loan suppliers, etc.). This suggests that while the library is acknowledged as a facilitator and manager of information and knowledge capital, the intangible assets of human and relational capital are also fundamental to realising some of the library’s intended outcomes.

Human capital and relational capital can sometimes be referred to as transactional capital, which is the outcome of an exchange (of information, support, advice, guidance, etc.) between two or more people. These 'people-centred' forms of intellectual capital bridge the gap between knowledge capital and social capital, which is another intangible asset often credited as an output of public library usage.

### 2.7.2 Social capital in public libraries

Social capital is often discussed and written about within a library context, particularly where the public library represents a community or a network for those using them. Both Bourdieu (1983) and Burt (2007) argue that it is networking activities which generate advantageous social capital for those in a particular network and that because of the nature of networking there is an unequal division of social capital, particularly outside the networks. On applying this stance to public library use there is an assumption that the individual who uses the public library in order to network is in an advantageous position with regard to benefiting or gaining from social capital. Woolcock defines social capital as "the norms and networks that are established between people and communities that give rise to greater levels of trust and the ability of people to work together to solve problems." (Woolcock, 2010, p. 47). It is perhaps this particular interpretation which best illustrates the social network value of public libraries in that those citizens using public library services are in a position to establish themselves within a network of library users and stakeholders which includes members of the community as well as professional librarians. The library itself becomes the place which allows such a network to form and develop.

Alternatively, Coleman (1988) writes about social capital from the point of view that society can be decomposed into the activities of self-interested individuals who use a variety of resources that they have available to them to pursue their individual aims and goals and who enter into relationships of exchange with one another, trading resources in pursuit of profit. In particular situations, some of the resources available to individuals are 'social' in that they are derived from relationships between individuals which cannot be reduced back to the individual (e.g. trust, networks, etc.). With this in mind Coleman is interested in the social systems, and

the individuals within them which allow for social capital to be generated and exchanged. It could be argued that one such social system is the public library system and that Coleman's theory lends itself well to the public library context in that it is the collaboration and interactions of a community of individuals which allow for all involved to generate the worth and value of a community centred service.

A number of researchers have tied the themes of social capital and public libraries together (Kranich, 2001; Hillenbrand, 2005; Varheim, 2007; Johnson, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Goulding, 2004; Goulding, 2013) and their perspectives are presented in this section of the literature review. However, in order to contextualise the LIS literature in this field it is helpful to acknowledge the work of Putnam, a recognised social capital commentator and his definitive social capital text *Bowling alone* (Putnam, 2000). He provided a deep analysis of social capital and a picture of how Americans' changing behaviours during the mid to late twentieth century saw citizens become increasingly disconnected from their communities. Putnam diagnosed the problem and suggested that stronger and greater civic and community engagement is the way to remedy the situation and offered much compelling evidence as to why Americans' civic disengagement has resulted in a critical shortage of 'social capital'.

However, one omission in Putnam's work is that he failed to consider the public library as a place which provides a space for connecting with other people and sharing of experiences. This oversight was openly criticised by Michael Cart in his paper "America's front porch: the public library" in which he argues that "in an increasingly fragmented, factionalised and decaying society, the library is a centre that can hold. The library is intergenerational, intercultural, and most importantly, it respects what we all have in common despite our differences: our essential humanity" (Cart, 2002, p. 5). What Cart describes is precisely what Putnam advocates as a public place which can contribute to resolving civic disengagement, without him actually having referred to public libraries in this capacity.

Nancy Kranich, during her term as president of the American Library Association in 2001 set out to focus on civil society and democracy and in doing so set out a new

agenda for public libraries in which they needed to move from traditional library service models to a refocusing of their vision towards creating social capital. She invited Robert Putnam to speak at the 2001 ALA conference and reports that he “captivated a full house of librarians who share his concerns about the erosion of community social capital. However, Putnam was taken aback when he discovered the extraordinary level of social capital resident in the room... and has subsequently, like many other commentators and public officials realised that the public library is an institution rich in social capital and poised to usher in a new era of civic awareness and community revival.” (Kranich, 2001, p. 40). This is a significant moment in that it prompted more LIS commentators and researchers to link social capital with public libraries and their outcomes and also within library value and impact studies.

As a result of these prolific and public discussions there was a move for public libraries, particularly in the USA, to refocus their vision around becoming the creators of social capital. This is reflected in Bundy’s (2003) commentary in which he remarks on some of the emerging discussions around public libraries as creators and facilitators of social capital. Varheim (2007) also acknowledges libraries’ contribution to the creation of social capital and suggests that this can manifest itself in two distinct ways: through developing social networks through face to face interactions and activities; and, through being a central [government] institution responsible for delivering policy, political rights and civil liberties. Varheim concludes that through being both things, a central meeting space and a place from which public services are delivered, that public libraries contribute massively to the generation of social capital. This in turn is important in that ‘communities high in social capital are characterised by citizenship, neighbourliness, trust and shared values, community involvement, volunteering, social networks and civic participation’ (Goulding, 2004, p. 3). These commentaries are significant in introducing discussions around the importance of the role of the public library in developing the citizenry through social capital. This becomes particularly relevant in the United Kingdom, where the recent ‘public library crisis’ has meant a shift in focus for the public library towards community cohesion and community oriented

services. Writing some years later, Goulding suggested that where public libraries [in the United Kingdom] have survived and prospered, it is as a result of lobbying and pressure by citizens in communities, rich in social capital (Goulding, 2013, p. 484).

In her paper "Public libraries as developers of social capital" Hillenbrand (2005) concluded that if public libraries effectively pursue their natural community and citizenship oriented missions then social capital will naturally follow which in turn will have an impact on the 'citizens' using the library. She uses Matarasso as an example when he advocates that "libraries should take on a developmental role which seeks to renew its social mission urging libraries to claim a central position in developing public policy through active involvement in both personal and community development." (Matarasso, 1998, p. 6).

Johnson (2010) asserts that North American libraries now have a diminishing informational role and have needed to reassert their relevance to communities as a generator of social capital. Her research suggests that there is a strong relationship between public libraries and social capital. For Johnson, social capital is realised and gained by public libraries largely through their accessibility and role as a community meeting place. Johnson's study also revisits the discussion with regard to library performance and impact measurement and she suggests that there is still currently (inappropriately) a significant importance placed on evaluating library usage with regard to how many visits a library receives or how many loan and e-resource transactions take place rather than on how libraries actually benefit the community through realising social capital.

In their paper on the significance of libraries as meeting places, Aabo, Audunson and Varheim (2010) argue the importance of the library as a physical 'third space' in which "people accidentally run into neighbours and friends" and discuss in their research findings how "it is also a place where a substantial proportion report being accidentally engaged in conversations with strangers. It appears to be a place where users are exposed to 'the other'" (Aabo, Audunson & Varheim, 2010, p. 25). They conclude that from their study of Norwegian public libraries that there exists a relationship between social capital and the use of the library as a meeting place.

More recently, a further study by Johnson in 2012 explores and analyses the content of social interactions between library staff and patrons in three branch libraries of a large mid-western American city. She concludes that social capital is built through the relationships and interactions that occur between library staff and patrons including: building patrons' trust in the library and its staff; connecting people to both community and information resources; providing social support for patrons; reducing social isolation; helping patrons gain online skills; and, providing a positive community space (Johnson, 2012).

Social capital as a product, output or outcome of public library usage has been widely discussed and predominantly situated within scholarship concerning the community or societal role of public libraries. There does now appear to be a correlation between the political and socio-economic environment in the United Kingdom, and subsequent shift towards community oriented library services and the increased discussion around the role and function of the public library in generating social capital. On the surface, it would appear that the community and societal roles of the public library have possibly become more important than their traditional learning and literacy roles.

### 2.7.3 Human and transactional capital in public libraries

All capital, by its nature implies that there is something new which is desired or required by another party and that a process for sharing, distributing or trading the capital can take place. As Coleman illustrates "just as physical capital is created by changes in materials to form tools that facilitate production, human capital is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them act in new ways." (Coleman, 2000, p. 22)

Human capital is embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual, which Kostagiolas argues is a form of intellectual capital (Kostagiolas, 2013, p. 679). Similarly, in his theory of the creation of intellectual capital, Lesser discusses the concept of "the combination of materials and forces within our reach" contributing to the cognitive dimension of social capital, which in turn becomes intellectual capital (Lesser, 2000, p. 136). These are good examples of how human capital is often interconnected with other forms of intangible capital in the literature.

According to Coleman (2000) the one effect of social capital that is especially important is its effect on the creation of human capital. Coleman looks specifically at the development of human capital in the 'next generation' suggesting that capital generated through family and community impacts upon the development of children and young people. This particular theory can equally be applied to the generation of social capital within the public library, where it then has a significant impact on the creation of human capital (i.e. in the understanding of and the development of the citizen). Lesser also argues how "social capital in the family and social capital in the community play roles in the creation of human capital in the rising generation" (Lesser, 2000, p.30).

In considering the work of Lesser, Kostagiolas and Coleman the 'blurring' of human capital as both a bi-product of social capital and as a form of intellectual capital is noteworthy. Either way, human and transactional capital appear to be prevalent in public libraries in two forms: the expertise and support exchanged between library staff and library users, which individuals need access to in order to fully realise the impact of the library; the intellectual and social capital gained by the individual library user as a result of interacting with the library infrastructure and other library users.

In the literature however, there is little written about human and transactional capital in public libraries. Two studies from 2007 look into the assessment of human capital in libraries (White 2007a, 2007b) but the approach is very much from a return on investment (in staffing) perspective rather than evaluating the worth of the human capital exchanged between people in the library. The lack of relevant literature around human and transactional capital in libraries may also be down to the above mentioned 'blurring' of human capital with intellectual capital, and the relative 'newness' of the discussions around the role of the public library in the community and the measurement of public library outcomes.

This is partly explained by Johnson when she argues that a current problem in public libraries is that library professionals continue to see their services fundamentally as providing access to information resources and leisure materials and can often be unaware of the impact they are having through the social relationships that they

develop with library patrons (Johnson, 2012). It may be the case that scholarship and reflection on the role of the librarian in the recent shift toward community oriented services over information oriented services has not yet had a chance to catch up.

## 2.8 Theoretical considerations

This doctoral study seeks to specifically investigate the role that public libraries play with regard to citizenship in the United Kingdom. The literature suggests that public libraries are now expected to be at the heart of their communities and that citizenship is a civic outcome of library usage. Two inter-related academic disciplines, within the domain of information science have intentionally dominated the review of the extant literature, those of information society studies and library and information studies. A point to note is that a sociological lens has not knowingly been used when considering the literature, but in analysing the role of the public library as a public sphere and trying to synthesise the original 'knowledge' (or epistemic) function of the library with its more recently adopted 'societal role', sociological concepts begin to emerge. In her recent thesis Corble suggests that there has been a "surprising dearth of scholarship on public libraries within the discipline of sociology and that the study of libraries has traditionally sat within the LIS discipline, which tends to lack critical theorisations of the sociological, political and cultural dimensions of public libraries (Corble, 2019, p. 27). Corble suggests that sociological studies allow for the social, cultural and public elements of the library to be studied (ibid, p.27). The study of the public library as a public sphere crosses over into all three disciplines and consequently can be researched using multiple theoretical frameworks.

### 2.8.1 Borrowing theory

Information science has traditionally 'borrowed' theories originally developed in other areas to inform information science research (Hall 2003, p. 288). When looking at theory development in the information sciences, Nardi explains how many library and information science researchers are in the habit of appropriating other existing underexploited theories (Nardi, 2016, pp. 11 – 12). Nardi suggests that in her own work she appropriates activity theory and anthropological theory in her own Human Computer Interaction (HCI) research. Bawden argues that, by its

nature, information science is a multidisciplinary field and that it is “unreasonable to expect specific theories from information science, but that there will be a range of theories, dealing with different aspects of the subject and probably deriving from theories in cognate disciplines” (Bawden, 2016, p. 287). This would appear to be an appropriate stance to take in aligning this doctoral study to a theoretical framework and that borrowing from the different theories underpinning the subject is justifiable.

### 2.8.2 Social and economic theory

Social theories can also be considered within LIS and information society studies, when grounded, as this doctoral study is, in social science scholarship. For example, in initially focusing on the knowledge aspect of the library it is necessary to identify underpinning social theories which can be applied to contemporary knowledge and information exchange, which is an integral part of libraries fulfilling their epistemic roles. Public libraries are indeed places where knowledge and information are exchanged, both in print and digital formats and also through the exchange of social and human capital as is evidenced in the literature review. In his book *The Public Library*, McMenemy introduces the subject by suggesting that:

“[Public libraries] lend resources of high cultural value as well as material many commentators believe to be poor quality and not suitable for funding from the public purse. Yet they have stood for generations as instruments of the higher values of society and remain among our most prized public institutions. They represent the ideal that everyone in society deserves the right to access materials for their educational, cultural and leisure benefit, regardless of their income level, political beliefs, race, creed or colour”

(McMenemy, 2009, xiii).

This observation places the public library and its associated activities at the heart of society and suggests that a library service, and access to it (particularly its information resources), is seen almost as a fundamental human right. The above quotation refers to the political nature of public libraries in that they are publicly funded and subsequently scrutinised and questioned as to their value in both

economic and societal terms. Taking this into account it is possible to use a Marxian lens as a means of looking at the role of information exchange through public library services. However, in order to apply a purely economic capitalist model to the exchange of information it would need to be assumed that money is being exchanged in the transaction. Monetary value only exists because people believe that money has value, to such an extent that they will exchange material goods and service for it, because everyone believes the same amount of money to have the same value. Therefore 'value' even where it is centrally defined and formally shared, is a social construct, a shared belief which may vary in different social, economic, political and philosophical contexts (Badenoch et al, 1994, p. 20)

In the case of a study into the use of public libraries in the United Kingdom they are paid for by the individuals and communities making use of them through taxation. This becomes the social, economic, political and philosophical context for public libraries, as defined by Badenoch. The review of the extant literature so far suggests that information and knowledge is widely used and exchanged as a commodity in economic terms and this puts a value on information for those who produce and those who use it to gain an advantage.

### 2.8.3 Exchange theory

In acknowledging the notion of 'exchange' of knowledge and information as being a fundamental element of public library use and activity, it is appropriate to consider exchange theories. Exchange theory argues that commodities are bought and sold in transactions which are subject to contracts, conditions and obligations and that currency is exchanged during these transactions. Those paying for the commodity make their choices based on quality and value for money.

In the commercial world there is an acceptance that the knowledge and intellectual capital of an organisation are valuable resources. Marshall suggests that "capital consists in a great part of the knowledge and organisation....knowledge is our most powerful engine of production." (Marshall, 1965, p. 115). Any human creation can be regarded as a 'commodity' and commodities have 'value'. Value can be regarded as 'use value', which is the personal value that someone gains from consuming the

commodity and 'exchange value', the value in monetary terms which might be given in order to obtain the commodity. (Best, 2003, pp. 49-50).

Writing from a business and organisational studies perspective, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998, p. 242) discuss how social capital and intellectual capital are created and exchanged within organisations in order to achieve a competitive or organisational advantage. The paper acknowledges different dimensions of social capital, most notably the relational and structural dimensions which consider the structural properties of the organisation and the relationships, affiliations and loyalties which individuals have with one another within a given system.

Exchange theory, even when applied to knowledge and social capital, is largely associated with commercial gain or competitive advantage and ultimately the transaction or exchange is financially (economically) driven.

#### 2.8.4 Social exchange theory

Arguably, it is perhaps difficult to see the role of the library within purely capitalist and macroeconomic models but 'social exchange theory' offers something potentially more appropriate and comprehensible with regard to the role of libraries in the creation and exchange of knowledge, information and social capital:

"Social exchange theory is regarded as a 'flavour' of exchange theory. Here 'resources' are 'bought' and 'sold', but the mutual obligations of the trading partners are ill defined. Any 'deals' concluded are not necessarily subject to contractual obligations, nor are 'resources' necessarily exchanged for currency. In addition, the resources exchanged may be valued more highly than their market cost"

(Hall, Widen & Paterson, 2010, p. 118).

It becomes easier to view the exchange activity which takes place in public libraries through this social exchange theory lens. The various forms of capital being exchanged in the public library (social, human, transactional) are not subject to contractual obligations, but are valued by those involved in the exchange and have the potential to be beneficial to those in receipt.

Elaborating on social exchange theory in her earlier paper, Hall (2003, pp. 290-1) introduces the concept of 'gift giving' in non-capitalist societies. She explains that economic anthropologists have discussed systems of social exchange of physical artefacts as gift economies and that the rituals of gift giving provide insight into group values and behaviours such as the mutual regard and respect of parties involved in the exchange. Chen and Choi (2005) add to the sociological and anthropological discussions about exchange systems when they look specifically at the social exchange of goods, status and information. They too introduce the concept of gift giving as a social exchange structure but before doing so illustrate how social exchange theory shares many similarities with social contract theory in that it assumes some form of agreement between parties within the social exchange system. Within social contract theory there is an "assumption that rational humans will seek to design a binding, though unwritten, agreement establishing the parameters for ethics in economic relationships" (Chen & Choi, 2005, p. 2). The underlying difference is that social contract theory assumes that there is an authority of the law in which exchanges take place whereas the structures required for social exchange to take place are even more complex and exchange is based on social structures, personal contacts and relationships. The exchange of non-monetary capital in the form of gifts or information can be regarded as social capital and as such is illustrative of an exchange system based on such social structures and interpersonal relationships.

### 2.9 Positioning the research

Through appropriating different exchange theories and capital theories, it is possible to view the transactions which take place in the public library within sociological, economic and socio-economic terms. This is important in respect of establishing what the intended outcome of public library use is and indeed the mechanisms (i.e. exchanges) through which the social and developmental outcomes might be achieved. A basic understanding of this is required in order to consider how the impact and value of such outcomes might be measured. However, this doctoral research is not solely about library use and outcomes, rather it is

about the specific outcome of citizenship and how this is achieved through public libraries as public sphere institutions.

As discussed in section 2.8.1 there is an expectation for theory to be borrowed in order to provide a framework for Information Science research. A significant amount of LIS and information society studies literature has been reviewed in order to identify the need for this doctoral study and to formulate the research questions. The borrowing and appropriation of theories in order to frame the research will ensure that the research crosses over both disciplines.

#### 2.9.1 Gaps in the literature

The main gaps identified in the literature from this review, and therefore the research about public libraries are indeed around their role as public spheres. This is true of both LIS and information studies, as neither discipline fully acknowledges the significant role that public libraries play as public spheres in developing individuals and enabling citizenship through its ever increasing variety of functions and roles. Whilst the information society literature does indeed acknowledge the role of the public library as a public sphere and playing a part in enabling participation and democracy it is approached from an information generation and consumption perspective, rather than through discussion about the ever-changing role and mission of the public library in its community. In contrast the contemporary LIS literature looks at how public libraries in the United Kingdom are managed and have repositioned and re-purposed themselves in order to adapt to a changing society and diversification of demands. In doing so, discussion about some of the fundamental informational functions of the public library now appear to be diminishing, as focus becomes more about social wellbeing and digital inclusion.

The public sphere is a distinct concept within information society studies, yet this is not the case in the LIS literature reviewed. Indeed, in Rubin's latest edition of *Foundations of Library and Information Science* there is not a single mention of the information society as an environment in which libraries operate, let alone the notion of the public sphere (Rubin, 2016). It is this role of the public library, as the public sphere which makes sense of and makes accessible the information flows models of information society theory. In the major contemporary information

society monographs by Webster (2004, 2007, 2014), Feather (2013) and Duff (2000, 2013) public libraries as public spheres are discussed, but only briefly and therefore the role of public libraries is often underplayed and subsumed into broader discussions about the range of public sphere platforms. Varheim et al (2019) illustrate how there is a current need to further build on theory development in LIS and other disciplines and to carry out “theoretically based empirical studies investigating the broad range of activities that expand our understanding of public libraries and their public sphere roles.” (Varheim, Skare & Lenstra, 2019, p. 99).

A sizable part of the literature review has been used to synthesise some of the scholarship written about the generation and exchange of intangible capital in public libraries. The literature suggests that measuring the performance of public libraries through the exchange of capital as an output can be challenging. However, there is a link between this activity and libraries being able to deliver on their societal, community and epistemic outcomes. Again, the literature fails to consider this within an information society setting, yet such outputs play a vital role in libraries citizenship missions.

### 2.10 Conclusion

This literature review has covered the broad themes of: the original purpose and role of the public library in the United Kingdom; performance measurement of public library services; information society theses and models; the exchange of intangible capital in public libraries. Some theoretical frameworks relating to the field of study have also been considered in order to position the research across the two disciplines of library and information studies and information society studies.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodological approach used in this doctoral investigation. In doing so the chapter provides an overview of the research paradigm applied in conducting the research and also details of the range of qualitative methods considered in addressing the research questions developed from the literature review. The chapter also explains the rationale used in determining the eventual method chosen for data collection, that of a longitudinal focus group method and an exposition of how the data were subsequently analysed and coded. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the overall methodology and the methodological contribution made to LIS and information society studies research into the public sphere.

#### 3.2. Research Philosophy

Both Kankam (2019, pp. 85-92) and Pickard (2013, pp. 5-12) discuss that studies of outcomes of behaviour in information science require the adoption of one of four appropriate research paradigms: pragmatism; interpretivism; postpositivism; postpositivism. Kankem suggests that the aim of a research paradigm used to conduct an investigation into human behaviour should be to improve the credibility and generalisability of the study (Kankem, 2019, p. 85). This philosophical starting point is relevant in that in order to investigate the missing and 'underplayed' narrative in the LIS and information society literature, outcomes of public library use, will need to be studied. In order to demonstrate the effect of public library use on outcomes such as citizenship development, a critical mass of library usage will need to be studied, in order that any research findings are both credible and can be generalised.

It can be argued that research questions must always be framed in terms of what can be directly observed or measured (Robson and McCarten, 2016, p. 60). This is particularly prevalent in scientific research which often adopts a positivist approach to designing research methods. However, Maxwell (2013) discusses in detail the risk of trivializing a study by restricting it to simply observable questions and instead argues for 'real world research' questions which 'do not assume that feelings,

beliefs, intentions, prior behaviours, effects, and so on, need to be reduced to, or reframed as, questions and conclusions about the actual data that one collects.’ (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 79-82). Instead Maxwell suggests that researchers should treat unobserved phenomena as real and use their data as evidence about these, to be used critically to develop and test ideas about the existence and nature of the phenomena.

The research questions identified in section 1.5 (table 1, p. 13) concern individual and community usage of public libraries, and in developing the methodological approach for this study, certain philosophical assumptions were applied. These included assumptions that a research methodology needs to be transactional and subjective from an epistemological stance (i.e. the research would need to involve interaction between subject and investigator) and that from an ontological stance, “a belief in different constructed realities that cannot exist outside the social contexts that create them” (Pickard, 2013, p. 7). Because of this and the desire to generate generalised and transferable findings, the research methodology is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm.

There are different approaches to the interpretive paradigm, falling into two broad categories: human inquiry; or, critical theory. In order to conduct this doctoral study empirical research into how subjects use public libraries needed to be carried out, therefore situating the research methodology within a specific ‘human inquiry’ interpretivist approach. This approach involves looking at the “reality or truth as a social formation or construct of the mind’s inner feeling” (Aliyu et al., 2014, p. 84) and in the case of the methodology for this doctoral study this translates into the exploration of the reality of individual and community subjective lived experience of using public libraries. Human inquiry is also a key component of phenomenological methodologies. In simple terms, phenomenology can be defined as ‘an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it’ (Teherani et al, 2015, p. 669). The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of this experience, both in terms of what is experienced and how it is experienced. Phenomenological philosophies theorise the meaning of lived human experiences

within the physical world (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). Therefore, as well as being situated in an interpretivist paradigm, a phenomenological stance also needs to be applied to this doctoral research.

### 3.3 Research methods considerations and design

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) maintain that research questions are of fundamental importance in determining the ultimate research strategy. They suggest that the research questions, involving both quantitative and qualitative aspects, dictate the type of research design that can be used, the sample size, sampling scheme, type of instruments to be used as well as the eventual data analysis techniques (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006, p. 475)

The literature review in section two concludes that a significant gap in the LIS literature is that of the public library as a public sphere. With this in mind the research methods required for the empirical research were designed to be able to expose how public libraries fulfil specific societal outcomes and enable citizenship and participation for those that use them. Data needed to be collected about the value that individual citizens and communities place on their public library services within the information society, and the research questions (see section 1.5, p. 12) were developed with this aim in mind.

An initial major decision was made as to whether a quantitative or qualitative (or mixed) approach should be taken in order to generate data through which to address the research questions. The study tries to establish the worth (value and impact) of public libraries, as perceived by people who make use of them. Robson and McCarten (2016, p. 76) suggest that such studies require a research strategy with a flexible design, that evolves during the data collection, rather than a fixed design, more generally used for quantitative studies.

### 3.4 Determining the method of investigation

There are many qualitative methods available for consideration when pursuing an interpretive approach to research design. On a basic level, Robson and McCarten (2016) suggest that in the social sciences there are three simple options for empirical data gathering available: watching people; asking people; and, looking for evidence. In other words, 'watching' becomes 'observation', 'asking' becomes

‘interviewing’, ‘using questionnaires’, or ‘administering tasks’, whilst ‘looking for evidence’ includes ‘desk-based research’ or ‘document analysis’ (Robson & McCarten, 2016, p. 241), all of which could potentially be utilised within the methodology for this study. Similarly, Broady-Preston illustrates several interpretivist methods in her editorials for two ‘research methods’ themed issues of *Library and Information Research* (Broady-Preston, 2012; 2018). These include grounded theory approaches, phenomenography and meta-ethnography, all of which could be considered in a flexible approach to research design for this doctoral study. Several different qualitative methods were considered as part of the methodological options appraisal:

#### 3.4.1 Observational / ethnographical

The initial literature review demonstrates that there are specific gaps in the literature around the position and use of the library as a public sphere in the information society and how this impacts upon citizenship. Whilst the research questions lend themselves to an element of finding out what people do in libraries and how they use them, this is not the exclusive focus of the study. Had the research been focusing on the behaviour of library users then there would be an argument for adopting an ‘observational’ or ethnographical method for undertaking the research. However, as the focus of the research is about the impact that the library has on individuals and their communities, and the subsequent value placed upon public libraries, there was a need for a dialogue with library users. A purely observational or ethnographic approach used in isolation could not be relied upon to generate data through dialogue. The eventual research method applied, cannot be regarded as an ethnographic study per se, however there are elements of ethnography contained within it, namely using groups with a common interest (i.e. active library users) as a means of collecting data.

#### 3.4.2 Naturalistic inquiry

Naturalistic inquiry is an approach to understanding the social world in which the researcher observes, describes, and interprets the experiences and actions of specific people and groups in a societal and cultural context (Salkind, 2010). It encompasses qualitative research methods originally developed in anthropology

and sociology including observation and ethnographic methods and acknowledges the data that already exists in the natural environments in which people live and work. Lincoln and Guba (1985) who originally developed the naturalistic inquiry rationale, argue that it confronts the basic premise underlying more scientific traditions which exist in positivist research paradigms and therefore lends itself to interpretive paradigms. Expanding on this, Denzin and Lincoln (2013) suggest that naturalistic inquiry allows for 'values' to be considered as part of the inquiry process. This includes choices around research problems, paradigms and theoretical frameworks, as well as values based choices around data gathering and analysis. In addition, naturalistic inquiry allows for values already in existence in the research environment to be treated within a chosen context. It is naturalistic inquiry which 'allows for a departure between positivist, conventional modes of inquiry and interpretive forms of inquiry' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 237). Elements of naturalistic inquiry therefore lend themselves to the research being undertaken in this doctoral study, where subjective judgements regarding the method need to be made.

#### 3.4.3 Interview and narrative methods

Narrative methods of research and the concept of 'asking' library users was appealing and in keeping with the research questions and the evaluative nature of them, and were duly considered. Riessman explains how "oral storytelling allows for speakers to connect events into a sequence that is consequential for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story" (Riessman, 2008, p. 5). A 'storytelling' method would need to be able to produce anecdotal and reflective data regarding how public libraries have an impact on the citizenry and could be achieved through conducting interviews with active library users. Thematic and structural analysis of the narrative in interview transcripts might have provided the desired data for the study. However, when taking into account the scope and time limits of the doctoral research there was no guarantee that sufficient narrative data could be gathered. A disproportionate amount of interviews might need to be conducted in order to generate a representative sample of library users who could feasibly contribute to this particular dialogic approach. Whilst this method was ultimately rejected from a logistical point of view, it did help to focus the flexible

design in respect of establishing a method which involved dialogue with library users in order to generate narrative.

#### 3.4.4 Grounded theory

'A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon' (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 23). A grounded theory study essentially seeks to generate a theory which relates to the particular situation forming the focus of the study and the theory is 'grounded' in the data obtained during the study, particularly in the actions, interactions and processes of the people involved (Robson & McCarten, 2016, p. 161)

In practical terms, conducting grounded theory within a piece of research involves making the initial decision to examine a particular domain in connection with a set of issues or questions. Then, data collection takes place, typically using qualitative methods such as recorded interviews in the field or at the research site. When a body of data has been collected these data are subjected to progressive processes of coding. In simple, everyday terms, the general idea here is to start with big clusters or themes (produced through open-coding processes) that are apparent or emerge in the data. Then the next phase (of axial coding) aims to identify subdivisions or subcategories within the broader themes established in the first phase (Stokes, 2011a). Through this process the broader and overall theory is gradually built up and emerges.

Grounded theory is known for distinctive attributes such as line by line coding and constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, saturation and not engaging with relevant literature prior to analysis (to avoid influence from preconceptions of existing research). As Braun and Clarke (2013) explain 'producing a fully grounded theory is a demanding process and only possible in larger research projects... and in reality, many researchers only complete the early stages of grounded theory (initial coding and concept development)' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 186)

In developing a grounded theory data sampling, data analysis and theory development are not seen as distinct and separate, but as different steps to be repeated until one can describe and explain the phenomenon that is to be researched. This point is reached when new data does not change the emerging theory anymore. As this doctoral study aims to seek understanding of a particular real world phenomenon through investigating how people engage and interact with it and within it, elements of grounded theory technique need to be considered. This will be particularly the case when strategising how data will be collected and analysed.

#### 3.4.5 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is closely associated with grounded theory and is a method for providing a systematic approach for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes across a dataset. (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 178). Thematic analysis is effectively a method to be applied to data analysis only, rather than a whole research method. It involves looking over data in order to identify recurrent, salient and self-evident points, issues, words, terms, events, language, discourse, images, allusions and so on and so forth. These noticeably repetitive pieces of data can be clustered together under a label (that may also emerge from the respondent data or be allocated by the researcher) for the theme (Stokes, 2011b)

Thematic analysis is employed in inductive and interpretivist research, where researchers are required to read and re-read the data several times in order to code and identify prevailing themes. As the themes emerge from the analysis they can be assembled into a conceptual framework that begins to point at the development of emergent theory.

#### 3.4.6 Delphi method

Delphi is an interactive forecasting method, originally used for gathering and refining the opinions of experts in order to gain consensus. It uses a structured group interaction process with 'rounds' of opinion collection and feedback (Thota & Munir, 2011). This iterative process ultimately results in the forming and stabilisation of group opinion, which can be agreement, disagreement or a combination. Seeking views and opinions of public library users will be central to

the data collection used in this doctoral study, so a Delphi method, or variation of it should be considered. One such variation is the grounded-Delphi method, which is achieved by incorporating aspects of grounded theory into the Delphi method. While the Delphi method would normally be used to ascertain group opinion, Howard (2018) explains how through incorporating the data collection and data analysis phases of grounded theory, the grounded-Delphi method also attempts to improve the theory building aspect of the Delphi method.

Howard evaluates the grounded-Delphi method and discusses its implications for LIS research. She suggests that 'the consensus, or force ranking, aspect of the Delphi method assists in improving the relevant level of importance of categories derived from grounded theory (Howard, 2018, p. 24). In other words, the rigour of the iterative discussion and opinion gathering of Delphi allows for 'cleaner' and 'clearer' themes to emerge through the grounded theory approach to data analysis.

#### 3.4.7 Case studies

The case study method enables a researcher to closely examine their data within a specific context, in that case studies usually involve a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of study. They allow for the exploration and investigation of contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships (Zainal, 2007). Yin (2009) defines the case study research method 'as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used' (Yin, 2009, p. 18). By definition, a case study could be considered as a suitable method through which to gather and analyse data for research into the perceived value of public libraries by their users.

Rowley (2002) suggests that 'case studies are a good way of looking at the world around us, but,... must not be confused with ethnographic and other strictly qualitative research paradigms' (Rowley, 2002, p. 18). This is because case study

research can be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Typically, case studies use multiple data sources including two or more of: direct detailed observations, interviews, and documents. In addition, case studies can involve single or multiple cases, depending upon the breadth that the researcher needs to achieve in respect of data analysis. Rowley, goes on to explain how 'multiple case designs are preferred. This is on the basis of the replication logic discussed above, multiple cases can be regarded as equivalent to multiple experiments. The more cases that can be marshalled to establish or refute a theory, the more robust are the research outcomes' (Rowley, 2002, p. 21)

The use and value of public libraries in the United Kingdom is still receiving a lot of attention in the media in the United Kingdom, due to closures and proposed closures of hundreds of libraries around the UK, due to cuts in local expenditure, and this has been the case over several years (BBC, 2016; Flood, 2019). The cuts made to library services have resulted in the emergence of pressure groups such as 'Voices for the Library' and the 'Speak up for Libraries'. Subsequently many examples of case studies about public libraries have been generated, which make use of anecdotes about the value of public libraries in order to lobby politicians and local authorities. As the phenomenon is so widespread across the country, and has been for some time, there is an argument that a case study approach for this study would be appropriate. There would potentially be a critical mass of cases available for a multiple, and longitudinal case study research design. Case studies are one the most widely used flexible design research approaches used to generate qualitative data (Robson and McCarten, 2016, p. 80). It is also important to recognise that case studies do not only generate qualitative data. Case studies make use of a variety of sources, including: documents; archival records; interviews; direct observation; participant observation; and physical artefacts. Each of these different sources require different approaches to their interrogation, and are likely to yield different kinds of insights and different kinds of data. However, the potential case studies currently in the public domain do not necessarily focus on societal and citizenship outcomes, which are the focus of the research questions, and there would be a risk

of inappropriate inference in respect of validity of data generated in respect of the research questions.

#### 3.4.8 Focus Groups

The methodological considerations and options appraisal concluded that an empirical research strategy and method in which subjects or participants (in this case active public library users) were able to discuss and share their experiences was required. Such a method would need to enable participants to reflect upon how their library usage has affected them (understanding, knowledge, participation, lifestyle, citizenship, etc.). Having access to multiple participants and provoking and facilitating such discussion would theoretically enable the research questions to be addressed. A discursive and narrative approach would allow for the sharing of experience and encourage reflection amongst participants, and therefore a focus group method was considered the most appropriate for the research. Focus groups are fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them. They also enable naturalistic inquiry on the part of the researcher, and an element of subjectivity in the method is desired. They provide a way of collecting data from a large number of research participants. Focus groups, through well-constructed questioning and discussion, can reveal deep and focused data, and has therefore become a standard method for data capture in social science research (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2002, p. 47). More importantly, according to Wilkinson (2011, p. 181) 'focus groups are more 'naturalistic' than interviews (i.e. closer to everyday conversation) in that they typically involve a range of communicative processes – such as story-telling, joking, arguing, boasting, teasing, persuasion, challenge, and disagreement.' The dynamic quality of a focus group discussion is very much an advantageous feature of the focus group. Similarly, the discussion element of the focus group is only the midpoint of the communicative process which takes place. Either side of the actual discussion is the decision as to what the researcher needs to find out from the focus group participants and the summative analysis of what has been discovered from the participants (Morgan, 1998, p. 9)

#### *3.4.8.1 Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups*

Focus groups provide an effective qualitative research method that enables investigation into complex behaviour and allow the researcher to discover how different groups think and feel about a topic and why they hold certain opinions. With regard to research into library use, focus groups can inform decision-making, strategic planning and resource allocation, and add a human dimension to impersonal data (statistics) (eVALUEd Project, 2005)

The main advantages of focus groups as a qualitative research method are that they: obtain detailed information about personal and group feelings, perceptions and opinions (required for a Delphi approach); they are cost effective and efficient in reaching out to multiple participants (i.e. saving time and money compared to individual interviews); they can provide a broader range of information, through seeking multiple voices (narrative and naturalistic, and required for Delphi or grounded theoretical approaches); they offer the opportunity to seek clarification (advantageous in a grounded theoretical approach).

There are however, also several disadvantages of focus groups, including: they can surface disagreements and irrelevant discussion which distract from the main focus; they can be hard to control and manage; a risk of participants not engaging; single dominant voices taking over the focus group discussion (therefore group dynamic might be effected by personal bias); participants may feel under pressure to agree with the dominant view; some participants may find a focus group situation intimidating or off-putting; non-verbal responses might be missed or misinterpreted. In addition, the focus group facilitator can inadvertently influence the data. Facilitators do more than just ask questions, in that they provide the group with a certain level of energy and encourage engagement. They keep the conversation on track and can potentially influence the data when questions posed are not neutral in nature (Gaille, 2015)

There are as many disadvantages to using this method as there are advantages, and the risk of insufficient, biased or invalid data needs to be mitigated, through the research strategy. However, as long as the disadvantages are equally weighed with the advantages that focus groups provide, the data value from them makes them a

preferred method for data collection. A focus group research method would potentially bring together a diversity of participants from different backgrounds and cultures, would allow for an accessible and understandable conversation to take place in the first instance, allowing participants to talk freely and discuss their experience of library usage. For all these reasons focus groups were looked upon as a preferred research method for this doctoral research. Another advantage to this method is in optimising the time available with participants. A typical focus group discussion would take between one and two hours, but with a critical mass of subjects, all of whom would have a common, shared, lived experience, that of making use of public libraries. With this in mind, focus groups were considered an appropriate qualitative method to use within an interpretivist, phenomenological methodology.

#### 3.4.9 Longitudinal approaches

The subject areas being investigated through the research questions, whilst interconnected, could potentially generate a breadth, as well as depth, of data. Focus group participants would be required to reflect upon several aspects of their public library usage and their own citizenship development and would be asked to situate this within the information society. It was felt that a single focus group would be insufficient for a cohort of participants to cover these different layers of sophistication embedded in the research questions. Participants of focus groups would be required to contextualise the different elements of the research questions (e.g. public library use; community outcomes; social capital; individual citizenship; community citizenship; information society, etc.), which would need to be facilitated through the focus group discussion. However, time can also be considered an important component of context, which can be “more flexibly considered as a temporal ecology... and can be expected to influence the magnitude of the magnitude of the interconnections among different ecological levels” (Little, Boviard & Card, 2007, p. 3). In other words, taking a longitudinal approach to a focus group method, through allowing for ‘time’ to be part of the methodological context could enhance the overall investigation, in respect to complexity, validity and credibility of data.

This approach is also informed through the consideration how case study research makes use of longitudinal approaches. In some case studies, an in-depth longitudinal examination of a single case or event is used. The longitudinal examination provides a systematic way of observing the events, collecting data, analysing information, and reporting the results over a long period of time. In other words, a case study is a unique way of observing any natural phenomenon which exists in a set of data (Yin, 2009). However, Zainal asserts that ‘... by unique, it is meant that only a very small geographical area or number of subjects of interest are examined in detail. Unlike quantitative analysis which observes patterns in data at the macro level on the basis of the frequency of occurrence of the phenomena being observed, case studies observe the data at the micro level’ (Zainal, 2007)

Interval contingent design is acknowledged as an intensive method in social science research methodology. Interval contingent recording involves participants recording experience at regular and pre-determined intervals of time (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013). Studies also suggest that longitudinal studies are effective ways in observing and evidencing social development (Lewis & McNaughton Nicholls, 2013, pp. 61-62).

It is acknowledged that focus groups inevitably reduce the researcher’s control over the interaction, and as such are regarded as an ‘egalitarian’ method. [However], this reduced researcher control enables focus group participants to follow their own agendas and to develop themes most important to them (Cooper, Diamond & High, 1993). This is a characteristic of a grounded theory approach to research, in that, whilst focus groups are structured, there is an element of allowing the discussion to flow and take its own course, which in turn might inform the next stage of the empirical study in a longitudinal design. Similarly, a focus group method, involving a grounded theory approach might allow for participants to become more and more familiar with the focus group environment, whilst addressing more increasingly challenging discussion concepts over time.

A longitudinal approach within the methodology, where focus groups were convened and re-convened on multiple occasions, over a given period of time was therefore given due consideration as an aspect of a flexible research design.

<b>Option / approach</b>	<b>Data collection implication</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Flexible design feature?</b>
Ethnographical	Researcher generated observation	Researcher observes public library users, from within the field. Data is generated through observation and through discourse, as a library user, with other library users.	No
Naturistic inquiry	Values based, subjective discussion and opinion of lived experiences of public libraries	Inquiry into real-world lived experiences. Allows for subjective choice of research questions, research paradigm and theoretical framework. Values can be considered as part of the context of the research (i.e. what libraries mean to users)	Yes
Narrative	Recordings and transcripts of: discussion; story-telling; anecdotes	Library users are interviewed and questioned in order to surface stories and anecdotes about public library usage within the information society.	Yes
Interviews	Recordings and transcripts of individual interviews	Semi-structured interviews are conducted with individual library users in order to generate data based upon their experiences and usage of public libraries.	No
Grounded theory & thematic analysis	Data is coded and thematically analysed. Analysis can shape next steps of research.	Grounded theory approach can be applied to methods whereby subjects discuss and reflect on public library usage. Grounded theory allows for study of real world phenomenon through investigating how people	Yes

		engage and interact with public libraries	
Delphi method	<p>Formation of group opinion through discussion and reflection.</p> <p>Delphi also makes use of different rounds of data collection (part of longitudinal approach)</p>	<p>Group discussion based method which aims to generate group opinion through reflection of real-world lived experiences of public library usage.</p> <p>A grounded Delphi approach would allow for such data collection to then be subject to thematic analysis and for the research and emergent theory (or theoretical contribution to knowledge) to develop longitudinally.</p>	Yes
Case studies	<p>Multiple observational, inquiry and desk-based methods used to realise how library-usage is perceived by library users.</p>	<p>Existing case studies of public library usage are investigated in order to obtain data about the value and impact libraries have on individuals and communities. Case study methods would allow for investigation into human experience of contemporary real-life phenomenon (i.e. public library usage) and could be deployed longitudinally. However time constraints in deploying a multiple case study approach (taking into account the multiple elements of individual case studies) might distract from achieving breadth and focus.</p>	No
Focus groups	<p>Recordings and transcripts of discussions</p>	<p>Groups of library users are brought together in discussions focusing on public library usage within the context of the research. Data is generated from their</p>	Yes

		collective experiences of public library usage.	
Longitudinal	Multiple recordings and transcripts of discussions over pre-determined time period	Where participants are involved in discussions or interviews to consider particular elements of the investigation, this is repeated at later pre-determined times in order to increase the depth and breadth of the context of the research.	Yes

*Table 2: Consideration of methods and approaches informing the flexible research design*

### 3.5 Empirical work

Having informed the flexible research design through the options appraisal of qualitative methods, the empirical research of this doctoral study could then be undertaken. The empirical work is presented in four parts: the research strategy and underpinning principles; an overview of the pilot study which was used to test the focus group method and data collection; an overview of the application of the method for the main study and the data collection; the ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent from participants.

#### 3.5.1 Research strategy

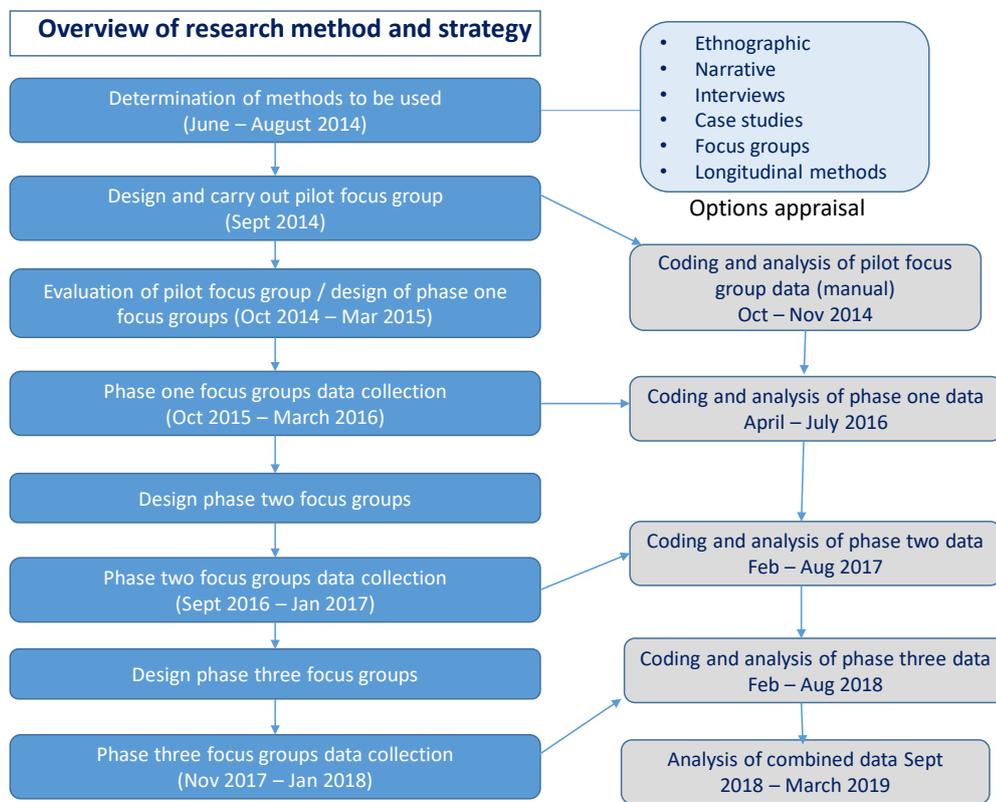


Figure 1: Overview of research method and strategy

“Focus group interviews typically have five characteristics or features. These characteristics relate to the ingredients of a focus group: (1) people, who (2) possess certain characteristics, (3) provide qualitative data (4) in a focused discussion (5) to help understand the topic of interest.” (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 6). The Krueger and Casey list of characteristics (or ingredients) of a successful focus group provide a useful frame on which to base the focus group method required for the empirical research:

1.	People	Focus group participants
2.	Characteristics	Public library users
3.	Qualitative data	Narrative / anecdotes / reflections
4.	Focused discussions	Shaped by the research questions
5.	Understanding of the topic of interest	The role of the public library in citizenship development within the information society

*Table 3: Kreuger & Casey 'ingredients of a focus group' as applied to the research strategy*

Other focus group theory suggests that a set of four therapeutic factors ordered within a focus group discussion represent stages of a discussion, and that time and consideration for each stage can optimise the usefulness and data outputs from said discussion (Foulkes, 1964). An underlying principle of the research strategy was that the participants would be randomly recruited and selected, and would effectively not know each other, yet would be placed in a situation where they would be expected to talk to each other. In developing the research strategy, these therapeutic factors were considered as a means of creating a welcoming, comfortable and inclusive environment in which the focus group discussion could take place. The first factor, social integration is the opportunity for equal participation by the participants within the discussion. The second factor, mirror reaction allows for participants to realise the shared values, anxieties and experiences that they have around the subject being discussed. The third factor, condenser phenomenon, is the collective conscious and unconscious of the group which enables participants to talk about the issues raised within the group discussion session, and the fourth factor, exchange, is the process of sharing information which forms the main part of a focus group discussion (Fern, 2001). It was important that all participants felt that they could contribute and could do so without threat of conflict or upset whilst at the same time ensure that the focus of the discussion remained and the research data outcomes of the discussion were achieved.

Focus groups can produce a number of different types of information, and depending upon the research a large quantity of information might be desirable, for others, quantity might not be as important as the quality of the information (Fern, 2001). In the case of this doctoral study both quantity and quality was required. A critical mass of participants, from a multitude of geographic locations in the United Kingdom would assure potential quantity of data, and this was a feature of the final research strategy. The quality of the data generated would depend upon the success of the focus group discussions and the development of the questions used in the discussions in relation to the research questions being investigated. The 'multiple location' approach that was incorporated into the strategy would also go some way to validate the quality of data generated, in that themes and sub-topics might occur in separate discussions at different locations. Fern (2001) suggests that different types of information can be generated from focus group discussions, and this was certainly a desired outcome of the research strategy in that several topics needed discussing in detail (e.g. public library use; social capital; citizenship; information society, etc.). The flexible research design incorporated a deliberate longitudinal approach, intended to layer the sophistication and context of the focus group questioning over a series of focus groups for each cohort. This longitudinal approach was a further element of the research strategy intended to assure quality of data. The research strategy therefore featured a total of three separate focus groups, each eight to twelve months apart, in each of the eight geographic locations used in the empirical work.

Whilst this doctoral research is not attempting to ground a theory, a theoretical contribution to knowledge is a desired output. Therefore, there are elements of a grounded theory approach required in the research strategy. These elements include those identified by Glaser and Strauss (1967): the research does aim to generate theory from data; the empirical study will be informed by interview/discussion/conversation based data generation; a systematic but flexible research strategy providing detailed prescriptions for data analysis will be required. Similarly, thematic analysis of the data generated from focus groups will be required, which is another grounded theory feature. The grounded Delphi

approach, discussed above, also becomes a significant feature of the research strategy in that it provides a framework for longitudinal rounds of data collection from structured group discussions. Therefore, whilst the strategy predominantly features a longitudinal focus group method, this has partly been influenced through a grounded Delphi approach.

#### *3.5.1.1 Sampling*

Having established that focus groups would be the primary data collection method, attention then need to turn to sampling in respect of recruiting participants to the focus groups. 'Sampling is the deliberate selection of the most appropriate participants to be included in a study, according to the way that the theoretical needs of the study may be met by the characteristics of the participants' (Morse, 2011). Marshall argues that probability sampling techniques used for quantitative studies, such as random sampling, are rarely appropriate when conducting qualitative research this is partly due to the very large sample sizes required in order to mitigate the risk of random sampling error (Marshall, 1996). Similarly, Maines explains how random sampling is used to generate data for purposes of testing and verifying hypotheses derived from existing theories and in contrast 'theoretical sampling, which is contained within a grounded theory approach' is an analytical process of deciding what data to collect next and where those data should be found' (Maines, 2011). Marshall presents theoretical sampling as 'appropriate for qualitative studies which seek to provide illumination and understanding of social issues and answering humanistic 'why? And 'how'? questions' (Marshall, 1996, p. 522). Theoretical sampling necessitates building interpretive theories from emerging data and selecting a new sample to elaborate on this theory. This approach to sampling is commonly used in a grounded theory development. Marshall also introduces convenience sampling, the selection of the most accessible subjects/participants and judgement sampling, where the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research questions. Marshall concludes that there is often an overlap between the three naturalistic sampling techniques (theoretical, convenience and judgement) and a combination of these are favourable in qualitative research.

<b>Research strategy</b>	
<b>Underpinning principle</b>	<b>Context</b>
Focus groups to be conducted in eight different United Kingdom locations providing access to a diversity of active public library users	<p>Convening multiple focus groups in different locations would allow for the critical mass of participants required in order to generate data to address the research questions.</p> <p>This would assure quantity and quality of data and information generated through the empirical work</p>
Systematic approaches to different types of local library authorities seeking permission to engage with public library users.	<p>This would allow for focus groups to take place in different socio-economic areas of England and Scotland, and would also allow for representation of different types of local authority (i.e. one and two tier council systems, city councils and metropolitan borough councils)</p> <p>This would enable a degree of representation of British (English and Scottish) communities</p>
Recruitment to focus groups to be conducted at local level, using mainly judgement and convenience sampling techniques.	Reliance on the local authority to provide access to active library users (i.e. non-random) and to assist with recruitment to focus groups
A longitudinal method to be applied to each focus group location, involving the same participants each time, enabling data to be collected and evaluated overtime, allowing for a grounded theoretical approach.	<p>Reconvening each focus group a further two times (eight – twelve months apart) enables familiarisation amongst the participants and allows participants to actively use their public libraries and reflect on their usage in between focus group discussions.</p> <p>This approach also goes some way to assuring the quantity and quality of data required for this study in that it</p>

	allows for a greater amount of discussion and allows the breadth and depth of topics discussed to become incrementally more detailed and sophisticated over the two to three year time period over which any one set of focus groups is carried out
Initial focus group questions to align with research questions – subsequent focus group questions to be informed by the outcomes of the previous focus group discussion (i.e. grounded theoretical approach)	<p>This is a feature of a flexible research method being used within an interpretivist paradigm. This allows for the data being generated as a result of the study to actively contribute to theory development during the course of the empirical research process.</p> <p>This also allows the focus group questioning to address increasingly challenging discussion concepts over the course of the set of three focus groups (i.e. in a given location)</p>
Focus groups to be moderated the principal researcher	The principal researcher has experience of conducting and successfully moderating focus groups and provides the right level of technical expertise into the subject, whilst remaining objective to the discussion. Active facilitation is also in keeping with

*Table 4: Research strategy and underpinning principles*

### 3.5.2 Ethical considerations

Ethical enquiry needs to inform the reasons for action in the conduct of social research and should protect participants and the integrity of the inquiry (May, 2011, p. 61). Social research ethics is also bound up research values and the researcher being able to refrain from making value judgements about the research data collection situation (i.e. the nature and flow of a focus group discussion), whilst maintaining a control over the flow and direction of the discussion with regard to the intended outcomes of the focus group. Ethical approval for this doctoral investigation was sought prior to the initial pilot focus group, through

following the procedures explicit in The Edinburgh Napier University Code of Practice on Research Integrity (Edinburgh Napier University, 2013). The case made for ethical approval included addressing data generation and storage (of participant details and of research data) and anonymising participants during the data analysis stage. Participants remained anonymous throughout the data analysis stage and in the presentation of the findings, although characteristics of individual participants needed to be captured and reported upon as this would form part of the narrative in the data.

#### *3.5.2.1 Informed consent*

All the focus group participants in this doctoral investigation were self-selecting volunteers who had responded to an advertising campaign inviting them to participate. As described in section 3.5.3.1, in recruiting them, there was a deliberate use of convenience sampling, as well as judgement sampling, in that 'active library users' were targeted in each authority.

, However, in order that the pilot focus group be conducted in a disciplined manner and that an ethical approach could be applied to all subsequent focus groups it was important to consider 'informed consent', which was a key consideration in the research method gaining ethical approval. Informed consent refers to a freely given agreement on the part of the participant that they become a subject of the research process and is based, not only on a complete understanding of the aims and process of the research itself, but also the potential consequences that the research might have beyond the period of research (May, 2011, p. 62).

The process and objectives of each focus group were explained to the participants, including the requirement for obtaining personal details which would be for analysis only and which would remain anonymous. An 'informed consent form' was distributed to the group, and this was explained and also read out loud to the participants. From the outset, an anticipated longitudinal nature of the study was also explained in the hope that the focus group could be reconvened at a later stage of the research. The 'informed consent' form also included an 'opt in' section for those participants who would be happy to have their photographs taken, so that they might be presented as illustrative material alongside the research.

All pilot focus group participants were satisfied with the explanations provided and the format and content of the informed consent form. However, the pilot focus group also revealed where revisions were required for gaining informed consent during the main study. Firstly, during the recruitment process, an enquiry was made as to whether participants under the age of sixteen would be accepted as participants as they could technically be active library users and provide a different voice. During the preparation for the pilot focus group consideration had not been given to this, but on reflection it was decided that subsequent focus groups should be opened up to under sixteens in order that the focus groups could be as representative as possible of the communities they served. Consequently, an 'informed parental/guardian consent form' was developed which proved essential in later focus groups, particularly in the London Borough of Redbridge where the initial focus group was advertised at the local 'youth parliament' and attracted interest from participants within an under sixteen age range. However, even though parental consent was sought, and gained, in order that the under sixteen participants could engage, it was also important that the young participants were provided with the same explanation of the project as the adult participants. This enabled them to make their own decisions as to whether they should participate and understand that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw should they choose to do so. (See appendix B for informed consent form)

### 3.5.3 Pilot focus group

A pilot focus group was convened in September 2014 in order to test out the focus group method and underlying principles as set out in the research strategy (section 3.5.1, p. 81) and to assess its appropriateness as an effective method for investigating the specific research questions.

#### *3.5.3.1 Recruitment of participants*

Liverpool City Libraries were asked to arrange recruitment to the pilot focus group. The focus group was advertised using posters in and around Liverpool's central and branch libraries, and information was also included on the council web-pages, with a view to recruiting between 6 and 10 participants, which is recommended good

practice (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 68). The recruitment campaign invited library users to ‘*come and share your experiences of using Liverpool City Libraries*’ and an incentive of a £10 Amazon voucher was offered in exchange for participation in the focus group. This approach made use of naturalistic sampling in that it was both a convenience sample and also a judgement sample, in that the recruitment was focused at ‘active library users’, already habitually using Liverpool Libraries. This mitigated against a random sample, which would have potentially yielded a sample, unable to address the research questions.

Eight people signed up for the focus group, and this was considered an appropriate and workable number, particularly for a pilot focus group. The participants represented different users and demographics of the user population of Liverpool City Libraries, including a gender balance and representation of different age groups, ethnicities and nationalities.

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Libraries used</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	45 - 54	F	Lecturer	Indian / British	Central
<b>Participant 2</b>	75 - 84	M	Retired professor	Indian	Central
<b>Participant 3</b>	65 - 74	F	Retired mental health worker	British	Breck Rd.
<b>Participant 4</b>	16 - 24	M	College student	British	Central
<b>Participant 5</b>	55 - 64	M	Retired	German	Central
<b>Participant 6</b>	35 - 44	M	Photographer	Venezuelan	Central
<b>Participant 7</b>	55 - 64	F	Retired	British	Central, Allerton, Childwall
<b>Participant 8</b>	55 - 64	F	Social worker	British	Central, Allerton, Childwall

*Table 5: Details and demographics of pilot focus group participants*

The participants were asked to provide some personal details in advance of the discussion in order that demographics, representation and protected characteristics might be considered during the data evaluation stage.

### *3.5.3.2 Results of the pilot focus group*

Questions were posed (See appendix A) in such a way that participants were encouraged to reflect on their library experiences. During the course of the pilot focus group it became apparent that the nature of the topics being discussed evoked some very value driven responses, particularly around 'noise' and accessibility' as well as 'quality of resources'. The participants quickly became very comfortable with their surroundings and the discussion flowed, providing plenty of insight into the public library use of the participants.

When analysing the transcript of the pilot focus group, and individual comments and observations made therein, it became clear that whilst the participants themselves presented a diverse mix of public library users, they were in fact all active public library users. Subsequently there was a general acceptance that the library always provides a positive experience and represents a general 'force for good'. The participants were in agreement that their library service was indeed very valuable and there was a sense of civic pride in having access to a public library services.

The participants had a lot of praise for the physical space, the resources and the staff support in general as well as the concept of 'library' and the services and resources that they had access to. The discussions and observations from the focus group allowed for a deeper understanding of why people choose to use public library services, how they do so and how they benefit as individuals and community.

### *3.5.3.3 Evaluation of the pilot focus group method*

The purpose of the pilot focus group was to test the method in order to ascertain whether it would be a suitable method for the main empirical study, within the overarching research strategy. With this in mind the pilot can be considered a success in that the discussions from the focus generated sufficient narrative and reflection for analysis in respect of the research questions. In this regard a longitudinal focus group method could be considered as an appropriate data collection tool. A critical mass of similar focus groups, over a period of time would allow for a rich data set to be generated for subsequent analysis.

The evaluation of the pilot focus group identified certain strengths and weaknesses of the method, which could subsequently be considered in rolling out the method in the larger longitudinal study. Strengths included: enabling proactive discussion in a safe environment; targeting questions so that the research themes can be addressed; capturing anecdotal evidence; validating anecdotal evidence through asking participants to reflect on the other participants' observations; enabling multiple and varied voices and experiences to emerge. Potential weaknesses identified included: risk of the discussion being dominated by one or two individuals; the discussion becoming a platform for feeding back on specific library services; discussions taking different directions leading to insufficient data. All of these potential weaknesses could be (and indeed were in the case of the pilot) mitigated through effective and measured facilitation of the focus group.

#### *3.5.3.4 Conclusions from the pilot study*

The pilot focus group had been well planned and executed, and tested the appropriateness and suitability of the method for the main doctoral investigation. In doing so the pilot focus group had tested some assumptions about the practical elements of conducting focus groups. This in turn helped to inform some minor revisions which were subsequently made to the practical approach used in the main study.

It is important to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to contribute, that the discussion is not dominated by individuals, and that the discussion remains focused within the context of the research. It is also important that the facilitator uses accessible language, meaningful to the participants. For example, the pilot focus group demonstrated that most library users are unaware that they are participating in the exchange of social and transactional capital when using the library. Similarly, participants are not familiar with making conscious 'citizenship' decisions and the focus group questions and discussions need to be developed accordingly, taking this into account as part of the longitudinal approach. Participants struggled to comprehend what was meant by citizenship and as a result the discussion around this area became stifled and awkward. It was decided that

descriptions and explanations of some concepts (such as citizenship) should be made available to the participants of subsequent focus groups.

### 3.5.4 Design and implementation of the method for the main empirical study

The following section details the design and implementation of the full longitudinal study, which took place over a three-year period from 2015 to 2018. The longitudinal approach of the research strategy meant that the empirical work was carried out in three distinct phases: phase one (2015-2016); phase two (2016-2017); phase three (2017-18). The section is therefore presented by way of these three phases and provides an overview of how the research strategy was implemented during each phase. By way of a conclusion, the section also provides an analysis of the implications of the longitudinal approach.

#### 3.5.4.1 Phase one (2015 – 2016)

Approximately 40 public library authorities were approached in order to obtain a representative selection of UK public library users, whilst at the same time trying to account for different types of library administration (i.e. county councils, city councils, urban and rural areas). From the responses received and the requirement to have a representative mix of library authorities, eight were selected and used for the sample:

<b>Library authority</b>	<b>Type of authority</b>
Liverpool	City council authority
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	City council authority
Edinburgh	City council authority
Lincolnshire	County council authority
Essex	County council authority
Devon	County council authority
Redbridge (London Borough)	Metropolitan borough council authority
Sutton (London Borough)	Metropolitan borough council authority

*Table 6: List of participating local authorities*

The local authorities were selected through further judgement sampling, in that a cross-section of British (English and Scottish, as per the geographic scope of the research) local authorities were approached, in order to achieve a diversity of local authorities. In recruiting focus group participants, there was again a deliberate use of convenience sampling, as well as judgement sampling, in that 'active library users' were targeted in each authority.

During the Autumn and Winter of 2015, focus groups of up to ten participants in each, were convened and carried out in each of the chosen localities as the first phase of the empirical study. The phase one focus groups were each scheduled for an hour, during which participants discussed and shared their experiences of using public library services and reflected upon how their library usage had affected them. The questions posed during the first round of focus groups, having been moderated as a result of the pilot, were around the themes of:

- Attitudes and feelings towards public libraries
- The demand for and use of knowledge and information
- Who are libraries for and what is their role in society?
- What is meant by the term citizenship and how does the library contribute to this?

A total of 53 participants were involved in the phase one focus group, which allowed for a critical mass of reflective and anecdotal data to be gathered in order to inform the research project.

A key attribute of focus groups was that the participants had shared lived experiences of public libraries and this immediately brought the participants together. Participant had a confident willingness to share their library stories with the group. There were disagreements along the way (particularly with regard to noise, children's spaces in libraries, technology over print, and general repurposing of libraries), but participants respected each other and all appeared to enjoy the experience of being in a group. This is significant in that the interactions of all the focus groups appeared to follow the therapeutic stages of group formation as

identified above by Foulkes (1964) and Fern (2001), those of; social integration; mirror reaction – realising commonality; condenser phenomenon – enabling participants to discuss issues; and exchange of experience.

These ‘therapeutic factors’ and the group dynamics afforded by them became even more significant once the longitudinal aspect of the methodology took shape during the second round of focus groups which were held a year later.

#### *3.5.4.2 Phase two (2016-2017)*

Phase two was carried out during 2016 and 2017 in each of the original locations, with as many of the original participants as possible. The second round focus groups were scheduled for an hour. Participants were asked to discuss and reflect specifically on their personal development and involvement in their communities during the previous eight to twelve months (the period of time in between focus groups), and whether any of this had been facilitated through their library use. These themes were intended to generate more reflection and to focus in on both individual and community learning and development afforded through public library use.

Convening for a second time, the participants appeared to become very comfortable with each other very quickly and were able to talk about the issues and share experiences very easily. This allowed for a much more intense and ultimately more informative discussion around self and community development, which individuals would necessarily find easy to talk about. Some of the same anecdotes appeared from the initial focus group (which would have taken place up to a year ago) and individuals were able to draw on these examples, with the other participants already being familiar with the context of what they were referring to.

#### *3.5.4.3 Phase three (2017-2018)*

During the third and final round of focus groups, up to two years after the first focus groups had been convened, the group dynamic re-emerged very quickly in each instance. Participants were immediately familiar and comfortable with each other, the facilitator and the focus group environment. Knowing that this dynamic would be present during the third focus groups, some new parameters and stimulus were introduced. One of the attributes of using a longitudinal approach is the

context of time and in the case of phase three, this was used to incrementally introduce increasingly abstract and more sophisticated themes to the discussion. The phase three focus groups were also scheduled to last up to two hours, so that this could be effectively achieved. Specifically the new concepts that were introduced into the phase three discussions social capital; human capital; knowledge capital; and, information society. Citizenship was also featured as an associated theme, although this had been a key focus of the phase two focus groups as well. 'Crib sheets' were distributed to the participants at the beginning of the focus group, on which there were brief descriptions of social capital, knowledge capital, human capital, information society and citizenship. The participants were then divided into pairs or groups of three to discuss these concepts and relate them to their own personal public library use. After 30 – 40 minutes of small group discussion, the participants were invited to re-join the larger group and share their stories and experiences relating to the concepts that they had been introduced to.

#### *3.5.4.4 Implications of the longitudinal approach*

The major benefit of using a longitudinal focus group approach was that it allowed time for reflection on lived experiences, and also for participants to continue living those experiences in between focus groups, allowing for deeper reflection at subsequent focus group discussions. For example, in all eight phase two focus groups the discussion was more open and consequently deeper, full of rich personal anecdotes, due to the familiarity of the discussion topics, the focus group environment and fellow participants. In phase three this comfort with the situation and desire to engage for a third time was even stronger. Participants were now attending, not out of curiosity, but now as an enthusiast wishing to engage in the research process and to contribute to the discussion. In some instances, participants likened the third focus group to a 'reunion' and 'meeting up with old friends'.

The longitudinal method also allowed for more topics to be discussed, than a single focus group would have afforded and for the topics to become increasingly abstract and more sophisticated throughout the phases. This was required for the doctoral study as the investigation needed to address the multiple elements of public library

use, individual citizenship, community citizenship, exchange of capital and the information society. The focus group discussions during the latter phases were more sophisticated and more focused than each previous discussion, with all participants having surfaced 'real life' examples to share and being comfortable receiving comments and questions about them. From the point of view of the research the examples and discussion became instantly relatable to the research questions and it is during the third phase of focus groups in particular that some of the richest, most meaningful data were revealed, in relation to the research questions.

A disadvantage of the longitudinal approach was participant attrition. The study initially attracted a total of fifty-three participants for the phase one focus groups. The success of the longitudinal method would rely on all, or most of these participants returning for phases two and three. This number was reduced to thirty-two participants during phase two and reduced further still in phase three to twenty-eight. Attrition in sample size in a longitudinal method brings with it a risk in respect of the validity of the data generated during the discussions, but this was mitigated through the multiple focus groups taking place in each phase, ensuring a significant quantity of valid data would be generated. This will be discussed in further detail during the evaluation of the research strategy in section 3.7 (page 102).

### 3.6 Data collection

The main source of data collection was longitudinal focus groups as described in section 3.5 about the empirical fieldwork (see page 81). A set of questions was developed for each phase of focus groups and was designed to elicit discussions and responses about particular themes, specific to that phase of focus groups. The question set for the second phase of focus groups was developed after the analysis of the phase one focus groups, so that the research could develop systematically and longitudinally. For example, the analysis of the phase one data led to questions about individual learning and development being included in phase two, as this sub-theme had not been prolific in the phase one analysis. Similarly, having analysed the phase two data, it seemed appropriate to focus on concepts of information society and social capital during phase three. (See appendix C for the question sets). The question sets were made available to participants on sheets of paper so that they could refer to them at any time during the focus group discussion.

The twenty-four focus groups were recorded through voice recording software and the data were stored as MP3 files so that it could be transcribed after each focus group had taken place. The word-processed transcriptions became the primary data source for analysis, and the transcripts from each phase of focus groups was analysed soon after that phase had been completed. (See appendix D for a research protocol for longitudinal focus groups and appendix E for an example of a focus group transcript). The data for each phase was coded and subsequently analysed using NVivo10 software and these stages will be explained in the following sections.

#### 3.6.1 Data coding

All data collected were coded and analysed using NVivo10 data analysis software. The coding and analysis took place at three specific points during the course of the longitudinal research, which were after each phase of data collection. Once all three phases had been analysed, a final combined analysis was carried out, in order to segment findings under the research question headings in order to present the findings.

*3.6.1.1 Data coding for the pilot focus group*

The initial coding structure, used in the analysis of the phase one focus group transcripts was developed from the themes which had emerged from the pilot focus group, the analysis of which had been manually coded. The overarching themes of ‘knowledge’, ‘access’, ‘inclusion’ surfaced as the major discussion themes of the pilot focus group, and subsequently the coding tree used for phase one, was based on this. For the pilot case study analysis, the coding was deliberately kept at a basic level, as it was providing an opportunity to test the research method and evaluation method, rather than to produce significant empirical research data.

<b>Data coding for pilot focus group analysis</b>	
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
Knowledge	User; Reading; Books; Information; Internet; Computers
Inclusion	User; Reading; Society; People; Community; Children; Everyone; Member
Access	Community; Children; Everyone; Member; Books; Information; Internet; Computers; Space; Library; Local

*Table 7: Basic data coding for analysis of pilot focus group*

It should be noted, that whilst the main objective of the pilot focus group was to test the chosen research method and strategy and to trial an approach to coding, the data elicited from it was substantial and significant in respect to the wider study. It was therefore decided to incorporate the pilot focus group data into the final full set of phase one data. This allowed for the Liverpool focus group to be reconvened during phases two and three and included in the full longitudinal study.

*3.6.1.2 Developing the data coding*

In order to effectively and efficiently analyse the wealth of data generated through the longitudinal research strategy, the data needed to be coded with the research questions very much at the forefront. This was enabled through using the principles of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) (Silver & Lewis, 2014) and exploiting the flexibility and navigation afforded through using Nvivo as a code based analysis software. During the coding process, data were coded initially under

the headings and sub-headings established through the manual process used for the pilot focus group analysis. Further nodes and sub-headings were added as they emerged in the phase one data. For example “Books” was fixed as a code within the thematic analysis node, with new sub-codes such as “e-books”, “monographs”, “print” added beneath it where the data allowed for greater granularity. Further contextual codes “Positive” and “Negative” were added during the coding of the phase one focus group transcripts which allowed for subsequent sentiment analysis of the data. Data were coded as “positive” where a reflection or anecdote was regarded as a positive experience of public library usage, and “negative” where data indicated a negative experience of public library usage.

After coding the phase one focus group data, queries were run using the initial coding structures and reports subsequently created based on the three research questions. The reports were reviewed and checked in order that the data could be thematically presented for analysis. This stage also allowed for sources, nodes and classifications to be checked against the sub-themes they were appearing in, and to be moved or combined where appropriate.

The coding was revisited for the phase two focus group data, and again for the phase three focus group data. The longitudinal approach meant that new and different data were inevitable (and desirable) and could only be added to the coding structures at the points in time when they surfaced. For example, the sub-codes occurring from initial codes such as “citizenship”, “transactional capital”, “human capital” and “information society” could not be included until after phases two and three, as it is during these phases that these concepts were introduced to the discussion. Saldana (2009, p. 175) recommends categorically and comparatively reviewing the data corpus across time when carrying out longitudinal coding. This is to be able to continue to adapt the coding structures and also to assess whether participant opinion may have changed over time. It was important that the coding structure allowed for this to take place.

The coding was incrementally developed throughout the phases, as per a grounded theory approach, and this was informed through the systematic analysis of the data from each phase of focus groups (See appendix F for an example of a Nvivo

node/code structure report and appendix G for examples of Nvivo node structures during phase one). Table 8 demonstrates how the coding tree for the thematic analysis node was developed during the course of the three phases of focus groups:

<b>Thematic analysis node</b>		
<b>Codes</b>	<b>Sub-codes</b>	<b>Sub-codes</b>
Access	Access to computers and Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IT skills</li> <li>• Using software</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul>
	Access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community hub</li> </ul>
	Atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiet</li> <li>• Study</li> </ul>
	Physical buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space</li> <li>• Social space</li> <li>• Community space</li> </ul>
	Safe and secure	
Attitude	Negative	
	Neutral	
	Positive	
Capital	Human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise</li> <li>• Friendly and approachable staff</li> <li>• Negative staff experiences</li> <li>• Friendship</li> </ul>
	Intellectual capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forming opinions and ideas</li> <li>• Documenting knowledge</li> <li>• Discovering information</li> <li>• Fact-checking</li> <li>• Canvassing opinion</li> </ul>
	Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clubs and societies</li> <li>• Courses</li> <li>• Events</li> <li>• Helping other library users</li> <li>• Meeting new people</li> <li>• Developing communities</li> <li>• Meeting like-minds</li> </ul>
	Transactional capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise in support</li> </ul>
Citizenship	Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community awareness</li> </ul>
	Democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic information</li> </ul>

	Digital citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IT support</li> <li>• Online participation</li> </ul>
	Health and wellbeing	
	Political engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political participation</li> </ul>
	Societal impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community resource</li> </ul>
	Job seeking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job club</li> </ul>
	Friendship groups	
Inclusion	Outreach	
Knowledge	Information resources	
	Books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Printed books</li> <li>• E-books</li> <li>• Monographs</li> <li>• Credibility</li> <li>• Preference for print</li> </ul>
	Newspapers	
	Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy</li> </ul>
Staff support		
Information Society		

Codes and sub-codes added during phase two are indicated in 'red'

Codes and sub-codes added during phase three are indicated in 'blue'

Table 8: Thematic analysis node coding tree

### 3.6.2 Data analysis

The chosen approach for analysing the focus group data for this doctoral study was to perform a content analysis using the CAQDAS principles and the Nvivo 10 Software identified in section 3.6.1.2 (see page 98). Content analysis is based on an examination of the data for recurrent instances or mentions of things. These instances need to then be systematically identified across the data set, and grouped together by means of a coding system in order to perform the analysis (Wilkinson, 2011, pp. 170-71). The data for this doctoral study were analysed based on the coded themes, as they emerged from each phase of the longitudinal method. The focus groups generated a large amount of data, and subsequently a wide variety of codes. The initial analysis took place through reading and revisiting the focus groups transcripts in order to become familiar with the data, whilst generating the coding structure.

After each of the three phases of focus groups, queries were run against the coded data in NVivo10 and this allowed for instances of data to be grouped in three ways: data that were similarly coded; frequency of instances of codes appearing; relationships and overlaps between the different codes. In addition, the “positive” and “negative” codes enabled a basic level sentiment analysis to take place, which added a further dimension to how the findings of the research could be presented. Negative experiences of public library use were subsequently presented in order to present counter-anecdotes and reflection in order to validate specific points being made in the findings. The reports which were produced from the NVivo10 analysis were used to make specific findings visible, particularly in relation to the research questions (See appendix H for examples of Nvivo queries run against the data for the phase one analysis). Consequently, the findings from the data analysis are presented longitudinally as pertaining to each of the three research questions (see chapters 5, 6, and 7)

### 3.7 Evaluation of the research strategy

The longitudinal methodological approach used in this doctoral research has been advantageous in many respects and has similarly presented several challenges, largely to do with efficiency and conducting the research in a timely fashion. The doctoral study has been undertaken on a part time basis over six years between 2013 and 2019, and this in itself has allowed for a longitudinal approach to the empirical work required for the study. The advantages and benefits of using a longitudinal, multi-location focus group method manifest themselves in the richness, breadth and depth of the data generated, which in turn contributes to the validity and credibility of the findings. The time lapses between each phase of focus groups also allowed for participants to learn, develop and interact with libraries and library users in between discussions, and this personal development of individuals becomes part of the narrative contained within the data. The time aspect of the longitudinal approach has also meant that external political developments affecting public libraries have taken place during the course of the study, which in turn have affected the ongoing library experience of the participants (often resulting in

changing of opinions, or being better informed about a theme over time), which again become apparent in the depth of the data.

In respect of challenges to come from the method, these are predominantly around sustainability of the method over a long period of time and the attrition that occurred in respect of participants not being able (or willing) to attend a series of focus groups over three years. There was always a risk that the challenges posed by sustainability of the method and the attrition would have a negative effect on the credibility and validity of the data generated. These risks were mitigated through planning and communication with regard to the organisation of the focus groups in ensuring that a critical mass of participants were able to take part in the study over the longitudinal period. The following SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) provides a succinct evaluation of the method and a guideline which could be considered, should the method be used for future research.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple locations allow for critical mass of representative participants to be reached</li> <li>• Increased likelihood of achieving diversity of focus group participants</li> <li>• Richness, depth and breadth of data generated over a series of focus groups</li> <li>• Validity and credibility of data</li> <li>• Participants become familiar and comfortable with focus group environment, resulting in participants being more likely to share reflections.</li> <li>• format allows for increasing levels of sophistication to be introduced to later phases of focus groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliance on local authorities to become active partners in the research process, at a time of ‘public library crisis’</li> <li>• Logistical and organisational challenges in recruiting to focus groups from a distance</li> <li>• Lack of trust from focus group participants (i.e. thought initial focus group was a consultation on public library service)</li> <li>• Attrition of focus group participants over time</li> <li>• Continuity of library liaison contacts at multi-locations not always achieved (i.e. changes of personnel at library locations)</li> <li>• Danger of repetition of themes at subsequent focus groups</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible research method able to develop over time</li> <li>• Able to introduce and cover an even broader range of topics and themes within focus group discussion</li> <li>• Able to hold focus groups in even more locations in order to increase diversity and representation</li> <li>• Development of a sustainable method for evaluating public library outcomes and satisfaction.</li> <li>• Replication of method to conduct further similar research in the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainability of method relies on availability of resources and time over a 5 – 6 year period</li> <li>• Lack of continuity in personnel at library locations, resulting in not being able to access participants or facilities for subsequent focus groups</li> <li>• Focus group does not remain focused due to having ‘too much’ discussion time over a longitudinal period</li> <li>• Library closures during time periods between focus groups</li> <li>• Library authorities unwilling to work as partners in the research method</li> <li>• Potential overwhelming amount of data</li> </ul>

Table 9: SWOT analysis of the longitudinal, multi-location focus group research method

### 3.8 Methodological contribution to Library and Information Science research

As well as contributing theoretical knowledge through this doctoral study (see chapters 8 and 9), the originality of the research method deployed could potentially also contribute methodologically to Library and Information Science and Information Society research. There is no evidence to suggest that longitudinal academic studies using the same participants in multiple locations have ever before been undertaken in researching into the role, value or impact of public libraries. Whilst studies exist which make use of a critical mass of public libraries and public library users (e.g. Peachey, 2017a, 2017b) they report quantitatively on usage, rather than qualitatively on sustained library use, which is one of the unique outputs of the research method used for this doctoral study. In surfacing and analysing data about library usage over time, the method allows public library scholars and public library practitioners alike to access findings, discussion and narrative about a several aspects of public library usage. These include data on the perceived use of public libraries, data on public library user behaviour, data on the value of public libraries and data on the impact of public libraries.

The discussion from the findings from this doctoral study has actually resulted in contributing to theory and knowledge within information society studies, with a focus on the public library as public sphere. In doing so the research contributes to a gap as identified by Varheim, Skare and Lenstra (2019) where an examination of research investigations conducted into this subject area over the last ten years show a distinct lack of empirical studies into the public library as public sphere, with only eleven having been conducted across the globe, since 2010. Of these eleven studies, none make use of a focus group approach, nor a longitudinal approach. Therefore, whilst addressing a gap in the current research literature, the study also provides a method which can be used for future research into the public library as public sphere. The method would lend itself to replication in other countries in order to contribute to global knowledge and understanding of the particular LIS and information society themes.

The method uses a classic focus group approach within an interpretivist paradigm. The longitudinal aspect of the method, requires attention to detail with respect to organisation and logistics and some understanding of longitudinal studies. Appropriate recording, coding and content analysis of data is required at each phase of focus groups. The detail of the design and subsequent method has been explained in sections 3.5 (page 81), 3.6 (page 97) and 3.7 (page 102). Future research into public library usage or the public library as public sphere could be carried out through replicating this method within other geographic locations or public library contexts.

### 3.9 Conclusion

The methods described in this chapter for the implementation of flexible, multi-location, longitudinal focus groups, have allowed for the generation and collection of data in order to answer the three research questions set out in section 1.6 (page 15): To what extent is an individual's position advantaged as a result of using public libraries?; What is the impact of using a public library service on individual and community citizenship?; What is the role of the public library in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Consequently, the following chapters demonstrate the value of such an approach in the analysis of the data collected, and three sets of research findings are presented in order to answer the three research questions (chapters, 5, 6, 7).

## 4. Findings Overview

### 4.1 Introduction: Presentation of Findings

By way of introducing the findings of the empirical research, this chapter presents an initial brief overview of twenty-four focus groups, conducted across eight different local authority locations between September 2014 and January 2018. Each location was visited three times. Three separate focus groups took place at each, over the longitudinal period of the research, at approximately eight to twelve month intervals. A library from each location was used in which to carry out the focus groups and the initial group of participants at each was invited to the subsequent focus groups at that location in order to achieve cohesion and continuity.

The focus group overviews in this chapter are ordered by location, in the date order of where the first focus group in that location took place. Each profile considers the number of participants at each meeting, participant and local authority characteristics and an overview of the main topics under discussion at the time of the visit. This detail is presented to provide context for the following three chapters, in which the research findings are presented.

	Phase 1	Participants	Phase 2	Participants	Phase 3	Participants
Liverpool	10/09/14	8	26/10/15	4	23/09/16	4
Newcastle	30/10/15	4	29/06/16	4	12/12/17	3
Edinburgh	05/11/15	10	30/09/16	7	15/12/17	4
Chelmsford	04/12/15	2	01/10/16	2	17/01/18	2
Lincoln	15/01/16	4	21/10/16	3	16/12/17	2
Redbridge	16/03/16	9	23/11/16	3	07/12/17	5
Sutton	19/02/16	9	19/11/16	5	11/11/17	6
Tiverton	23/11/15	7	24/09/16	4	12/12/17	2
<b>Total</b>		53		32		28

Table 10: Summary of focus groups



Figure 2: Map of the research fieldwork location

## 4.2 Liverpool

### 4.2.1 Participants

	Age	Gender	Occupation	Ethnicity	Nationality	Attended
<b>Participant 1</b>	45 - 54	F	Lecturer	Asian	Indian / British	1, 2, 3
<b>Participant 2</b>	75 - 84	M	Retired professor	Asian	Indian	1
<b>Participant 3</b>	65 - 74	F	Retired mental health worker	White	British	1, 2, 3
<b>Participant 4</b>	16 - 24	M	College student	White	British	1
<b>Participant 5</b>	55 - 64	M	Retired	White	German	1
<b>Participant 6</b>	35 - 44	M	Photographer	Mixed	Venezuelan	1
<b>Participant 7</b>	55 - 64	F	Retired	White	British	1, 2, 3
<b>Participant 8</b>	55 - 64	F	Social worker	White	British	1, 2, 3

*Table 11: Participants of the Liverpool focus group*

4.2.2 Liverpool governance and demographic information<sup>4</sup>:

<b>Type of governance</b>	Metropolitan Borough
<b>Governing body / Local authority</b>	Liverpool City Council
<b>Population (2018)</b>	494,800
<b>Population by gender</b>	Female (50.2 %), Male (49.8 %)
<b>Employment /unemployment</b>	In employment (66.6%), Unemployed (3.9%)
<b>Age profile</b>	0 - 19 (23%), 20 – 44 (40.5%), 45 – 64 (23.8%), > 64 (12.7%)
<b>Ethnic profile (2011 census)</b>	White British (85%), White other (4%), Asian (4.2%), Black (2.6%), Mixed race (2.5%)

*Table 12: Liverpool governance and demographic information*

Liverpool Libraries are run by Liverpool City Council, a unitary authority serving the city of Liverpool. Liverpool sits in the wider metropolitan county of Merseyside, which comprises of five metropolitan boroughs (Liverpool, Sefton, Knowlsey, Wirral, St. Helens). Each metropolitan borough is responsible for its own library services. Liverpool Libraries consist of the Central Library and a further eighteen local community libraries.

4.2.3 Focus group one - Liverpool Central Library, September 10<sup>th</sup> 2014

This pilot focus group was established to test the proposed method and the questions that had been developed in order to start the discussions and data generation for the research.

Eight participants took part in the focus group and a varied mix of ages, ethnicities and nationalities were represented, resulting in a diverse mix of library users. Whilst the focus group discussion centred on Liverpool Central Library (a recently redeveloped flagship municipal library in the heart of the city centre) the participants drew on their experiences of other Liverpool branch libraries, as well as libraries in individuals' home countries. During the focus group discussions, some participants mentioned libraries in the metropolitan boroughs of St Helens and also

<sup>4</sup> Statistical information from nomis official labour market statistics:  
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157104/report.aspx>

Wirral. Whilst these libraries are not run by Liverpool City Council Library Authority, the participants did not discern between different authorities.

The questions around attitude and feelings towards the library led to a lot of reminiscing about how individuals had discovered libraries and what libraries mean to individuals, and how using libraries had affected or developed them. There were four non UK nationals in the group which led to some comparisons between public library services in the UK and their home nations. The discussions allowed three main themes to emerge, those of: books and print and the epistemic role of the library as a primary function; inclusion and the concept of public libraries being for all members of the community; and access to libraries allowing for citizens to have equal access to resources, facilities, buildings, community and professional support.

The discussion also revealed several frustrations and anxieties about their public library use and the participants duly shared these with each other. Several participants still maintained a traditional view of the library and that a scholarly, quiet space was the normal expectation of libraries. There were several frustrations about public libraries having introduced activities or spaces that generated noise and this was difficult for some participants to tolerate. However, there was still a general agreement that libraries were for 'all' and some of the conversation was around how the library does not reach out to young people and young adults.

The questions used in the Liverpool pilot focus group were well received and enabled the desired and relevant discussion, the data from which has subsequently been used in the research analysis. As the Liverpool focus group was used as a pilot, the questions themselves were being tested. For the most part the questions were appropriate, but it was felt that they also provided too much opportunity for participants to find fault with their library service, which would then take the discussion in a direction which was not conducive to conversation about the value and impact of the service. Therefore, the questions were amended for the following focus groups to ensure that the three main themes of knowledge, access and inclusion were at the heart of the initial questioning process.

#### 4.2.4 Focus group two - Liverpool Central Library, October 26<sup>th</sup> 2015

The findings from the first Liverpool focus group were used to demonstrate that a focus group research method was appropriate for this research. As a period of time elapsed between this stage and the rolling out of the main empirical work, subsequent Liverpool focus groups were then used as a testing platform for the line of questioning in the next round of focus groups, and subsequently provided rich and valuable data as part of the empirical study.

The second focus group was used to question participants about their immediate previous twelve months' usage of their public library service and to consider how their individual usage of libraries had benefited them with regard to self-development or active participation in community and societal settings. It was also the first instance where participants were brought back together for a second session and four of the original eight participants were able to attend. The dynamic of the group was noticeably different from the first convening of the group as the participants were familiar with each other, the facilitator and the setting. Because of this they demonstrated an increased level of engagement and participation, which resulted in an overt willingness to discuss, listen and contribute. It was noticeable how comfortable the participants were with the environment. This was a noticeable difference from the semi-apprehension and anxiety which was displayed at the outset of the initial focus group.

The discussion focused on the developmental aspect of libraries and the learning and educational outcomes that library authorities often have. The participants had a lot of praise for the Liverpool Libraries' staff and attributed much of the learning opportunities to them. There was a strong feeling of library staff enabling access to library resources and the resultant learning and knowledge exchange. The discussion also covered the use and prevalence of increased digital resources, yet there was an agreed mistrust of this, and participants regarded books as remaining the prime medium from which to learn and discover new knowledge.

There was a mixed reception with regard to the performance of Liverpool Libraries in general with some participants still very proud of the flagship Central Library, while others were more cynical about how this is at the expense of cuts to branch

libraries. The overall perception of the participants was that Liverpool Central Library still offers a place and sense of community, but many branch libraries have been removed from their communities in order to sustain this.

#### 4.2.5 Focus group three - Liverpool Central Library, September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016

By the third and final focus group, participants' familiarity and comfort with the environment was such that the discussion could be increased in sophistication. Therefore, the concepts of social capital, human capital and knowledge capital were introduced to participants in order to guide the discussion towards citizenship and participation as well as asking participants to reflect on their experiences of role of the library within the Information Society. The third Liverpool focus group allowed for this approach to be tested. The same four participants who had attended the second focus group were present for the third.

The participants engaged mostly with the notions of human capital and transactional capital and spoke positively (again) about the values and behaviours of the Liverpool Libraries' staff, identifying this as a means of exchanging human capital within the library. Specific examples were presented which illustrated particular citizenship development for individuals (e.g. start-up businesses, embracing lifelong learning, acquiring digital skills, etc.)

Of all the focus groups, the Liverpool participants were the most vociferous about the value of print and the library's role in providing print information. This stood out again during the discussions around knowledge capital with the theme of mistrusting digital over print remaining as strong as in the previous two focus groups.

## 4.3 Newcastle-upon-Tyne

### 4.3.1 Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Ethnicity	Nationality	Attended
Participant 9	55 - 64	F	Retired	White	British	1, 2, 3
Participant 10	55 - 64	F	Elderly home care provider	White	British	1, 2, 3
Participant 11	45 - 54	F	Unemployed	White	British	1, 2, 3
Participant 12	35 - 44	F	Home educator / Writer	White	British	1, 2

Table 13: Participants of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne focus group

### 4.3.2 Newcastle-upon-Tyne governance and demographic information<sup>5</sup>:

<b>Type of governance</b>	Metropolitan District
<b>Governing body / Local authority</b>	Newcastle City Council
<b>Population (2018)</b>	300,200
<b>Population by gender</b>	Female (49.5 %), Male (50.5 %)
<b>Employment / Unemployment</b>	In employment (71%), Unemployed (5.3%)
<b>Age profile</b>	0 - 19 (18.2%), 20 – 44 (39.7%), 45 – 64 (23.5%), > 64 (18.6%)
<b>Ethnic profile</b>	White British (81.3%), White other (3%), Asian (9.7%), Black (2.2%), Mixed race (1.6%), Other (1.5%)

Table 14: Newcastle-upon-Tyne governance and demographic information

Newcastle Libraries are run by Newcastle City Council which serves the city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Newcastle sits in the wider metropolitan county of Tyne and Wear, comprising of five metropolitan boroughs (Gateshead, Newcastle, Sunderland, North Tyneside, South Tyneside). Each metropolitan borough is responsible for its own library services. Newcastle Libraries consists of the

<sup>5</sup> Statistical information from nomis official labour market statistics  
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157065/report.aspx>

Newcastle City Library and a further fifteen community information hubs and libraries.

#### 4.3.3 Focus group one – Newcastle City Library, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Four participants took part in the focus group, all were female and white British, although they represented a range of ages and occupations. They were all users of Newcastle Libraries and three of them also actively used libraries in the neighbouring metropolitan boroughs of North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Gateshead. The four participants were asked questions (slightly revised as a result of the pilot) around the themes that had been established from the pilot focus group.

Again, printed books as a main resource provided by libraries stood out, as did the educational and lifelong learning roles of public libraries. The discussion also addressed the community role of the library in providing spaces, clubs, societies and support for the community. This includes skills and IT training provision as well as access to job search and job club initiatives. Participants considered the value that professional library staff add to the library experience and individuals' use of the library, but there was also a lot of dissatisfaction at the professional level and knowledge of the library staff. They concluded that through cuts to library provision and the reliance on volunteers, the level of customer service and breadth of support available has diminished in recent years.

There was dissatisfaction with how library services are being run through the local authority with participants complaining about how services are being cut, and where opportunities are available for joining up locally provided services (e.g. museums and galleries with libraries) they are not being exploited. Often, during the discussion, direct comparisons were made with similar library provision available at libraries in neighbouring local authorities (South Tyneside, North Tyneside and Gateshead)

#### 4.3.4 Focus group two – Newcastle City Library, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016

The original four participants were able to attend the second focus group, convened eleven months after the first meeting. Reflections were generally positive and focused on the social functions of the library service including an

acknowledgement and celebration of the number of groups and classes that the library provides access to and the subsequent inclusion and socialisation which is achieved. The group members had all come to appreciate the social groups (e.g. such as reading groups and knitting groups) and all were positive about how being part of such groups helped them to feel included in the community. The participants had much in common, and the familiar dynamic of this second focus group allowed all the participants to comfortably exchange their experiences of marginalisation, isolation and loneliness and how the library had helped them to overcome this.

There was also still lots of discussion about the book stock, which was largely negative. All participants shared a belief that where the library was succeeding in its social mission, it was at the expense of having a quality selection of printed books and felt that the opportunities to browse, discover and learn were diminishing.

Following on from the first focus group, the topic of the staff support re-emerged and the participants, again, were quite vocal about the inadequacy and inconsistency of the customer service and transactional activity of the library staff. The group was critical of the behaviours, attitudes and values of some of the staff and also felt that the library had fallen victim to a lack of visibility and marketing within the community.

#### 4.3.5 Focus group three - Newcastle City Library, December 12th, 2017

Three of the original four participants attended the third and final focus group, the themes of which were around generation and exchange of capital, citizenship and the Information Society. On this occasion there was an even greater tension between the library increasing the number of non-traditional services (e.g. hosting the Citizens Advice Bureau, Providing IT and IT Support, Employability advice and job clubs) and what the participants saw as the library's primary function, the provision of printed books. The participants compared the services and provision of print that they received from Newcastle Libraries, with what they saw as superior services and provision at the neighbouring library authorities of North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Gateshead.

Of all the focus groups, this one struggled with the concepts of citizenship the most and could not really see how the library, and its acknowledged provision of increased community-oriented services, had helped them as individuals in developing their citizenship.

#### 4.4 Edinburgh

##### 4.4.1 Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Ethnicity	Nationality	Attended
Participant 13	65 – 74	F	Retired	White	American	1, 2
Participant 14	65 – 74	F	Retired	White	British	1,
Participant 15	65 – 74	F	Retired	White	British	1, 2
Participant 16	55 – 64	F	Retired	White	British	1, 2
Participant 17	65 – 74	F	Retired	White	British	1, 2, 3
Participant 18	65 – 74	M	Retired	White	British	1, 2, 3
Participant 19	75 – 84	F	Retired	White	British	1
Participant 20	55 – 64	M	Librarian	White	Irish	1
Participant 21	65 – 74	M	Retired	White	British	1, 2, 3
Participant 22	45 – 54	F	Unemployed / volunteer	White	British	1, 2, 3

Table 15: Participants of the Edinburgh focus group

4.4.2 Edinburgh governance and demographic information<sup>6</sup>:

<b>Type of governance</b>	Unitary local government area
<b>Governing body / Local authority</b>	City of Edinburgh Council
<b>Population (2018)</b>	518,500 (local authority area)
<b>Population by gender</b>	Female (51.3 %), Male (48.7 %)
<b>Employment / Unemployment</b>	In employment (77%), Unemployed (3.8%)
<b>Age profile<sup>7</sup></b>	0 - 16 (18.2%), 16 – 44 (46.5%), 45 – 64 (23.3%), > 64 (12%)
<b>Ethnic profile (2011 census)<sup>8</sup></b>	White British (81.9%), White other (9.7%), Asian (5.5%), Black (1.1%), Mixed race (0.8%), Other (0.8%)

Table 16: Edinburgh governance and demographic information

The city of Edinburgh is a unitary council area and the council is responsible for the city’s public library service. At the centre of the service is Edinburgh Central Library, which is complemented through the twenty-six branch libraries around the city.

4.4.3 Focus Group One – Edinburgh Central Library, November 5th, 2015

The Edinburgh focus group had the highest attendance of all the phase one focus groups. Of the ten participants only one was in full time employment, one unemployed, and eight were retired, therefore the age ranges represented are limited. Whilst all users made use of Edinburgh Central Library, many were habitual users of their branch libraries with Currie, Balerno, Fountainbridge, McDonald Road, Newington, Oxgangs, Colinton, Portobello and Leith all referred to during the course of the focus group. The participants were asked the same questions as had been used in the preceding focus groups.

<sup>6</sup> Statistical information from nomis official labour market statistics  
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157416/report.aspx>

<sup>7</sup>[http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20247/edinburgh\\_by\\_numbers/1393/locality\\_and\\_ward\\_data\\_profiles](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20247/edinburgh_by_numbers/1393/locality_and_ward_data_profiles)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/2938/census\\_2011\\_-\\_ethnicity\\_and\\_related\\_themes\\_-\\_topic\\_report\\_for\\_edinburgh](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/2938/census_2011_-_ethnicity_and_related_themes_-_topic_report_for_edinburgh)

In general, all participants were positive about their library services, with very few criticisms surfacing throughout the discussion. The participants came across as being grateful for their thriving library service and all found it to be of great benefit to them. Words such as 'welcoming', 'relaxing', 'warm', 'buzzy', 'privileged' and 'included' were all suggested when asked how libraries made them feel.

The Edinburgh participants appeared to be more engaged in the digital resources available to them than their Liverpool and Newcastle counterparts and some of the Edinburgh focus group attendees proactively use the IT and computers made available to them through their libraries. The library staff were seen as very important to the library's provision and there was a strong respect for the work and support that they provide.

#### 4.4.4 Focus group two - Edinburgh Central Library, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Seven of the original ten focus group participants were able to attend the second focus group. This focused on learning and development, and on community and participation. The members of the group had much in common, in that they were all either retired or not currently in employment, and therefore able to spend lots of time in the library. Edinburgh Libraries is one of the few case study authorities that had not been subject to any spending cuts at the time of conducting the research. Alongside the ease with which the group were able to discuss issues, this factor could possibly have contributed to the particularly positive experiences of libraries which the group shared. All participants praised the library staff that they had encountered and could see a correlation between the help and support they received in accessing and retrieving information and the learning and self-development that they attested to it.

Several anecdotes were shared about community engagement and participation and the role that the library had played in these activities and developments. The group also seemed to be quite politically proactive and attributed this to their public library use. This included having access to MPs and MSPs surgeries', accessing council minutes, involvement in civic planning consultations and using library facilities and resources to write letters about political issues to newspapers.

#### 4.4.5 Focus group three - Edinburgh Central Library, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017

The final focus group attracted four of the original ten participants, and again, due to the repeat nature of the meeting the participants quickly felt at ease in sharing their discussions with each other and the facilitator. They all easily grasped the notions of social, human and knowledge capital and were able to relate this to their own library usage experiences.

The members of the group were able to comprehend the concept of the Information Society and saw the library as having a fundamental role in the provision of both print and digital information. All participants understood how their learning and development and increased knowledge, through library use was having an impact on society. As avid library users, they could all relate to building relationships and social capital through their public library experiences and acknowledged that this in turn helped them to discuss and debate (with like minds) and that this helps to inform personal opinions and points of view.

## 4.5 Essex (Chelmsford)

### 4.5.1 Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Ethnicity	Nationality	Attended
Participant 23	65 - 74	M	Retired	White	British	1, 2, 3
Participant 24	45 - 54	F	Manager	Afro-Caribbean	British	1, 2, 3

Table 17: Participants of the Essex (Chelmsford) focus group

### 4.5.2 Essex governance and demographic information<sup>9</sup>:

<b>Type of governance</b>	Non metropolitan county
<b>Governing body / Local authority</b>	Essex County Council
<b>Population (2018)</b>	1,477,800
<b>Population by gender</b>	Female (51.2 %), Male (48.8 %)
<b>Employment / Unemployment</b>	In employment (78.6%), Unemployed (3.1%)
<b>Age profile</b>	0 - 19 (24.7%), 20 – 44 (31.1%), 45 – 64 (27.2%), > 64 (17%)
<b>Ethnic profile</b>	White British (90.8%), White other (3.5%), Asian (2.5%), Black (1.3%), Mixed race (1.5%), Other (0.4%)

Table 18: Essex governance and demographic information

Essex is a county council local authority, which is responsible for library services across the county, with the exception of its two unitary authorities, Southend and Thurrock, which run separate library services. Essex Libraries has seventy-four individual branch libraries across the county and an additional seven community run libraries, as well as mobile library provision. The library which Essex County library authority made available for the research is Chelmsford Central Library, in

<sup>9</sup> Statistical information from nomis official labour market statistics  
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1941962833/report.aspx>

the county's administrative capital. Chelmsford itself is a city located within the London commuter belt and has a population of 111,000 (2011 census).

#### 4.5.3 Focus group one - Chelmsford Central Library, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Whilst print books and monographs were seen as important, it was the themes of citizenship and community inclusion which dominated this particular focus group. Concepts of 'libraries for all', community cohesion, access to resources, facilities, expertise and integration within society came out very strongly. Due to the small number of the group (i.e. two), the discussion became deeper, more quickly than in the other focus groups. This allowed the participants to discuss their own experiences of feeling included in society and community events and activities through engaging with their public library. Similarly, they were able to discuss, and provide anecdotes of, what it means to be a citizen and to spend some time reflecting upon how the library enables this.

The knowledge theme was covered from a more philosophical standpoint with discussions about British literary culture as being at the heart of the need and demand for the printed word. The Chelmsford participants were far more trusting and supportive of digital information and resources and fully accepted that expert library staff had a vital role to play in enabling access and providing support for digital skills development.

#### 4.5.4 Focus group two - Chelmsford Central Library, October 1st, 2016

The second meeting of the two participants and facilitator provoked a further deep and rich discussion, accentuated by the small number of participants and the ease with which they 'picked up where they had left off'. As with all the other round two focus groups, the focus was on individual and community development and learning and the conversation revealed lots of satisfaction with services and individual experience of social interactions leading to development and socialisation. The participants again acknowledged the role of the library in providing digital information and saw this as a natural extension of the epistemic and knowledge function.

Participants discussed how the library helps to socialise many marginalised people through its social and inclusion missions. It was noted that this is a significant shift

in how libraries operate and there was some cynicism about how sometimes social inclusion issues, such as homelessness and mental health, are being side lined through libraries addressing them, rather than councils resourcing more significant interventions.

#### 4.5.5 Focus group three - Chelmsford Central Library, January 17th, 2018

The third focus group discussion proved to be equally as informative as the previous two and revealed a sense of the central library representing a microcosm of Chelmsford life. Participants concluded that the cultural diversity in libraries allowed for a genuine exchange and understanding of cultural capital. They were comfortable talking about social capital exchange and understanding and seeing that libraries are a useful platform for social capital to be generated and exchanged. Several anecdotes and examples were shared and there was an agreement that as inclusive spaces, libraries provided a safe space to interact with all members of society and the community (e.g. age, gender, race, ethnicity, social class, etc.)

## 4.6 Lincolnshire (Lincoln)

### 4.6.1 Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Ethnicity	Nationality	Attended
Participant 25	25 - 34	F	Therapist	White	British	1,2,3
Participant 26	55 - 64	F	Social worker	White	British	1,3
Participant 27	35 - 44	F	Teacher	White	Polish	1,2
Participant 28	45 - 54	F	Community worker	Asian	British	1,2

Table 19: Participants of the Lincolnshire (Lincoln) focus group

### 4.6.2 Lincolnshire governance and demographic information<sup>10</sup>:

<b>Type of governance</b>	Non metropolitan county
<b>Governing body</b>	Lincolnshire County Council
<b>Population (2018)</b>	755,800
<b>Population by gender</b>	Female (51.1 %), Male (48.9 %)
<b>Employment / Unemployment</b>	In employment (76.1%), Unemployed (4%)
<b>Age profile</b>	0 - 19 (22%), 20 – 44 (29.3%), 45 – 64 (28%), > 64 (20.7%)
<b>Ethnic profile</b>	White British (93%), White other (4.6%), Asian (1%), Black (0.4%), Mixed race (0.9%), Other (0.1%)

Table 20: Lincolnshire governance and demographic information

Lincolnshire County Council is responsible for all council provision and services, including libraries, across seven of the nine districts which make up the county of Lincolnshire. The county has two unitary authorities, North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire, which take responsibility for their own library services.

Lincolnshire Libraries has forty-nine individual branch libraries as well as mobile library provision. The focus group took place in Lincoln Central Library, which is

<sup>10</sup> Statistical information from nomis official labour market statistics  
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1941962809/report.aspx>

centrally located in the city of Lincoln. Lincoln is a cathedral city and is the county town of Lincolnshire with a population of 94,600 (2011 census).

#### 4.6.3 Focus group one - Lincoln Central Library, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Four female participants attended the focus group, representing a range of ages, nationalities and ethnicities. Lincolnshire Libraries have been one of the more high-profile library authorities under public scrutiny for having to close library branches and decrease staff hours. These public cuts had seriously affected the provision of library services. This came through strongly in the focus group discussion in that this was the most negative phase one discussion.

The Lincoln participants focused more on the role and mission of the library within its community than the other focus groups and the participants were much less vocal about the need for books and print monographs as the main vehicle for knowledge and information to flow. Community cohesion, integration of immigrant communities and equal access to facilities and support came through strongly. The greatest frustrations aired by the participants were around the perceived lack of direction and focus from the library authority itself. There was a feeling that the local authority is not meeting the demands and expectations of its library users.

The discussion provided the first mention of libraries being owned by the communities that use them, and how responsive library services allow for greater civic participation.

#### 4.6.4 Focus group two - Lincoln Central Library, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016

The second Lincoln Focus Group was very relaxed and the three participants in attendance were at ease with the continuing discussions. The education and development themes were the main focus and participants were a lot more positive about this than they had been ten months earlier. The two main discussion points were around the role of the library in the educational development of children and the community cohesion mission of public library services. The participants provided several useful examples of community engagement and how inclusion and community cohesion is achieved through the culturally diverse groups which use the library for meetings and activities. The main concern from the group was that it

is external and volunteer groups who are proactively delivering these rather than the library authority itself.

#### 4.6.5 Focus group three – Lincoln Central Library, December 16th, 2017

The third Lincoln Focus Group attracted two of the original four participants. The underlying issues of the management and leadership of Lincolnshire Libraries still prevailed in the discussion. The participants were comfortable discussing the generation and exchange of social, human and knowledge capital and saw how this is achieved through public library use. There were some useful anecdotes, including one about library-generated social capital leading one of the participants to become involved in local politics and how many of the community groups which meet at Lincoln Central Library enable this kind of participation.

However, as with the previous two focus group discussions, there was a lot of criticism of the running of library services and in the lack of engagement, knowledge and expertise that the library staff demonstrated. It was felt that they no longer had the skills (nor inclination, values or drive) to offer the services that need to be delivered. As a result, the participants no longer had confidence in their library services, nor in the value that staff could add to the library experience through the exchange of human and transactional capital.

## 4.7 London Borough of Redbridge

### 4.7.1 Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Ethnicity	Nationality	Attended
Participant 29	16-24	M	Student	Asian	British	1,2,3
Participant 30	16-24	F	Student	Afro-Caribbean	British	1,2,3
Participant 31	16 - 24	F	Student	Asian	British	1,
Participant 32	35 - 44	F	Home volunteer	Afro-Caribbean	Zimbabwean	1,3
Participant 33	65 - 74	M	Retired	Asian	British	1
Participant 34	16 - 24	M	Student	Asian	British	1
Participant 35	16 - 24	M	Student	Asian	British	1,2
Participant 36	45 - 54	F	Technician	Asian	British	1,3
Participant 37	16 - 24	F	Student	Asian	British	1,3

Table 21: Participants of the London Borough of Redbridge focus group

4.7.2 Redbridge governance and demographic information<sup>11</sup>:

<b>Type of governance</b>	London Borough Council
<b>Governing body</b>	Redbridge London Borough Council
<b>Population (2018)</b>	303,900
<b>Population by gender</b>	Female (49.5 %), Male (50.5 %)
<b>Employment / Unemployment</b>	In employment (68.7%), Unemployed (5.4%)
<b>Age profile</b>	0 - 19 (27.6%), 20 – 44 (38.3%), 45 – 64 (22.1%), > 64 (12%)
<b>Ethnic profile</b>	White British (34.5%), White other (8.1%), Asian (41.8%), Black (8.9%), Mixed race (4.1%), Other (2.7%)

Table 22: Redbridge governance and demographic information

Redbridge is a London Borough Council in East London, one of 32 London Boroughs. Its administrative centre is the town of Ilford. This is home to Redbridge Central Library, where the focus group took place. Ilford itself has a population of 168, 168 (2011 census) although the participants for the focus group came from the neighbouring areas within Redbridge Borough, as well as from Ilford. Redbridge Libraries has thirteen branches in total.

4.7.3 Focus group one - Redbridge Central Library, March, 16th, 2016

Nine people attended the initial focus group and were all of black or Asian ethnicity. Most had been recruited from a ‘Youth Parliament’ initiative, hosted by Redbridge Borough Council which is co-facilitated by the library. This initiative encourages school and sixth form students within Redbridge to engage and participate in local politics and events, and subsequently, seven of the participants were school and sixth form pupils. This meant that young people were particularly well represented in the focus group. Using the same question structure the themes of knowledge, access and inclusion were all addressed.

<sup>11</sup> Statistical information from nomis official labour market statistics  
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157275/report.aspx>

The theme of inclusion generated the most discussion and a sub-theme emerged around the library helping to facilitate diversity and cultural awareness through bringing people together and facilitating groups and activities. Participants agreed that whilst this is a strength, they would still like to see the library do more for the diversity and inclusion agenda in Redbridge.

The discussion was predominantly positive with lots of respect and gratitude for a thorough, inclusive, accessible and responsive library service. Mild frustrations were aired around the library not reaching out enough. This was in response to participants knowing people who would benefit from actively engaging in their public library but were not fully aware of the service.

#### 4.7.4 Focus group two - Redbridge Central Library, November 23rd, 2016

The second focus group attracted three of the original nine attendees, allowing for a more concentrated and focused discussion with all three having an equal voice. The learning and development theme quickly brought the discussion around to the library positively promoting and encouraging community activity and cohesion. There was an acknowledgement that events such as the Youth Parliament, public council budget meetings, vlogging workshops, etc. were all facilitated by the library in order to bring the community together.

Redbridge Central Library is in an inner city area of London, with higher than average social deprivation. Subsequently there was a sense of appreciation of having such a public space available in which individuals can safely engage with each other and with their communities. There was a similar acknowledgement and praise for the knowledge and learning function, fulfilled by the library. Participants all shared stories of how they had been advantaged through learning skills and being introduced to new interests and activities through the library.

#### 4.7.5 Focus group three - Redbridge Central Library, December 7th, 2017

The number of participants increased for the third focus group, with five of the original participants available. A very friendly dynamic was quickly established, and as with previous experiences the participants were all comfortable with each other through the familiarity of the setting. This allowed for sophisticated discussion around social, human and knowledge capital and the role that the library plays in

their generation and exchange. The youthful nature of the participants meant that there was a focus on some of the youth events that the library and the council facilitate, such as: youth debates; work experience hubs; 'This is Redbridge' Day; Youth Parliament. Participants discussed how these activities and events are essential for generating social and knowledge capital. In enabling such activity, the library is delivering both its educational and social cohesion missions.

## 4.8 London Borough of Sutton

### 4.8.1 Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Ethnicity	Nationality	Attended
Participant 38	65 - 74	F	Retired	White	British	1, 3
Participant 39	16 - 24	F	Student	White	British	1, 2
Participant 40	45 - 54	M	Property Manager	Afro-Caribbean	British	1
Participant 41	45 - 54	M	Civil Servant	White	British	1, 2, 3
Participant 42	35 - 44	M	Unemployed	Afro-Caribbean	British	1, 3
Participant 43	35 - 44	F	Accountant	Asian	British	1, 2, 3
Participant 44	65 - 74	F	Retired	White	British	1, 2, 3
Participant 45	65 - 74	M	Retired	White	British	1
Participant 46	55 - 64	F	Secretary	White	British	1, 2, 3

Table 23: Participants of the London Borough of Sutton focus group

4.8.2 Sutton governance and demographic information<sup>12</sup>:

<b>Type of governance</b>	London Borough Council
<b>Governing body</b>	Sutton London Borough Council
<b>Population (2018)</b>	204,500
<b>Population by gender</b>	Female (50.2 %), Male (48.8 %)
<b>Employment / Unemployment</b>	In employment (79%), Unemployed (4.7%)
<b>Age profile</b>	0 - 19 (24.6%), 20 – 44 (35.3%), 45 – 64 (25.5%), > 64 (14.6%)
<b>Ethnic profile</b>	White British (71.8%), White other (7.5%), Asian (11.3%), Black (4.5%), Mixed race (3.6%), Other (1.3%)

*Table 24: Sutton governance and demographic information*

The London Borough of Sutton is located in the south-west of the metropolitan London area. Sutton Libraries comprises of eight individual branches and the focus group took place in Sutton Central Library, which is located in the borough's administrative centre, the town of Sutton. The population of the town of Sutton is 41,483 (2011 census)

## 4.8.3 Focus group one - Sutton Central Library, March 19th, 2016

There were nine participants representing a mix of age ranges and ethnic groups at the first focus Sutton group and they were overall very appreciative of and grateful for their library services spoke very positively about what was available to them. The theme of inclusion dominated the discussion as well as the blend and range of spaces which are available for users and several of the Sutton libraries were used as example. Some of the Sutton libraries are co-located with other local services, such as the local Further Education College, youth centres, community hubs, etc. and this is seen as a very positive thing for generating and promoting usage. The range, extent and availability of print books and monographs was not really discussed at any length, which was a contrast to all the other seven focus groups.

<sup>12</sup> Statistical information from nomis official labour market statistics  
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157277/report.aspx>

#### 4.8.4 Focus group two - Sutton Central Library, November 19th, 2016

Five of the original nine attendees were at the second focus group. The participants were very quickly and easily engaged in conversations about how libraries had helped them to learn and develop. This manifested itself through an acknowledgement of a continual offer of lifelong learning through libraries and a rich variety of opportunities to learn and engage in new skills and activities. This led to discussion around the range of the various activities and groups available through Sutton Libraries, and around socialisation and the library taking a proactive role in community development.

There was some mild concern about the library staff appearing to be ill-equipped to support all services and facilities offered through the library and a feeling therefore that the human interactions and transactions could be improved. The group put this down to the wealth of services and activities ever increasing (particularly digital) and staff not being managed in a way that they remain competent and confident in delivering the full library offer.

#### 4.8.5 Focus group three - Sutton Central Library, November 11th, 2017

The third focus group saw six of the original nine participants in attendance and the framework of social and knowledge capital was used to generate discussion around how the library resources (both print and digital) were easily accessible. A combination of these alongside access to staff allows for knowledge to be generated and debate and discussion to be informed. There was further acknowledgment of the huge social role that the library plays in bringing people together and providing space in which a diverse mix of people can work together.

Comments were made about how through co-locating library services with other 'social' settings (e.g. leisure centres, Sutton College, etc.) there is even more likelihood of social interactions taking place.

## 4.9 Devon (Tiverton)

### 4.9.1 Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Ethnicity	Nationality	Attended
Participant 47	65 - 74	F	Retired	White	British	1
Participant 48	55 - 64	F	Retired	White	British	1, 3
Participant 49	65 - 74	M	Retired	White	British	1, 2
Participant 50	55 - 64	M	Unemployed	White	British	1, 2
Participant 51	65 - 74	F	Retired	White	British	1, 2, 3
Participant 52	55 - 64	F	Health care worker	White	British	1
Participant 53	65 - 74	F	Retired	White	British	1, 2

Table 25: Participants of the Devon (Tiverton) focus group

### 4.9.2 Devon governance and demographic information<sup>13</sup>:

<b>Type of governance</b>	Non metropolitan county
<b>Governing body / Local authority</b>	Devon County Council
<b>Population (2018)</b>	795,300
<b>Population by gender</b>	Female (51.3 %), Male (48.7 %)
<b>Employment / Unemployment</b>	In employment (80.2%), Unemployed (2.5%)
<b>Age profile</b>	0 - 19 (21.4%), 20 – 44 (27.7%), 45 – 64 (28.4%), > 64 (22.5%)
<b>Ethnic profile</b>	White British (94.9%), White other (2.6%), Asian (1.2%), Black (0.2%), Mixed race (0.9%), Other (0.2%)

Table 26: Devon governance and demographic information

<sup>13</sup> Statistical information from nomis official labour market statistics  
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1941962901/report.aspx>

Devon is a county council local authority, responsible for library services across the county, including the city of Exeter. Devon also includes two unitary authorities, Plymouth and Torbay, which run separate library services. Devon Libraries comprises of fifty-two individual branches and is complemented with an extensive mobile service. The library made available for the research project is Tiverton Library and Learning Resource Centre. Tiverton is a small dormitory, commuter town in the Mid-Devon district of Devon county, with a population of 21,335 (2011 census). The operational management of Devon Libraries was outsourced to a 'Libraries Unlimited' during the period of the research, although this did not affect gaining access to Tiverton Library.

#### 4.9.3 Focus group one - Tiverton Library and Learning Resource Centre, November 23rd, 2015

The seven participants in this focus group were predominantly retired and were all white British in ethnicity and nationality. The age range can perhaps be accounted for by the dormitory nature of the town as an attractive retirement setting. The remoteness and isolation of the town presented a different environment from the other focus groups, in that the library users appeared to be more reliant on their library services for general communications and community activity. The library is located in the town centre, in a modern civic building, shared with the council offices and council service point and is adjacent to the town's bus station, which is the only public transport link into the town.

Another reason for the homogenous make-up of the Devon focus group might be accounted for in that participants all came from a 'Friends of Tiverton Library Group' a group of retired library users who took some ownership and responsibility, under the leadership of the branch librarian, for events and activities which take place in the library. The Tiverton participants were all strong advocates of physical media and in particular printed books and monographs, although this also extended to CDs and DVDs and there was a strong browsing and borrowing culture amongst the participants. The focus group was very positive, with attendees discussing how inclusive the library is and how they all feel that communications with library is good. Compared with the other focus groups, there was less focus on the need for

different types of library space at Tiverton, with all participants suggesting that they were very content with the facilities that they have available and welcome the use of their [very small] public library by all members of the community, particularly young people and children. However, there was also an acceptance that the library was very much underused by teenagers and young adults.

#### 4.9.4 Focus group two- Tiverton Library and Learning Resource Centre, September 24th, 2016

Four of the original participants were able to attend the second focus group. In discussing how the library had enabled individual and community development, the sense of community engagement came through strongly. Library based events and clubs are well attended and the library also plays a proactive role in hosting and facilitating a job search club, which one of the participants was very much involved in.

The role that the library plays in a small town community where many residents know each other also stood out and there was a real feeling of the library being at the 'heart of the community' Participants described the library as a 'gateway to communication and discovery' in describing how library usage enabled learning both in adults and in young people and children. There was very positive support for the library staff and their professional and social engagement in enabling and facilitating a range of activities and learning opportunities.

This second focus group was partially dominated by some strong characters within the group of four. This had been less apparent during the first focus group as their voices had been diluted within the larger group. Neither of these personalities were at the final focus group, which allowed for a further interesting discussion.

#### 4.9.5 Focus group three - Tiverton Library and Learning Resource Centre, December 12th, 2017

Only two of the original participants were able to attend the final focus group, and only one of them had been in attendance at all three groups. This allowed for quite a different discussion from the first and second focus groups and a different focus emerged as a result of the different experiences of the remaining two participants. Social capital was seen as a very worthwhile and valuable output of public library

use and the participants reflected on the personal socialisation benefits they had experienced as a result of being part of Friends of the Library and other library facilitated groups. The discussion was very reflective and both participants agreed that their continuous and lifelong library usage means that they have been surrounded by lots of friendly and welcoming support, both from library staff and from their peers, and that unknowingly social and transactional capital are being generated and exchanged in the library all the time.

#### 4.10 Conclusion

The detail presented in this chapter has provided a contextual overview of the twenty-four focus group meetings that generated data for analysis. These are summarised in table 9 below. In the three chapters that follow, the findings generated from the analysis of data gathered at the focus groups are presented.

## 5. Research question 1: to what extent are individuals advantaged through using public libraries?

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the research field work in relation to research question 1 (RQ1): to what extent are individuals advantaged through using public libraries? Each of the 3 longitudinal phases is presented and a synthesis of discussions from the 8 focus groups is provided in order to present the findings. This is sub-divided into 4 sections: learning and development; resources and services; support; capital. (This overall approach is repeated in chapters 6 and 7 in respect of research questions 2 and 3)

In order to answer RQ1, it was necessary to ask library users about their personal use of libraries, and to self-reflect on this topic in all three focus group phases. Whilst the major theme of each focus group phase differed (e.g.: phase 1 - feelings and attitudes; phase 2 – knowledge acquisition and skills development; phase 3 – capital and Information Society,) questions were included in all three on individual participants' usage of their library services and subsequent advantages gained. By definition an advantage is 'a condition giving a greater chance of success' (Cambridge University Press, 2020). In this respect, the research question seeks to find out whether individuals feel that they have a greater chance of success or achievement, as a consequence of using public libraries.

### 5.2 Phase 1 focus groups (2014-15): RQ1

The discussions in phase 1 focused on attitudes and feelings towards public libraries. In engaging in such conversation the participants shared many anecdotes about their discovery of public libraries and their lifelong use of public libraries. The question about 'What would happen if there were no libraries?' was also asked in order to provoke discussion. Through these initial questions, participants were able to consider what public libraries mean to them. They reminisced with fondness and emotion about their own library usage. As a result, discussion was framed very positively throughout.

### 5.2.1 Learning and development

Throughout the phase 1 focus groups *all* participants explained that libraries afford access to knowledge and information and have a significant impact on knowledge acquisition, particularly in respect of education and development. There was general agreement that the primary functions of the public library service relate to its epistemic role. The part that the public library plays in the generation and exchange of knowledge and information, and the link between knowledge and power, surfaced quickly, as illustrated by a comment from the initial pilot Liverpool focus group:

“...handling all those really old manuscripts and books... It’s knowledge, just a body of knowledge. The library is a temple of knowledge... and knowledge is power, I believe. Knowledge is power!” (P2)

Initial discussions focused on the access that individuals have to knowledge and information within an educational context. Participants shared stories about the support that libraries had provided during their education and development at various stages of their lives, and in many cases at formative stages as children. For them to be educated is an advantage in life and for many, the library was held up as significantly enabling this.

Participants in some of the focus groups (Liverpool, Edinburgh, Tiverton, Sutton, Lincoln) reminisced about their introduction to libraries as children, discovery of books and the joy of reading. Such stories were subjective, appeared to be exaggerated and recurred in subsequent focus groups. ‘Discovery’, ‘Losing oneself in a story’ and ‘love of reading’ are all expressions that occurred several times throughout the focus groups. The participants spoke a lot about their access to fiction and non-fiction, and saw the knowledge transfer through the reading of these resources inside and outside of the space that the library provides as an essential function of the library.

For example, participant 4 from the Liverpool focus group contributed:

“When I come in, I have a dead positive vibe.... When I walk through the door straight away, ‘cos I know that I only need to spend fifteen minutes in here and I’ll have lost myself in a book!” (P4)

This illustrates the passion with which participants spoke about the library with reference to having access to books and reading for acquiring knowledge. Other functions of the library were identified as being essential (such as access to different spaces and the role of library staff), but the provision of knowledge through reading surfaced as a primary function. For example, participant 24 suggested:

“I use the library for all sorts of different things... I use it for accessing computers, to be in a quiet space.... I’m a voracious reader so I’m taking out lots of books, and books that are sometimes very obscure.... So I love the fact that it’s a place where I can be informed and get knowledge very easily.” (P24)

In the Liverpool, Edinburgh, Lincoln, Tiverton and Sutton focus groups, book groups and reading groups were also often referenced as vehicles for encouraging library users to read and discuss literature. Such groups are often facilitated through libraries and library staff. Whilst this starts to blur into the social function of libraries, several participants see it as important that the library is the place to convene such groups, as part of its responsibility to encourage reading.

All participants acknowledged the educational role of libraries and participants discussed how library resources and spaces allow for learning to take place. The knowledge and information available in libraries make them ideal learning spaces and many participants referred to accessing computers and Wifi, as well as books as integral to their study behaviours.

In Newcastle, participant 12 illustrated how, as a home educator, the public library resources were essential for her daughter’s learning and development and for following the national curriculum:

“The librarians run after school clubs, such as grid clubs and computer clubs. These are supported and the staff often stay behind after they’ve finished. This access to learning is so important for me and my daughter. We really value it.” (P12)

Narrative around the library facilitating learning for all was common throughout the focus groups, but in Newcastle, Redbridge and Sutton, in particular, there was also a positive acknowledgement of other ways in which their public libraries contribute to learning and development, for example:

“At the Life Centre [library] they’ve got a place where you can go and they teach you about things like cyber bullying and stuff..... and there is a living room space and it shows you how to deal with fires and stuff... and they have a 360 room where they show videos all around you so it looks like you’re in a forest or something and you can learn about it. They’ve even got a rock climbing wall.” (P39)

Learning to read and literacy development were also suggested as being important epistemic functions of the library. This was particularly the case in Lincoln, where participant 25 talked about how library use develops her daughter’s reading skills:

“For me it has helped me explore my child’s interests in a more structured and creative way. She’s not been limited to the books that I have bought for her. She’s been able to choose all the books that I wouldn’t have wanted her to read because they involve silly things, or illustrations that I don’t like. But it has provided an opportunity to develop my child’s interests and literacy beyond what I could have done myself.” (P25)

The same participant went on to talk about the literacy function of the public library and explained that it should go beyond being able to read, expanding children’s minds and understanding of the world in which they live:

“I remember as young child, my mother reading me a story about a gypsy. It was a very sensitive story about the discrimination she faced at school as a child and I had no knowledge of this situation, nor had ever met such

people. And then a Romany child joined our class and I was the only person who would talk to him. It is this aspect of emotional intelligence that is beyond information and facts. Reading and developing literacy in children opens that up. If you can't describe how you feel, can you actually feel it?" (P25)

Participant 23, also at Lincoln, spoke about the library's role in language learning as one of its epistemic roles in enabling engagement with society:

"I think language is an important thing and this should be addressed through the library. I'm very aware of a lot of people, who are maybe, technically [British] citizens, but because they don't have the language they are not engaged, and maybe have to rely on other family members to be engaged in society." (P23)

This concept was also discussed in the Redbridge focus group, where participant 29 explained that the library had helped his mother to learn English:

"Some people come into the library for speaking classes and things. If their first language isn't English the library actually allows organisations to come in and hold classes. My mum actually took part and they basically talk in English and they have an hour session. They get to develop their skills and she's kind of kept in contact with some of them too." (P29)

### 5.2.2 Services and Resources

When asked 'Who are libraries for?' *all* participants agreed that they are for everyone and identified the diversity of public library users in respect of: ages; backgrounds; social class; ethnicities; nationalities; religions; abilities/disabilities; intellects; political viewpoints; opinions, etc.

The participants explained that bringing together a diversity of community members in public libraries allows for interactions with a mix of people, including other library users, friends, colleagues and library staff. The participants who spoke about meeting and getting to know other public library users and interacting with library staff shared largely positive stories in which they were the beneficiaries of information, friendship, or socialisation.

The public library is seen as a 'leveller', a physical space which welcomes and includes everyone who wishes to use it. This sentiment was strong amongst all the participants, regardless of the demographic balance of the participants. For example, where a focus group's participants were made up exclusively of people within the older age ranges, all white and many retired (such as Edinburgh and Tiverton) they still remarked that the library was a resource for everyone and that everyone should access libraries. Similarly, in Redbridge, where the participants were all black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME), and predominantly in the younger age range, there was similar agreement. Participant 30 commented that the library allows users to engage with a diverse community:

"Without libraries we would not associate with each other. You meet loads of people at libraries. You meet Asian people, you meet black people, you meet white people, loads of people, and at the end of the day it makes us realise that we are a society and it brings us together. Libraries are one of those places that makes you realise that 'Yeah,...we're people!' (P24)

Whilst the feeling that the intention of the physical public library space is to be inclusive, many participants expressed a fixed view as to what the library should physically be like, and those that were of a more "traditional" persuasion still thought that the library should essentially be a quiet place. Where design of buildings or access policies had now brought together noisier activities (e.g. children's activities) into spaces that had previously been regarded as quiet spaces there were some noticeable tensions. Several participants in Liverpool, Newcastle, Tiverton aired frustrations about lack of segregated spaces within their libraries:

"I am slightly irritated I must say. I adore kids, but I don't like to see them racing about the library. But I would never ever want to put them off feeling the library is a fun place, but I would like to see a bit more quiet. I don't know how you do that, because yes you could put them in a separate space and shut the door on them....[but] I would rather have noise coming out of my ears rather than have a [whispers] quiet library." (P47)

There was a general feeling that one of the major changes that public libraries had made over recent years was around their uses of space and how the use and layout of space has helped in making the library more accessible and inclusive, therefore advantaging individuals and groups. As libraries have diversified the facilities and services on offer, an increasing diversity of users have been welcomed into them.

Security and being 'safe' are important to many of the participants. Feelings about the library's role as a safe space were particularly strong in participants from the inner city libraries, particularly Redbridge and Liverpool, and those who were BAME or at the younger or older ends of the age ranges. For example, participant 4, from Liverpool remarked:

"It's somewhere I can go and I know I'm not going to get in trouble. I'm safe!... When you're on the streets no one cares about you. It's like every man for himself. When you come in here you can just communicate with anyone, you can discuss things with people. There's loads of things that you can do." (P4)

Redbridge Central Library, is in the middle of Ilford town centre, an urban inner city London Borough, with high rates of unemployment and above average crime figures. Security and safety to study, learn and use library facilities stood out during the focus group discussion:

"I think of the library as a safe alternative to school. I can come into the library to carry on studying... It makes me feel at ease and less anxious."  
(P29)

The participants identified a variety of reasons for safety being an important contributing factor to creating a physical space, fit for purpose for epistemic and educational functions. In addition, providing a blend or variety of spaces for learning, study and skills acquisition, as well as for interacting with the diverse populations within the library, also allows learning and knowledge exchange to take place effectively.

Discussions around physical resources in all focus groups referred to print resources:

“My favourite thing about the public library is that you can just grab any book that you like and you can just sit as long as you like and read it, and if you really like it you can get another one! Books!” (P33)

Participants were asked to consider their most recent library usage, and browsing, accessing and using books was a shared experience amongst all participants. One of the Tiverton participants suggested:

“The library makes you think. You come in with an idea of what you want and go to the shelves.... And then you browse and you find other things. You end up looking around the shelves and you think to yourself ‘ah I hadn’t thought of that and you start to read new things.” (P49)

Print is highly regarded for its reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness. This judgement applied especially to reference materials, children’s literature, and self-help or instructional books, where a preference for accessing print over digital emerged. Even in the case of straight forward factual material, such as bus timetables or community information, a tendency for trusting print over their electronic counterparts emerged:

“An awful lot of the information that is digital might not be very trustworthy. Whereas if you come to the library I feel that I can get a lot more trustworthy things. There is a lot of very damaging rubbish on the Internet. I trust printed evidence more and find it easier to consult more than one source.” (P47)

Participants occasionally referred to online learning and acquiring knowledge through digital library resources. Whilst participants did not always discern between accessing hardware, software, support and digital resources, there was a consensus that having access to the Internet through desk top computers and through WiFi is beneficial to the learning environment that libraries create. However, there was very mixed experience with regard to the quality, and

therefore value of such services. This is dependent upon the computing resource available at individual libraries, the robustness of the network or WiFi, and whether staff support is available to assist library users in their online learning.

Participants had mixed feelings about the ever evolving range of services and resources available to them in their libraries. For example, in Newcastle participants were more critical of the diversification of the library:

“There’s too much diversity.... Dancing and music are really disturbing in the quiet spaces. There is a place for that, but not in the space that I’m using. They just don’t join together. They just don’t think about what to put in the spaces. I mean, there was Zumba going on in there the other day!” (P9)

The opposite was experienced at Redbridge, where participants liked the variety of activities, clubs and functions which were facilitated through the public library space, particularly in respect of those available for young people.

Participant 30 attributed her vlogging skills to events she had attended at the library:

“...like when I did the Vlogster challenge.... They brought in all these experts to teach us how to do vlogging really well.... And these are like opportunities to know that the library is there, even though there are other places that they could use for that. The library is a great place because everyone knows the library, so yeah, the library is a great place.” (P30)

Five of the Redbridge participants were members of the Redbridge Youth Parliament, an initiative where school age pupils (13 – 18) are encouraged to take part in local politics and events are facilitated by council and library staff accordingly. With this in mind, participant 29 saw a clear correlation between the library facilitating ‘youth parliament’ events and his increased political awareness and subsequent personal development.

“Redbridge council planned it with Redbridge Central Library and then they invited the Youth Parliament to come over and talk about it and see how the budget money is spent. I found it really interesting to see how some areas

get quite a lot of money, whereas some areas were getting next to nothing and were still being cut. I was quite surprised.” (P29)

### 5.2.3 Support

Participants were asked about the role that library staff played in their library experiences. There were several instances of recognising professionalism and that expert staff can help library users make the most of both the print and the online resources available. In these examples, positive language was used about the staff, including expressions such as: ‘always friendly and approachable’; ‘happy to help’; ‘amazing’; ‘available to help with any aspect of the library.’ This suggests that technical and professional support is seen as a key contributing factor to libraries being able to advantage individual library users.

### 5.3 Phase 2 focus groups (2015-2016): RQ1

During the second phase of focus groups, participants were asked to consider their own library usage during the eight to twelve month period between the first and second focus groups (i.e. what have they been using the library for?; had their library usage been beneficial to them?), and to reflect upon their lifelong public library use and whether this has had an impact on their individual, personal, professional and academic learning and development. This line of enquiry was used in order to intentionally enable and encourage further self-reflection on public library use in order to inform research question 1.

As explained in chapter three, one of the features of the longitudinal focus group method is the bringing together of the same people on multiple occasions. During the second phase of focus groups it was noticeable that the participants in each focus group were more comfortable and familiar with the other participants, than they were in phase 1. This led to a greater willingness to share stories and to describe experiences more deeply and in more detail.

#### 5.3.1 Learning and Development

During phase 1, having only just met each other for the first time, the participants were generally measured and thoughtful about their responses and reflected generally about the breadth of learning opportunities that the public library offers them. Whilst participative, they were also somewhat ‘guarded’ in their responses.

In phase 2, participants felt more comfortable with the focus group environment and felt able to 'open up' more. A good example of this was offered by participant 23 from Chelmsford. Now familiar with his focus group colleague, he shared an anecdote about preparing for the sermons that he was involved with as a lay preacher. He had not mentioned this aspect of his life during phase 1.

In phase 1, when participants reflected on whether they had learnt any new skills through their public library use, most would claim that they had not. With the exception of IT skills, where participants might have attended a class or a training sessions, there was no immediate association with skills acquisition through having access to knowledge and information within the library. During phase 2 however, perhaps because the idea of 'learning skills' within the library was not as alien a concept as it had been previously, participants were able to provide examples of a range of topics that they had studied with the support of public library resources: IT skills; computer skills; aromatherapy; cookery; drawing, gardening; learning to play musical instruments; and local history.

Learning and skills acquisition also takes place through specific, facilitated groups or events. For example, participants at Tiverton, Chelmsford, Newcastle and Sutton shared that their understanding of literature had been enhanced through participation in reading groups and that they had learnt about poetry through poetry events. Similarly, in Redbridge, participants spoke enthusiastically about the range of events that the library staff facilitate, and in which learning takes place, such as the Vlogster challenge and Youth Parliament debates.

There was also acknowledgement of unconscious or subconscious learning taking place in libraries. Youth participants in Redbridge were particularly receptive and aware of this. Having reflected on the learning that they had experienced, they concluded that they had acquired interpersonal skills through their use of the library, even though they were unaware at the time. Participant 31 said:

“It’s not just about learning academic skills and video production and vlogging, but about how to talk to people,.... Communication skills,..... how you talk to people and respect people.” (P31)

To which participant 35, added:

“It’s a sociological thing! We’re not learning through a formal curriculum..... it’s more informal..... So things like life skills and learning respect.... Things we use on a day to day basis. It’s not necessarily always the knowledge, but things that you need in day to day life.” (P35)

The participants also spoke about becoming more culturally aware through their library use, or more knowledgeable about aspects of society or history through events, exhibitions and displays. Comments around such non-intended learning and awareness occurred in several focus groups. For example, participant 24 remarked:

“....they’d done this exhibition for the Chinese delegation who had just come over, and I was just standing and watching and there was this woman at the exhibition, who was of Chinese origin, and we started talking. She was just asking me what I am interested in and I said that I was interested in creative things.... And through that she introduced me to the Anglo-Chinese community in Chelmsford and some of the issues they face with our culture and our society.” (P24)

A specific learning and development topic discussed in the Lincoln focus group was literacy and particularly children’s literacy. Lincoln participants expanded upon the literacy function and discussed the library’s role in ensuring a diversity of literature for children. Participant 25 was agitated that the library did not really achieve this and suggested that the library did not have the range of children’s books befitting of 21<sup>st</sup> century community:

“I feel as though the library is not doing its job. The library is supposed to know more than me. I can sit on Amazon and type in my keywords and find things, and get a potential list of books, but when I come into the library I expect the professional staff to be able to help me with this. For example,

teaching children from one parent families... they don't have *My dad's in prison, I don't know who my dad is, I don't know my mum, I know my dad but he's a bit of a waste of space*. They don't have any such titles. We can come in and get hold of a copy of 'Matilda' or pick up the classics, but in terms of resourcing literacy for children and parenting there is just a huge gap. And then when I asked someone, the librarian actually said 'Why would you want that?' (P25)

This particular discussion led onto the subject of dual language books and library support for language learning. It was felt that the library did this in two ways: through providing dual language books and books and newspapers in languages other than English; and, through facilitating language learning through groups and language classes.

Participant 27 from the Lincoln focus group had recently moved her family to the United Kingdom from Poland, and explained:

"The library is the first place I came when I moved here because I needed a lot of help. And also because my children didn't speak English. We just wanted to look for something that would help them." (P27)

Some of the Lincoln participants were themselves involved in facilitating meetings of migrant and ethnic minority women, whose first language is not English, and supporting them socially as well as developing language skills. The library was helping them in this mission through providing dual language books and being responsive through engaging them in stock selection. Participant 28 from Lincoln commented:

"I found out that we can have an impact on the books that are here. We can actually go to them [library staff] and advise or recommend what we want ordered for the library. I have collected different stories from Polish literature and Russian literature and we can get the books that make them available in English, so we are also sharing our culture." (P28)

### 5.3.2 Support

During phase 1, some participants had made mention of the presence and helpfulness of library staff. In phase 2 however, they openly reflected upon the advantages they had experienced through social interaction with people in the library, including library staff. Non-discriminatory access to expert staff continued to be acknowledged as one of the major benefits of public library use. For example, participant 10 from Newcastle highlighted that she developed computer literacy as a public library user:

“I learnt how to use computers in the library. [The library staff] showed me how to get online and how to search. I would never have had access to all of that before” (P10)

Participant 11, (an unemployed female in Newcastle) explained that the public library staff were assisting her job search:

“The staff are great. They will always show you how to do stuff. You don’t need to book on a course to set an email account up for example. They’ll just show you. The Job Centre doesn’t have computers for online job searching now. You can now only access this in the library. So having the staff available to help is so important.” (P11)

### 5.3.3 Capital

The focus of the phase 1 discussions had not allowed the exchange of capital to surface. This changed during phase 2, where participants shared opinions about the advantages afforded through interactions with library staff. They also discussed the importance of social interactions with other library users.

#### *Social capital*

Participant 24, a BAME participant, from Chelmsford shared an anecdote which illustrates how she and her community have benefitted from the cultural diversity afforded through the library. She described that she had met a Chinese-Malay woman in the library whilst she had been looking for information for her charity work. They entered into a conversation about the reasons why individuals get involved in charitable fundraising activities. The Chinese-Malay woman had taken

some convincing, as according to her, Chinese communities do not tend to think of charity as something that helps to develop them. However, some weeks later the two encountered each other again in the library and the Chinese-Malay woman shared with participant 24 how, on the back of their conversation, she had joined a Chinese charity in Chelmsford, the objectives of which were to help members of the local Chinese community who had learning difficulties. Participant 24 exclaimed that through this exchange, she felt that she had not only been able to help advantage the individual, through the discussion but that a wider community (i.e. those with learning difficulties) had also been advantaged through this social exchange. She concluded:

“It’s a great socialising place for everybody, not just people with isolated lives. It is a socialising place. If you want to learn how to deal with different kinds of people come and spend time in the library.” (P24)

#### *Transactional capital*

Social interaction was also mentioned during the Sutton focus group, where one of the younger participants attested that the library staff had recently helped to build her self-confidence and self-esteem:

“I suppose for me, with society and local people and stuff, when I was at school I had a lot of issue mixing and mingling with other people, so the library would be my safe space, my social environment, but somewhere where I didn’t have to talk to people. It was great being able to go somewhere and be with other people without having to socialise. And then I started talking to the library staff and they would have conversations with me as an equal. This made me start to talk to other people who were coming into the library as well, and this has been a really big confidence boost to me. The staff and other library users have given me a lot of support, just by having a chat with me really.” (P39)

A final anecdote to illustrate the potential of transactional capital within the library comes from the Tiverton participant who was actively job searching:

“Because I have had the training and I’m getting better at it, I’m relying less and less on the staff in certain situations. Things like accessing information on the Web and understanding firewalls, setting up channels of information and making me safe online. Initially the staff helped me a lot... they would advise ‘Joe don’t go on that site... you’ll get loads of information that you won’t need.’ And now I can pass on this advice to my friends in the job club. I’ve developed my own self-sufficiency and it’s my turn to pass it on.” (P50)

#### 5.4 Phase 3 focus groups (2016-2017): RQ1

By the third phase of focus groups, returning participants were fully familiar and comfortable with their focus group environment and surroundings. This led to an even greater depth of discussion in phase 3 and meant being able to introduce the concepts of the Information Society and the generation and exchange of intangible capital in libraries. This allowed for different findings to surface under the sub-themes in respect of addressing the advantages afforded to individuals through their library use. In particular participants were asked: to reflect and identify where they felt they had been advantaged through the generation and exchange of social, transactional and human capital; how they had acquired knowledge in the library; and, how the library helps to make sense of and navigate information within an Information Society.

##### 5.4.1 Learning and development

Where participants reflected generally on learning opportunities within the library during phase 1 and were then able to identify specific learning and skills development in phase 2, phase 3 presented the opportunity for this discussion to go even deeper. Participants observed that some of their library based learning interactions had developed them as people and as citizens in a societal context. For example, at Chelmsford, the following comment was made:

“...nowadays you can come in and have lessons and classes in the library. There’s stuff going on upstairs, IT stuff and they’ll have sessions for children... and then there’s the Essex Book Festival, and because I’ve used the libraries for years and over time, I realise that all this has seeped into

me, and I realise that I'm using the skills and knowledge that I have acquired through using the library." (P23)

Similar positive observations about lifelong learning were captured in the Liverpool, Sutton, Tiverton and Chelmsford focus groups. This focus on lifelong learning allowed participants to consider different contributing elements to lifelong learning which subsequently led on to reflection on the generation and exchange of social and transactional capital.

#### 5.4.2 Capital

##### *Social capital*

In the first two focus group phases participants had identified and discussed how the physical library space allows for integration and interaction between different, often diverse groups of people. Participants were invited to consider this further during phase 3. There was consensus that the physical environment of the library enables integration, but the actual transactions and interactions that take place are social. In effect, where groups of people are placed together in a library setting there is a strong possibility that social capital can be generated and exchanged. On a basic level, there was agreement across all the focus groups that the library was a social place and that social interactions are afforded due to the inclusive nature of the spaces. For example, participant 30 one of the younger Redbridge participants remarked:

"I was going to say about socialisation.... If you're not like a social person you might find someone in the library who has the same interests as you. It helps people who don't have much confidence to build their confidence more. You might find someone who likes the same book as you. At the end of the day, you might find a friend." (P30)

The perceived value of the library in facilitating groups and bringing people together, varied between library authorities. Where there was a full awareness of the different types of events, activities and groups, facilitated by the library, there was an appreciation of the power of this. At Chelmsford, participant 24 observed:

“Oh wow. Oh my goodness. There are so many different things. Let’s just take a little snapshot of some of the groups that they have here. There’s book clubs here, a writing club here, a crochet club here, there’s a knit club, games club. Meeting clubs where people come to meet people, be with people, develop their talents and abilities, develop their skills, gain more confidence, so you’re building up people, you’re enabling people, you’re resourcing people, you’re connecting people. All of these things, [Prime Minister] Cameron talks about the Big Society, all of these things that you would hope people gain from just by living in a healthy community, a good functioning library does!” (P24)

Here the participant speaks passionately about the social impact that such groups and activities have on individuals, particularly from a social and social capital perspective. She talks about the library enabling groups and interactions to develop people, therefore advantaging them with regard to skills and confidence.

The participants were asked to consider whether they had been advantaged as a result of meeting people in the library and taking part in discussions or exchanging ideas. Having reflected on their library usage and experiences in this way the participants began to see some of their library interactions, discussions and conversations within a social capital context and started to think about the advantages they have gained from this. Participant 18 from the Edinburgh focus group remarked:

“I find that people talk, even when they're on the computer,.... friends and colleagues will perhaps- just in passing, as they pass you on the computer- will say something. "Hi Joe, how's things?" you know, and you get in a conversation then, and you can talk to them about things. And then you'll get a convert to your point of view, or on opposite views. There's a dialogue so that aspect of it is- and that moves into social counsel as well a little bit.” (P18)

As a political activist, this participant was eager to get into debates and discussions about politics and issues of the day, so the familiar and like-minded audience that

the library allows him to access, advantages him in broadening his networks and providing opportunity for debate and discussion.

The library does not just bring 'like-minds' together. It can enable interactions and exchanges through people from different backgrounds and standings in a more teacher-pupil or mentor-mentee relationship, in which relevant advice, guidance or support is exchanged. Participant 29 from Redbridge (a BAME, inner-city school student) spoke about how he is advantaged in his opportunities to learn from others through interacting with individuals at the youth parliament events:

"I met this person called Nancy and she actually was in the library. She came to one of the hustings and I'm still in contact with her and I find that she's very knowledgeable. So I find that in terms of social capital, I do meet new people and they've been quite helpful in terms of advising me, 'cause she is a lot older than me. She's very knowledgeable of general life and different subjects that she's doing, so she's able to help me. At times I will text her and just ask her for some advice, on like what to do, and so she is quite helpful." (P29)

Participants who were involved in the Redbridge Youth Parliament felt advantaged through making new connections through Youth Parliament itself. Making connections and building networks and social capital was commented on in other focus groups as well. The following reflection incorporates several valid attributes of the social capital exchange afforded in public libraries. Participant 24 described a social exchange, which took place in Chelmsford Central Library, and has since had a lasting effect on her political participation through making a new connection. This incident involved participant 24 reading a copy of the *Guardian* at Chelmsford Central Library when suddenly it was snatched from her (whilst reading) by an older gentleman who proceeded to take the newspaper to the photocopier before returning it to participant 24 with an explanation of simply 'crossword'. Several days later she encountered the man again, although not in the library, and asked him about his behaviour in the library. The conversation developed from there and they realised that they had similar interests and political persuasions. Subsequently, they continued to enjoy discussions, whenever they were in the library. Participant

24 would often be invited to political events and gatherings. This ultimately led to participant 24 getting involved with the political group 'Momentum' and meeting Jeremy Corbyn, at a Labour Party rally in Chelmsford.

### *Knowledge capital*

Most participants regarded their reading and access to the printed word as contributing to their knowledge generation and the library is regarded as an important vehicle for this. They also acknowledged that this is complemented through interactions with people and discussions which also become part of the knowledge generation process, as illustrated by participant 32 from Redbridge:

“[the library] is a tool of knowledge because you have books, you have the internet, books about almost everything, to be honest with you. And it just helps. It helps you from advising to learning new things. I don't think you could ever leave the library without not learning something new or meeting someone new and discussing what you are doing or what you are learning.”  
(P32)

On a more abstract level, participant 24 from Chelmsford, explained that the knowledge she gained through her library use kept her connected:

“I'm connected, connected to individuals but also to the wider world. It's what you get from knowledge.... A sense of connection. I lead a very solitary life in lots of ways so I need to have that sense of connection with others and obviously to the wider world.” (P24)

### *Transactional capital*

In general, participants associated library staff with learning and knowledge exchange and as enablers who advise, support and promote inclusion as part of their work roles. Positive transactions with library staff can be regarded as examples of library users gaining 'transactional capital'. Where the library staff add value to the users' library experiences it was evident that transactional capital was being generated.

Participant 18 from Edinburgh, having already acknowledged the role the staff and the library users play in the generation of knowledge capital, also acknowledged the transactional capital when he remarked:

“Actually the human side of it to me is very important in two ways. One is the librarians themselves because they can help you and point you to resources, and the other is the other library users. You can talk to them to generate ideas.” (P18)

Most of the phase 3 focus groups provided examples of how access to professional and technically expert library staff was beneficial and advantageous to individual library users. Participant 44 from Sutton reflected:

“....Sometimes, when I’m doing academic research and I've reached a point where I've reached a standstill, the interaction with someone else, who's had a broader experience and can direct you then towards other things, which in our digital age, where everything is just through a computer screen, you don't have that understanding yourself. Whereas that is what teaches you how to use people as a resource. As a knowledge resource!” (P44)

### 5.5 Conclusion - Research question 1: to what extent are individuals are advantaged through using public libraries?

The qualitative data addressing research question one has been generated incrementally over the three phases of longitudinal focus groups. A general trend throughout all three phases, was that participants were all comfortable talking about their own personal and individual use of libraries and the impact that this has on them. This was strongest when framed within responses to questions about the learning and development, or the epistemic function of the library. All participants were able to contribute to discussions about this, especially around reading and the provision of and access to printed books during phase 1. This emerged as a comfortable, shared experience which was important in generating discussion during phase 1 when participants met each other for the first time.

The sub-themes of 'learning and development' and 'capital' have received the most attention during this chapter. This is due to participants predominantly associating 'individual advantage' with learning, reading, accessing books and accessing other people in the library.

During phase 1, participants generally reflected on their reading and book borrowing habits and were not inclined to consider other aspects of the library use as being beneficial to them. In the Liverpool, Newcastle and Tiverton focus groups a traditional notion of library emerged, which reinforced the provision of and access to print as being a primary epistemic role of the library. Whilst this was equally as strong in the other focus groups, some were able to recognise other library provision as enabling learning and development (e.g. the overall library environment, facilitated groups and events and staff support).

However, a general conclusion from phase 1, is that the participants largely attributed their learning and development to themselves and regarded the actual physical and abstract library as peripheral to this activity. During these initial discussions many participants assumed a basic level understanding of libraries being essentially 'buildings with books for reading in them'. Subsequently, several participants, particularly those had traditional perceptions of libraries, found it difficult to provide examples of skills that they had acquired through using the library, or even specific things that they had learnt. This rudimentary, surface level understanding of libraries accounts for there being less focus on 'support' in the early phases of the research.

However, this perception shifted during phase 2 when participants were asked to consider their own development between the first two phases and were now more used to reflecting on their use and understanding of libraries. With the focus being on self- development, and with participants being more comfortable with each other, discussions began to include other elements of library provision, namely an increased focus on staff support and how individuals are advantaged through being amongst a diversity of library users. The discussion became less self-focused and there was greater acknowledgement of the community and people involved in the epistemic role of the library.

Through the introduction of concepts of social, human and transactional capital in phase 3, participants across all focus groups were able to reflect even more deeply about their library use and consider the relationships that they have with the physical library and the people they interact with in the library. They had not been able to do this effectively during the first two phases, but the new found level of sophistication in the discussions around the newly introduced concepts meant that different data were generated during phase 3.

The incremental increase in participants' understanding the different component parts comprising the holistic library service stands out in the chronological analysis of the different phases. This is a direct result of the longitudinal method in that it allows experiences to be revisited and expanded upon after periods of reflection and discussion. The method also allowed ideas and concepts to build gradually over the course of the three discussions in each location. For example, participants generally did not reflect very widely during phase 1, and tended to associate the library exclusively with books and information resources. However, by phase 2, having had time to consider their own recent library use and contextualise it within the focus group discussions they were more capable of bringing in other library experiences, such as their use of space and their participation in groups, events and activities.

A final conclusion at this stage, is the degree of consensus across all the focus groups and across all types of library users. There were a range of ethnicities and age ranges represented in the focus groups, as well as some socio-economic differences between the locations visited. However, understanding and experience of library use was largely consistent with agreement being reached about how libraries do advantage individuals through a variety of platforms including: access to resources; inclusive, fit-for-purpose, physical spaces; and the enabling of interpersonal transactions.

It can therefore be concluded that the advantages perceived to be accrued by individuals, through public library use, are largely epistemic and achieved through reading, learning and development activities. Social interaction with other people, including library staff and library users also contribute to the learning that takes

place in the library and the subsequent advantage that individuals experience through this. Associated with this are advantages relating to citizenship. These are explored in the next chapter.

## 6. Research question 2: what is the impact of using a public library service on individual and community citizenship?

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings and analysis of the research field work in relation to research question 2 are presented. The synthesis of the findings is presented using four sub-sections: learning and development; resources and services; support; capital (as is also the case for RQ1 in chapter 5). The nature of research question 2 means that the analysis is presented predominantly under sub-sections 'resources and services' and 'capital'.

Research question 2 enquires: what is the impact of using a public library service on individual and community citizenship? In order to answer this, it was necessary to ask the focus group participants about notions of citizenship and participation. Participants were also invited to reflect upon their experiences of social interactions and interpersonal transactions in the library. It was also necessary that participants considered impact as 'change' to themselves or their communities. The dictionary definition of 'impact' refers to 'a powerful effect that something has on a situation or person' (Cambridge University Press, 2020), and this needed to be explicit in discussions around impact.

### 6.2 Phase 1 focus groups (2014-2015): RQ2

The concept of citizenship was introduced during phase 1, allowing participants to consider the contribution of services and resources provided by libraries, to their own citizenship and participation in society. This allowed for discussions around the library's role in community development and community sustainability. Questions about 'who are libraries for?' and 'what would happen if there were no libraries?' aided this discussion as participants considered library usage beyond their own individual activities.

#### 6.2.1 Learning and development

Participants considered citizenship and community within a learning and development context. For example, the theme of community and political participation emerged, and participants discussed the learning and development

which individuals are afforded through public library and consequent local political participation. One of the Edinburgh participants revealed that he equips himself with information, facts and understanding in order to write political letters:

“The library is a source of information to me to formulate my arguments and opinions to make to my politicians” (P18)

Learning and development through library usage is in itself seen as a means for other types of community participation. For example, one of the Chelmsford participants explained that she uses the library as her base to tutor groups of British-Bangladeshi children and their mothers:

“... they have the aunties and the mothers and they were lovely and very hospitable and they would give me food, but they would never speak English to me, only ever through their children who I was tutoring. Some of them had been in Britain for 20 or 30 years but had never needed to speak English... after a few weeks of getting to know them in the library I said to them ‘How long have you lived here guys.... Here’s a scenario... your husband goes away and one of your children gets sick and you can’t even talk to the doctor at the hospital... I’m disgusted with you.’ Several of them put their heads down in shame and then they asked if I could help them to learn English. I started them off in the library and used the resources there, but I’m no English teacher so after a while, when they were a bit more confident they enrolled at the local college... and now they are fully communicating and I see them and it is wonderful to see them flowering as citizens” (P24)

The same Chelmsford participant also explained that she thinks that having a library system, and the learning gained within, is a fundamental and quintessential part of being a British citizen, and therefore necessary for active citizenship:

“There would be devastation and desolation if we had no libraries. I have African heritage and the place where my family comes from has no libraries, so there is no free thought. They have an oral culture, but they don’t have a literary culture. Although people are clever they don’t necessarily think.

They don't think outside the box. When you read a book in a library you think! You think to yourself 'Well, what do I think about that?' Out there people are more like 'Well, this is what you're meant to think'. For me learning and libraries are connected to freedom, not just personal freedom, but community freedom and freedom as to how we move on" (P24)

Participants in Chelmsford, Edinburgh and Sutton suggested that library values allow for concepts of (British) citizenship and heritage to be expressed. In the Edinburgh focus group, having a public library system was itself seen as a symbol of citizenship and community and some of participants suggested that the library itself represents democracy:

"The library is a physical manifestation of where you can interact and participate in society, and that is what citizenship is all about." (P21)

There was an acknowledgement that learning together in the library provided a sense of citizenship and community. Meeting new people with like-minds or studying together as groups of school pupils or students were scenarios which were mentioned in the Tiverton and Redbridge focus groups. It was felt that collective learning and knowledge sharing in the public library, where individuals were present through their own choice (i.e. rather than at school or college) created a greater sense of community belonging. One of the school age Redbridge participants suggested that the community learning role of the library had a much greater societal function than simply its educational one:

"If you were to close down libraries you would be closing a door on opportunity, on education. You don't just learn in the classroom, you learn by yourself or with others and you learn in the library. You don't just learn from teachers, so if you close the libraries you are stopping people from having access to education. I know for a fact that if you close the library, friends of mine would go out there and hang out with the wrong people and do bad things. The library is the place that brings them together" (P30)

### 6.2.2 Services and Resources

In each focus group participants were asked 'who are public libraries for?' The unanimous response was that they are for 'everyone' and several discussions revealed what this meant to participants. The general inclusivity of the physical library spaces was apparent in all the first phase focus group discussions. Libraries enable a sense of community citizenship through having central, neutral and safe space in which anyone can come together, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religious belief, social class, or physical or mental ability. Participants saw the library as a 'level playing field' and this was regarded as particularly important for citizens who might be considered marginalised.

One of the Chelmsford participants articulated the sense of belonging that citizens get from interacting with their library services. She explained that the library is very much a central and well used space and facility and its users are typically representative of Chelmsford as a whole:

"It's a place of inclusion, not of exclusion and that's not just a feeling. You can look round the library and you can see it. All kinds of people, people who are homeless, young people, old people, different religions. Years ago, when I was a young user of the library homeless people were not allowed in. They were woken up, picked up and taken out. Now that's not the case. You can eat and drink in the library, there are things for kids... yeah everyone. If you walk into Chelmsford Library at any time you'll see the diversity. It's a microcosm of Chelmsford." (P24)

One particular observation from a younger Redbridge participant summarised what the physical library means to her with regard to meeting people, being with people and feeling part of that community by using an interesting metaphor whereby she likened the library to a digital platform:

"I would say that the library is like a social media website that you can actually physically go into. It's like Instagram or Snapchat, a place where you can go to meet people and learn new things. You can actually go in there

and you can just find people and you can find information. It's like a physical space that you can actually do this in." (P30)

One of the services that many public libraries provide, which in turn engages citizens in collective community activity is co-ordinating and facilitating groups. Discussion about this occurred in 5 of the phase 1 focus groups, and participants recounted that their sense of community was enhanced from being part of a group. Examples include: reading groups; computer clubs; writing clubs; poetry clubs; drama groups; grid club; homework clubs; knit and natter groups. There was also mention of the library facilitating plays and recitals as enabling community engagement and at the Tiverton focus group some participants reflected on the activities they enjoyed through U3A (University of the Third Age) and Age Concern at the library.

In addition to bringing individual citizens together through groups or shared interests, there are also library services designed specifically for marginalised groups and these play a different role within their communities. For example, participants in Newcastle, Tiverton and Sutton both spoke about making use of 'job clubs' and computer skills training groups facilitated by the library. These interactions represent far more than bringing communities of people together in a recreational capacity, as one of the Newcastle participants pointed out:

"The library is enabling for citizens, especially unemployed citizens. The library enables people to cope and gives them some dignity. I've used the library for loads of things like that, like getting books for cooking on a budget, accessing job search and websites to look for jobs. The job club at the East End Library is great and the staff are always supportive when you're looking for jobs and filling out applications." (P10)

Participants at Liverpool, Lincoln and Newcastle felt strongly that their local authorities were not doing enough to fulfil their citizenship missions and their failure to publicise and market their library services was detrimental to harnessing a sense of community in their areas. Participants at Lincoln in particular, a local authority which had recently made drastic cuts to its library service, were critical of

this. In response to a question about whether the public library helps people to embrace citizenship, one participant answered:

“I think there’s an opportunity for them to contribute and they have the space and there’s the staff and the infrastructure that enables the opportunity to contribute, but it’s a very unbalanced approach. There are some people who want to make it happen, but it’s not reciprocated by other colleagues so it’s hard to make changes. But I really want it to do that so we can all live together and value each other, irrespective of backgrounds, and the library needs to be working towards that.” (P28)

### 6.2.3 Support

During phase 1, staff support was perceived to be a value added attribute with regard to the curating and discovery of knowledge and information and aligned more with the library’s epistemic role. However, in three of the focus groups the role of the library staff in supporting citizenship and community was briefly discussed. For example, the Tiverton participants became quite vocal in emphasising the value that the library staff, and indeed themselves (for some of them were members of the Friends of Tiverton Library Group) added to the facilitation of groups at the library:

“The staff here facilitate an awful lot of these groups that come in. it isn’t just about putting up an exhibition... they’ll often find someone to come in and talk about it. I also find the staff to be a fount of knowledge about everything that the library does and everything that the library has. If I am ever stuck I can just ask them and have that personal interaction. It’s the staff expertise that does it for me.” (P47)

There was also acknowledgement at Tiverton, as well as in Chelmsford and Edinburgh that having access to staff support as well as facilities is both empowering and enabling with regard to being able to participate digitally with society and community. In Edinburgh for example, participants regarded the library staff as the human face of their community:

“The library as a whole actually acts as an interface for me to interact with online information and as I’m often bemused when I’m trying to use the computers, I can always ask the staff to help me, and they are so supportive. It really does come down to the help they provide. That makes all the difference.” (P21)

#### 6.2.4 Capital

##### *Social capital*

Once participants moved into conversations about the community function of the public library, three of the discussions surfaced examples of potential social capital exchange within a citizenship context. These tended to be correlations between meeting new people in the library and realising unintended outcomes through this.

The story of Participant 24, where she became a tutor for some of Chelmsford’s Bangladeshi population has already been used as an example of learning and development, but it is also a strong example of social capital generation through public library use. She recounted that, through the friendships she made through tutoring the Bangladeshi women, she ended up being invited into new social circles, which even included being invited to several family weddings. Some of this, she believes is due to her acting as an ambassador for her community in the early stages of building these new relationships:

“I got to know the whole community, not just as a tutor, but as friends and I ended up getting invited to their weddings and things. And I’m going back now to 9/11.... I was with them when 9/11 happened and they were terrified as a community, terrified as to what would happen to them and the implications, and I had to say, ‘...but you’re from Chelmsford. The people of Chelmsford know you. You’re our friends. We’re your friends. Don’t be scared. It will pass.’ And it did, but I would not have had that experience with these people if it was not for our central community library.” (P24)

It could be argued that such an exchange of dialogue and the formation of such environments could take place in any public space, so this latter point is all important. It was the physical and cultural combination which the library offers, in

this instance a safe, neutral, physical place, which brought the Bangladeshi community together with participant 24. A similar observation was made by participant 42 at the Sutton focus group:

“I can’t think of another place where you might interact with different people from different faiths, I’m not gonna go to church to meet Muslim people, sects and Jehovah’s witnesses, and vice versa, they’re not going to come to meet me. So certainly, in the library, not only would you meet people, but they’ve got ideas.” (P42)

It is the chance meetings of people from different backgrounds and with different characteristics exchanging their ‘ideas’, thoughts, opinions and skills in the inclusive space that is the library that has had an effect on these participants.

A further example of social capital exchange comes from Tiverton, where participant 50 is in the habit of actively using the library in order to gain employment. Through his job searching endeavours he meets people in similar situations and provided the following insight into his situation. His experiences are of often results in the exchange of social capital I respect of individuals benefitting from the experience and advice of the community in which they find themselves:

“...and in using the library your social circles expand. I do a lot of job search in the library and the learning happens there. There are often other people there looking for jobs too and they sometimes say ‘oh I don’t know what to do’, so I say ‘bear with me and I’ll show you.... Then I show them a little bit if this and a little bit of that and I show people how to use the computer to search for jobs and it is very rewarding for me as it’s the start of a journey for someone that might lead to them getting a job.” (P50)

Whilst not having been asked specifically about social capital during the first phase of focus groups it is interesting to see these examples emerging when discussing the role of the library within community and citizenship contexts. The bringing of people together are important aspects of the public library fulfilling its societal role and the focus group discussions start to reveal some of this at this stage.

### 6.3 Phase 2 focus groups (2015-2016): RQ2

Participants were asked to reflect on their own personal use of public libraries during the period between phases 1 and 2. Questions were posed in order to encourage discussion about personal learning and development as well as to provoke conversation about citizenship, what it means to be a citizen and how public library usage enables this. A theme which developed during the second phase of focus groups was the enabling of citizenship and participation through pursuit of knowledge and learning.

#### 6.3.1 Learning and Development

During phase 1 participants had spoken about the library enabling them to gain awareness of their local communities and local environment. In the phase 2 focus groups discussions progressed onto the library facilitating and delivering some of its community and societal functions through the delivery of its learning and development functions. For example, a Sutton participant explained that her mother benefits from a particular community learning partnership between Age UK and a local high school, which is facilitated through the library. The initiative enables school pupils to do voluntary work with senior citizens, teaching them computer skills, in the library, whilst contributing to credit towards their Duke of Edinburgh Awards:

“On a fortnightly basis she comes here for three hour session and they go through anything with her... any IT issue she has, learning new things. She can do so much more because of this. She is now much more comfortable buying things online. She teaches music, so they taught her how to use the software so that she can do online composition, how to attach lyrics, how to transpose... all things that I could never have taught her, as I am not computer savvy enough. They are wonderful and patient and she is so much more digitally confident.” (P43)

This is an example of the library, as a safe space for learning and participation, bringing together different areas of the community. Similarly, Redbridge participants spoke about events hosted by the library, in conjunction with the ‘Youth Parliament’ which were primarily epistemic in their objectives, but brought

individuals together in a community setting, allowing them to participate in the learning that was taking place. One such event involved local councillors sharing their annual budget plans with the attendees and encouraging discussion around their spending plans. In this instance the learning subsequently allows for political and community participation:

“Yes, that was a moment of learning.... About things like the budget consultation. If you know about it you can use it in your day to day life. For example, if you are doing problem solving or something like that it gives you real life situations, because you can see what has been cut by the council and why and how it has been effected. It really opens your eyes and you can see what impact it has on your life” (P29)

Collective learning and development activities were also cited at Tiverton, Lincoln and Newcastle as opportunities for community integration and engagement. These included reading groups and involvement in U3A, and participants acknowledged that through taking part in such leisure and learning activities they had been introduced to different types of people and had increased their awareness of their community. Examples of community learning at Lincoln, were similar, in that two of the participants spoke about the library space being used for community groups which they themselves facilitated. These groups are aimed at encouraging migrant women to engage in British society and equip them with the language and skills that they need in order to participate. When asked about the development and learning that occurs in these groups, the following dialogue occurred:

“For example, two weeks ago, we ran a session on educational systems so that they could understand assessment here in the UK. Things like what does ‘you are able’ mean... We had lots of examples and we were preparing one of the women to attend their child’s ‘parents’ evening’ at school. We actually helped them to write down the questions which they could then ask the teacher.” (P28)

“...and understand her rights as a parent.... That she can ask questions and she has the right to ask those questions” (P27)

On a similar topic, libraries were identified as being an effective source of cultural information in relation to citizenship. Libraries are not only at the heart of the community but they play a role in educating citizens as to their roles in that community. Participants in the second Sutton focus group identified this:

“It’s also about being able to keep your own culture as well as integrating into the culture around you. So the facilities for ethnic minorities in this library are very, very good. It holds Afro-Caribbean items, Indian things, or whatever it is that you’re after. You’re not excluded because you’re not white or Caucasian, and you also get to know about other cultures so you’re not cutting yourself off.” (P43)

### 6.3.2 Services and Resources

During phase 1 participants in *all* focus groups acknowledged the library as a physical place where citizens can come together. In phase 2 the expression ‘heart of the community’ was used by participants in Newcastle, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Sutton, and similar sentiment was found in reflections on the library being a place to go to and interact with other citizens. Part of what makes the library a hub or ‘heart of the community’ is the physical space and in all the focus groups, reference was made to the physical space being accessible and inclusive. This was a recurring theme from phase 1, where a feeling of safety and security emerged as being important for participants. However, in phase 2, discussions focused on what these safe spaces allowed individuals and groups to do. For example, participants at Lincoln talked about the space in the library being neutral and accessible. The room that they use for their meetings was regarded as being large and creating a friendly environment in which conversation can take place:

“The women can bring their toddlers, and so while they are having an open conversation, they can also keep an eye on the children as well as being involved in the group. So there is an element of being able to control a safe environment and addressing the safeguarding issue as well.” (P28)

The sense of the library as a welcoming place, where everyone is equal, which was apparent during phase 1, still prevailed during phase 2. However, during the second

phase the focus was more on how individuals develop, as citizens, through such exposure. Noticeably, where phase 1 discussion around diversity had focused on exposure and awareness of different cultures (i.e. through ethnicity, race, nationality or religion), the conversations during phase 2 expanded to consider diversity in respect of mental and physical health and disability, wellbeing, homelessness, and age. For example, at Lincoln a particular reference was made to the community benefits of mixing age ranges:

“One thing we’ve really enjoyed is when Age Concern regularly use the foyer and they do their art exhibitions there. That’s brilliant as they are typically older women and she [my young daughter] goes in and gets spoilt rotten. She comes out of her shell and chats to them and for me that is engagement with our community. It allows children to mix with more diversity, with people in authority, people of different backgrounds and navigating this, and as a child that really develops your confidence.” (P25)

Observations were also made in Lincoln, Chelmsford and Sutton in respect of the library being inclusive for users with mental health or learning difficulties and that the safety of the library enables integration:

“One of the things I’ve really noticed is that there are a lot of people with mental health problems who stay in the library all day. With some of them it’s very clear and it’s a safe place for them. But it also means that the other people are encountering and meeting people with mental health problems and learning disabilities and they are meeting them in safe space. They might say ‘Oh, they’re different. They’re not like me, but they’re OK.’” (P24)

Further examples of community participation arose in both the Edinburgh and Sutton focus group, of libraries enabling local political engagement. For example, a participant in the phase 2 Sutton focus group explained that he had become aware of local planning initiatives through his use of the library:

“I find out about lots of community groups and the thing that I have looked up most recently is the ‘Sutton Plan’ which is the 30 year plan of what is going to take place in the borough. I’ve downloaded the plan now, but I

come to the library because I'm on some community groups, and I can let them know how I think the plan is going to affect certain things, and we can respond by writing to the various planning committees." (P41)

Participant 41 then went on to provide a very relevant and recent example whereby the council was planning two permanent traveller sites to be developed. As most local residents were not aware of this detail within the plan, one of the groups that participant 41 was a member of set about informing local residents and canvassing them for their opinion. Their subsequent feedback informed the planning committee and the initial decision as to where to locate one of the traveller sites was overturned by the council, in favour of the recommendation from the (now informed) community group.

### 6.3.3 Support

During phase 1 there was some acknowledgement that library staff facilitate individuals in engaging in the activities, groups and learning that the library offers. Participants from several of the phase 2 focus groups were again very appreciative of the support they received from the library staff (and other invited staff) in particular, the facilitation of community groups. This was particularly noticeable in Newcastle, Sutton, Redbridge, Chelmsford and Tiverton. In the Liverpool and Sutton phase 2 focus groups there were specific discussions about the high quality staff support adding to the feeling of community. Participants felt like they were part of the community by the way they are treated by library staff.

The majority of discussion around staff support however, was about the availability of staff to help and support in using the library. From an individual citizenship perspective, the focus of this tended to be around help and support with IT skills and making the most out of the resources that the library provides. The following quotation from the phase 2 Tiverton focus group illustrates this:

"You need to be able to access the Internet and different Web sites in order to participate in the community these days. Things like buying things online, filling in forms for the council, you know. I did come into the library to ask for help with my ipad when I first got it and there was someone in the

library, who came in once a week and it all sort of clicked with me. He was brilliant and he invited me to come back to learn more, It was much better to learn with a stranger rather than my son getting frustrated saying ‘No you press this and click that’. It was one to one in the library and he was very patient.” (P52)

Similar conversations praising the library staff for facilitating and delivering IT skills training, enabling digital citizenship, also took place in Liverpool, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Redbridge and Sutton. The anomaly was Lincoln, where the participants were quite disillusioned at the lack of IT support provided by the library and suggesting that this was potentially disabling library users to participate in society:

“The crucial word is ‘accessible’. We have the equipment here, the PCs, the laptops, the multimedia, but at the end of the day a lot of the ladies who come to our group cannot access it because they have difficulty in understanding the instructions. They are very good at accessing apps and things on their mobile phones, but not on the computers in the library.”  
(P27)

This discussion was quite typical of the Lincoln focus groups, whose participants were largely frustrated with the support they received from library staff. The expectation of the Lincoln library users is not dissimilar to that of the other focus groups, but the failure to meet the expectation is further evidence that ‘digital citizenship’ is an area which libraries can embrace in order to achieve citizenship development and enable participation in society.

#### 6.3.4 Capital

During phase 1, discussions alluding to the exchange of intangible capital focused on the transactional capital, and subsequent social advantage, gained from interacting with different people. Whilst discussing self-development and learning during phase 2 several similar examples of the generation and exchange of social and transactional capital appeared. This was the case where individuals were trying to advance themselves in order to participate in civil society.

### *Social capital*

Some of the findings presented above illustrate the importance of the library in supporting unemployed citizens in searching for employment. One of the Tiverton participants explained that being part of a Job Search club within the library benefits him from a social perspective:

“There are a lot of people who get to know each other through Job Search.... We exchange information with each other, sometimes written and sometimes verbally. When you get to know people, they get to know what you are looking for. They might say ‘oh I’ve seen a job that will suit Joe’. It’s that social side that I really value.” (P50)

Participant 50 had developed a social network of people through the library (including library staff), who were able to assist him in his search for employment. These networks, whilst not necessarily resulting in employment, had increased his confidence and dignity and allowed him to normalise his situation within a community citizenship context. Similar experiences came from one of the unemployed participants from the Sutton focus group, who also acknowledged the networks she had made through her job search experiences in the library as enabling her own socialisation.

### *Transactional capital*

Transactional and human capital exchanges also surfaced during phase 2. Some of the discussion at Lincoln had been around the community group that two of the participants were involved in organising and running. One of the early attendees of this community group, aimed at building confidence, language skills and social skills in migrant women, had found particular success in the library as a digital mentor. Several of the members of the community group were studying for the ‘Life in the UK’ test and this particular member, who had IT skills felt she could provide support to the rest of the group. Lincolnshire Libraries then arranged for her to have volunteer training and registered her as a library volunteer, in order that she could help her peers in the digital aspects of the test:

“Yes, she would introduce people to the digital resources and make sure that they are linked up to the relevant people. And because she could put this on her CV, that she had volunteered and all these skills, she has now gone on to get a job in IT in the health service.” (P27)

#### 6.4 Phase 3 focus groups (2017-2018): RQ2

Some of the narrative and reflection previously shared in phases 1 and 1 were repeated during phase 3, but where this was the case it was through a different lens as participants had been asked to consider the Information Society and the concepts of social, human and knowledge capital. In all eight locations there were fewer participants in the phase 3 focus groups than in previous phases. This attrition has been accounted for in the methodology, but fewer participants at the phase 3 stage enabled more detailed discussion in that participants had more time and space to explore their thoughts and articulate them. Social interactions and exchanges of capital feature heavily in participants’ experiences of community and citizenship, therefore the phase 3 focus groups generated substantial data with regard to research question two.

##### 6.4.1 Learning and development

The themes of learning about the local community and becoming more locally and culturally aware were dominant during phases 1 and 2. In phase 3 participants in all the focus groups continued to expand on the concept of learning and development, and in the case of Redbridge, provided examples of learning communities being enabled through the public library. In particular, as some of the participants were school pupils, they explained that they would come in and do homework and revision and learn together:

“We all came together with common interests of revising, ad it is the same subjects most of the time, so we also learned from each other and from different groups of students using the library on how to revise and new topics and things.” (P37)

This sense of community learning reappeared later in the discussion around the Information Society. The five Redbridge participants agreed that the digital revolution had changed how information is generated and accessed and that the

library has a role in enabling learning within this digital world. The participants suggested that the library needs to enable equal access to learning to all factions of society:

“So I think that, in this day and age, our living within an Information Society is pivotal, now that everything has moved online. Archives, records, current information is all being moved online, and I think we are talking about how the past affects the future. The older generations would not be able to access all the information in the Internet, because they don’t know how to access it, so I think the library is the place where older people can come to use computers and learn how to access the information again.” (P30)

Edinburgh participants discussed their individual academic and intellectual development alongside their development as citizens:

“For every time the library has helped me intellectually with my development it has helped me to become a citizen. You may not plan it in a citizenship context, but... I love the definition of citizenship, that it allows you to be active in your society. It helps you to be closer to being a member of society and how we make society work together. It means having the knowledge and the skills to understand the challenge and engage with the main pennant of our democracy, which are part of our economy and the law. My argument would be that the library has a role in that and I’m certain that I have a role in that.” (P18)

#### 6.4.2 Services and resources

Phases 1 and 2 generated discussion about the library facilitating community engagement and local political participation. In phase 3, when discussing the exchange of capital in the library, participants in *all* focus groups continued this conversation about the benefits to individuals and communities, through the library facilitating engagement. The inclusive nature of public libraries was again attributed to enabling diversity and cultural awareness within communities.

Participant 8 in Liverpool explained that she regarded her library use as not only enabling her community engagement, but also in finding out about her community and those who live in it, specifically referring to gaining tolerance:

“...but just to be a bit more understanding, and to be a bit more tolerant. I hope by reading and learning it makes me a bit more tolerant. It doesn’t make me a saint and it doesn’t make me always right, but the more you learn about other people and their cultures and their religions, it does help you to contribute as a citizen.” (P7)

As in the previous phases, the third phase of focus groups revealed further examples of the library enabling participation in community events and groups, thus affording citizenship engagement with society. In the Liverpool, Newcastle and Tiverton focus groups in particular rich examples were provided of where individuals had engaged in community initiatives:

“I asked one the librarians about volunteering on an adult literacy scheme, because I had seen a leaflet or a poster. I could have spotted that anywhere, but it was in the library and I was able to follow it up by speaking to someone. And she said very calmly to me, ‘you just need to come and take this number and here’s the phone’. So off I went and made the call and I became a volunteer for four years. One of the most rewarding things I’ve done.” (P8)

Being active and able to participate in local events and groups was a strong theme in each phase, but stood out in phase 3, especially when talking about community. For the most part participants felt that being able to be part of a community and being able to contribute to that community was enabled by their public library use and this societal function was key to libraries delivering their citizenship mission.

#### 6.4.3 Support

The support theme which had dominated the first two phases of focus groups was that of library staff enabling engagement with community and society. In phase 3, this discussion matured and the focus on library-based human and transactional capital exchanges produced several examples of public libraries supporting

individuals and communities in citizenship development. In Liverpool, Chelmsford and Edinburgh observations about the professional values of library staff emerged, particularly with regard to library staff dealing with and supporting diverse communities.

For example, a participant from Chelmsford, reflected on the library staff attitudes and values allowing them to adjust their behaviour according to the situation:

“...I saw how the staff dealt with different situations within the community. One day you can get a homeless person in, who’s not had a bath and stinks, and yet they treat that person with the same dignity and respect as they would treat someone who is well dressed and speaks really nicely and acts really nicely. The library treats everyone with respect and dignity regardless.” (P23)

Participants at Liverpool also touched on the customer service values that they continued to encounter from the staff in the public library and gave several examples of ‘above and beyond’ support and staff ‘going the extra mile’ to find information and resources in different formats. They observed the empathy of library staff and felt that this demonstrated particular professional values:

“She told me not to worry [about a lost card] and that she would sort everything out. As if she knew about the struggle that I had already had that day and knew that I just needed reassurance.” (P1)

A final observation, capturing the values of librarianship which enable community engagement, was provided by an Edinburgh participant when he described:

“I think the librarian craftsmanship is about belonging and making library users feel that they belong.” (P21)

#### 6.4.4 Capital

In phase 3, participants were asked specifically to think about the generation and exchange of intangible capital whilst using public library services within their focus groups. Several examples illustrate different forms of capital being realised through library use, which enable community awareness and citizenship.

### *Knowledge capital*

For example, a Chelmsford participant acknowledges that over time she has become more aware of different sources and channels of information available in the library, and is conscious of acquiring new knowledge through different transactions with library staff and users, including gaining greater awareness and knowledge about cultural issues:

“... I recognised that the library was a place where could meet all kinds of people and bump into people that you expected to, or didn’t expect to. So whilst knowledge for me, was initially just from reading, to satisfy my own intellectual curiosity, I moved onto realising that it came from the people as well... the library tends to be a culturally diverse place, so it is a place to pick up cultural knowledge as well.” (P24)

Similarly, the Edinburgh participants were able to join together the different resources and support available in the library and comprehend their impact on individual citizenship:

“the knowledge aspect is the fundamental aspect of a library. It is a huge source of knowledge for us. If I want to do something, which is going to impact on society, however small, like send a letter or something, then you've got to have access to an incredible number of ideas, which you'd never thought of half the time, and it's this interaction with the librarian, with the knowledge in the library. But, also colleagues in the library... all three aspects of it...” (P18)

This example illustrates different resources within the library, namely the staff, the users and the resources, being used to triangulate knowledge when forming knowledge capital. The knowledge output from this example is the letter that is eventually written once the knowledge has been generated from which to form the ideas within the letter. The impact is unknown, but clear from the quotation that there was in intended impact from the knowledge capital exchange.

### *Transactional capital*

One of the Sutton participants provided an example of where she was under threat of being made redundant, so had come to the library in order to seek retraining opportunities. As a result, she ended up taking IT lessons, provided by the library, and found she was with similar library users who were in similar situations with regard to unstable employment. She recalled that the small community of library users who were actively participating in skills acquisition and job searching were able to help each other with their respective job searching, and was herself in a position to help others with some IT and word processing in their bids to gain employment:

“I was able to help with CVs, some of the people in certain situations. But we ended up helping each other out. There was definitely a social exchange.” (P44)

There were similar examples of peer to peer transactions between library users in several phase 3 focus groups (Sutton, Redbridge, Tiverton, Edinburgh, Lincoln). Once participants were familiar with the generation and exchange of transactional and social capital they were able to see more clearly how the library environment enables this and also started to see themselves within these transactions.

### *Social capital*

The focus on social capital exchange allowed for a broad range of examples of socialisation and social cohesion to be shared. On a basic level, many of the participants shared stories of lasting friendships being made through their library use, which they felt enabled integration into their respective communities.

However, a different experience integration through social capital exchange emerged during discussions about the Redbridge youth parliament. Participants reflected on how the network and political awareness that they have built up through participating in the youth parliament, gave them contacts and networks that were beneficial to them in a community environment:

“We were thinking more about if anything was about to be cut or to close outside the library, we could actually use the library to drum up support for

our campaign and get people to buy into it. There is a lot of people in the library and I feel we would be able to communicate our voice to a lot of people.” (P37)

A different example comes from the Edinburgh participant who describes himself as ‘a prolific letter writer’ describes using the social capital available to him in the library to inform his political lobbying:

“...We have a problem in Scotland where we are always worrying about the school levels going down, the quality of education. It’s something that I find important so I have written many letters about it to the press. The librarians have been very helpful with the material they have sent my way whilst I have been writing. The librarians found the information for me, but because I was in the library, I was able to talk to the mums who come in and other people about the various levels of education.... Some with kids at junior school, somebody from a baby group. And also, colleagues who just come in and I say ‘look I’m thinking of writing this, what are your feelings?’” (P18)

For several focus groups (Liverpool, Edinburgh, Chelmsford, Redbridge, Sutton) awareness of and participation in local politics is regarded as an active form of community citizenship. The Edinburgh example above is one of both library staff and library users being involved in the generation and exchange of social capital.

This is complemented with anecdotes provided from the Chelmsford focus group about how social capital exchanged in Chelmsford Central Library ultimately led to active engagement in political rallying and lobbying. Participant 24 spoke at length about her political experiences, enabled through the library. She explained that she had been encouraged to join the political group Momentum, as she had made an impact on the new colleagues she had met through her discussions in the library. Following on from this, participant 24 shared a further story of how she activated this new social capital that she now had access to, in order to organise and mobilise a local campaign:

“The Tory Council in Chelmsford were going to sweep everyone, who was regarded as homeless, off the streets, effectively criminalising their

behaviour and it was outrageous..... so I was like 'No way', so I got John involved and asked him 'how do you organise a protest?'" (P24)

"John's the guy who had originally taken the Guardian out of your hand?"  
(Facilitator)

"Yeah, yeah... so I gave him the information and he was like 'I've got a group of friends who can start' and I was like 'well I want it to be bigger than that' so he started talking to people and then we arranged to meet at a certain time, and then, all this through the Momentum group, we all met at the bottom of the High Street and we marched towards the council offices. And one of the wonderful things is that I looked and I knew some of the people who were there, some were homeless people, some were who you would expect, by there were some who you know had just got off the train from London, still in their suits and they were there because it was issue based. And the next day, at the council meeting, they overturned it and decided that they would not through with the proposal." (P24)

### 6.5 Conclusion - Research question 2: what is the impact of using a public library service on individual and community citizenship?

The findings reveal how libraries' impact on individual and community citizenship through fostering an inclusive environment, in which all library users are equal. Participants focused on different ethnicities, races, religions and nationalities being represented in public libraries and making full use of them within their communities. However, there seemed to be a sense that this was accidental, rather than intentional. This could be because of the level of discussion at phase 1, and participants not comprehending the holistic library service at this particular stage. The same lack of awareness was evident when participants considered their learning and development during phase 1. At this early stage, participants tended to focus on what they themselves, rather than their communities, had gained from knowledge and information accessed through library usage.

During phases 1 and 2 participants generally continued to relate their library use with knowledge acquisition. However, the line of enquiry during phase 2 meant that the discussion was framed around the themes of community and citizenship.

Participants reflected upon the learning opportunities that they had experienced in the library and their subsequent citizenship and participation in their communities. By phase 2, some participants were able to articulate how the library itself, due to its inclusive nature and the values and 'craftsmanship' of library staff, along with the knowledge and information resources available allow for individual and community identities to develop. This in turn becomes a platform for individuals to 'discover' themselves and their roles within their respective communities. This includes individuals being able to participate in broader society (e.g. political engagement, opportunities for marginalised people, etc.) through their library usage. Where such concepts seemed difficult to discuss during phase 1 (i.e. due to unfamiliarity with the setting and not having previously critiqued their own use of public libraries), these topics became easier in phases 2 and 3 where discussions became more analytical of individual library use within the context of the questions and lines of enquiry

The role of the library staff has significant impact upon individual and community citizenship. During phases 1 and 2 reflections about the contributions of library staff had primarily been about they advise, signpost and guide users to resources and answer enquiries about making effective use of the library. However, during phase 3 a more specific level of support was recognised and participants were able to reflect and articulate their perception of the skills and expertise of the library staff as needing to be at a particular, professional and expert level in order to deal with different library users in different contexts and environments.

During phase 3 individual participants were also able to acknowledge their own role in interpersonal transactions in the library. Whether they themselves share advice, information and guidance with other library users, participants gained a greater comprehension of how their library usage has an impact on enabling community. The physical library space and the abstract services offered within it, along with the organisation and technical infrastructure of the library enable the exchange of transactional and social capital which become a fundamental part of citizenship. In *all* focus groups there was a deeper realisation during the phase 3 discussions about how individuals contribute to society and community through their public library

use and for many, a realisation of what it means to be a citizen within a local community.

Overall focus group participants identified several key elements that need to be in place in order for libraries to fulfil their societal and community roles: safe and welcoming spaces; inclusive values; adequate and appropriate information resources; adequate infrastructure; services which enable people to come together; and essentially desired strategic outcomes around enabling community cohesion. To supplement this, where any of these elements are perceived to be lacking, frustrations are voiced around library authorities' inadequate provision and failure to fulfil their societal role. This was particularly apparent in the Lincoln focus groups and to a lesser extent in the Newcastle focus groups.

It can therefore be concluded that impact of using a public library service on individual and community citizenship is enabled through a combination of: the physical library location within the community; the use of the library as space and place and the technical infrastructure of the public library system. The fulfilment and delivery of societal outcomes plays a significant role in the library enabling community citizenship, and the social interaction with staff and other library users is also dominant within such outcomes.

## 7. Research question 3: what is the role of the public library in the 21st century?

### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings and analysis of the research field work in relation to research question 3 are presented. The synthesis of the findings is presented using the four sub-sections previously used for RQ1 (chapter 5) and RQ2 (chapter 6): learning and development; resources and services; support; capital. The nature of research question 3 means that the analysis is presented under all sub-sections with 'resources and services' and 'capital' being the dominant themes.

Research question 3 enquires: what is role of the public library in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

This is a very broad question, and whilst the research aims to provide answers to this, the focus is effectively on the role of the library as perceived by public library users. The answers to this question are discovered evenly across all three phases through the participants' discussions of what the public library means to them as individuals and to their communities. Participants' reflections on how they use and engage with libraries also significantly contribute to answering research question 3.

### 7.2 Phase 1 focus groups (2014-2015): RQ3

During phase 1 there was a great sense of appreciation, privilege and gratitude for the provision of all the resources contained within the library, particularly to books and print monographs. One of the first questions in the initial round of focus groups was "What are your attitudes and feelings towards the public library?" As active public library users, participants, from all the focus groups had a positive outlook on public libraries, even when being critical of their own local authority.

For the most part, reflections and discussions informing research question three were positive, but the current economic climate in the UK has left many library users feeling anxious about the future of the libraries. This is evident in participants' observations of where they have lost local public library provision. Similarly, in local authorities where there are no current cuts to funding and library provision, such as in Sutton and Edinburgh, participants still expressed concerns. This demonstrates participants' perception of the role of the library as being central and integral to the communities in which they live and to themselves as individual citizens.

### 7.2.1 Learning and development

In phase 1 the library would typically be praised for providing access to resources, both online and in print, that users believed they would not be able to access elsewhere (e.g. range of newspapers, archives, government reports, etc.). The epistemic role of the library and the primacy of print within this function surfaced as the primary and fundamental role of the public library.

Participants were asked to consider their most recent library usage, and it became apparent that accessing and using books was a shared experience amongst focus group members. They associated the library with books and there was a perception that print is still the primary vehicle for delivering knowledge and information to library users, as illustrated in the initial Redbridge discussion:

“I like coming in here and grabbing a book and reading it and getting involved and then I really want to know what happens next. You feel that this book is for me. And you go to the computer [catalogue] and you can see everything that they have got, and it’s free and you think ‘yeah, I’m actually getting something out of this place’.” (P30)

In the Liverpool, Newcastle, Sutton and Redbridge focus groups, attention was also paid to the library being responsible for creating a fit-for-purpose learning and reading environment. Conversations in these four focus groups suggested that part of the epistemic role of the library is to provide welcoming and quiet space in which library users can enjoy reading, and the provision of a quiet scholarly environment is regarded as important in order for the library to fulfil this function. As well as the provision of books and an environment in which to read them, some discussion in Liverpool and Chelmsford also focused on libraries enabling a parity of access to books as tools for learning:

“...nobody ever stopped you reaching for a book on anything. You might put it back immediately and think ‘earth science is not for me’ but you can actually read *any* book in the library and as a child or a teenager that does empower you.” (P7)

As previously illustrated in chapter five, print is highly regarded for its reliability and credibility. The enjoyment of and trust placed in printed books and resources also came through where participants were asked to consider the role of the library within a digital information age. The perception of the place of printed books in this context stood out in a conversation during the phase 1 Liverpool focus group:

“You can’t access books on the Internet or Google.” (P1)

“No, and you can’t see the cover. People are attracted by the cover, and I know when I was doing my [library] training we would study how people are attracted to books and it could be the colour or the cover. People often pick up books because of the cover or the illustrations.” (P8)

Phase 1 discussions revealed a sentiment attached to the physical book. The perceived advantages of print books over electronic books was further commented on at both Liverpool and Tiverton where participants suggested that reasons why printed books are superior to their digital counterparts include being able to: ‘flick through books’; ‘spread multiple books out in front of you’; and, ‘bookmark pages to go back to them’.

Where provision of print material is perceived to be inadequate, participants reported that they feel “let down” or disadvantaged. For example, in Lincoln there was concern over an ever-diminishing book-stock:

“Looking at some negative experiences, which is what that is, mine is about disappointment really, because every time I come in there are fewer and fewer books. I feel the shelves are emptying.” (P26)

The Lincoln participants were the only ones to acknowledge a correlation between the reduction in print resources and the increase in electronic and digital resources being made through the libraries. Whilst accepting this, they still agreed that the library would be better placed to deliver its learning and development functions if it invested more in print and encouraged children and young people to read more.

### 7.2.3 Services and resources

Libraries that had reliable IT infrastructure were praised for having speedy, accessible Wifi and networked desktop computers for accessing the Internet and online resources. Participants at all focus groups regarded this provision as an important responsibility of the library, particularly where they acknowledged that not everyone had access to computers and the Internet at home. For example, one of the Edinburgh participants stated:

“The library is my office. I don’t have a computer at home, so I use the PCs in the library for about six or seven hours a week. I really rely on the hardware. It’s fantastic.” (P18)

Access to computers and IT is part of the epistemic role of the library, but access to online information goes beyond learning and development. As a service, access to IT and the Internet allows for citizens to participate in society, discover new resources and activities and to integrate socially. The online services provided through library usage are often considered to be a lifeline for those who use them:

“There is also computer training and education here, for children doing homework, for job applications, and for the poorer people in town this is their computer access. The library has a social function as well as a digital function.” (P51)

This quotation from one of the Tiverton participants captures the crossover where libraries fulfil both a learning and development role alongside their social cohesion role. The same participant went on to say:

“The library is a big focal point in the middle of Tiverton town centre. You can come in here for an hour or two and find things out that are on because they advertise events. It’s the one place that brings people together.” (P51)

This sense of ‘bringing people together’ was very much valued and in five of the focus groups (Liverpool, Sutton, Redbridge, Tiverton, Chelmsford) there were several such examples:

“Britain is a wonderful place for learning, a wonderful place for education. It is multicultural and the library gives that sense. Parents are happy for their children to be here. It’s like a youth centre for younger people and for elderly people it is a place for socialising and for access to things that they would not normally have.” (P43)

The overall view from the focus groups is that a public library should be at the heart of its community, offering a variety of educational and social opportunities through the provision of resources, services and facilities. Through engaging and making use of public libraries, citizens are effectively engaging in their communities:

“I feel that is about being part of the community. I’ve always felt that about libraries, that when you use them you are being active in the community. It’s a public service, which is for absolutely everyone in the community.” (P26)

Community ownership of public library services emerged as sub-theme particularly where libraries were perceived to be suffering because of diminishing council budgets, such as at Lincoln. There was a feeling in four of the focus groups (Liverpool, Lincoln, Newcastle and Edinburgh) that the establishment and development of communities depends on the provision of quality public library services. For example, a Liverpool participant considered that access to a public library is a basic human right, and participants revealed that they were active in providing feedback to their libraries about service performance, and that they had lobbied their councils about public library services provision.

Participants also felt that the library has a responsibility to market and promote itself to its users and prospective users. Evidence of this comes from the Liverpool, Newcastle and Redbridge focus groups, where participants were critical of the lack of library marketing and expressed frustration at the general public’s lack of awareness of the services and resources that the modern public library offers.

### 7.2.3 Support

Participants in all eight focus groups argued that the provision of technical and professional support is a fundamental role of the library. The Lincoln participants were particularly vocal about the inadequacy of support and customer service that they received. Whilst they did not necessarily blame the library staff for their poor experiences, they were critical of their local authority in allowing the library service and the library resources diminish. Similarly, in Newcastle and Sutton there was dissatisfaction at staff who were ill-equipped to support new multi-functional aspects of the public library service, particularly where they perceived an inconsistency in library staff attitudes and behaviours. One of the Sutton participants said:

“In general, over the years, they have been supportive, but as more and more technology is introduced, their workloads change, and they have got to learn more. For example, they’ve got a whole row of computers up there, but they need to train the staff so that they know how to show people how to use them... there’s too much ‘that’s not my job’ in here.” (P41)

Different observations occurred in Edinburgh, where participants praised particular staff, who they regarded as ‘older’, ‘more experienced’ and ‘professionally qualified’. They had trust in this group of staff to deliver what they were asking for with regard to acquiring resources, books, records, archives, etc. and attributed this to their experience, professionalism and librarianship skills. On the other hand, some of the participants commented that the ‘younger generation’ of staff who perhaps did not have the same experience could not offer the same type of support, and that their skills lay more in supporting library users with online services and resources. There was a fear that once the older generation of librarians had all retired, then access to some particular historic and archival resources would be lost, as the management of this knowledge lies with individual staff, rather than the library as an institution:

“On the question of generations, though, on the occasions that the librarian has gone to look for stuff for me, the younger ones haven’t got a clue what they’ve got access to, or where it is, but the older ones can go back into the

old card catalogues and that's where they find the older materials. I think there is an issue about when the older generation of librarians retire, what will happen to all the older materials accessible only on the card catalogues?"

This perception whilst possibly flawed, validates evidence from the other focus groups with in respect of genera; perceptions of library support. Library users expect expert staff able to support the ever increasing remit and portfolio of services delivered by the public library.

### 7.3 Phase 2 focus groups (2015-2016): RQ3

Phase 2 discussions allowed participants to discuss their expectations of a modern, contemporary public library service, with regard to the provision of individual development and learning opportunities and community provision.

#### 7.3.1 Learning and development

During phase 1, discussions regarding the learning function of the library were dominated by reflections about print books and reading. In phase 2, the epistemic function and the library as the gateway and keeper of knowledge and information continued to be visible as a primary function of the library but with less discussion around the primacy of print than in phase 1. Participants in Chelmsford and Tiverton referred to the library as a holistic portal to knowledge and information, encompassing both print and digital:

"I always start out on the Net and then come back to the printed books when I want to research something in more depth. If I want information, whatever it is, I know I'll find it in the library. I almost look at the library as a doorway to the Internet and I know I'm going into a bigger library.... I'm going to the world library." (P.50)

Sentiment around the public library as a place of quiet and a haven for learning, reading and thinking continued into phase 2. There is an expectation and a perception that the public library is a place of learning and development, but in order for the library to perform this function, the environment has to be effective. The demand for libraries to provide traditional, quiet and scholarly spaces in which to

learn, was still strong in phase 2. Participants at Lincoln felt that there was a lack of vision from their local authority meant that these traditional library values and functions were diminishing. The streamlining of some council services and the formation of community hubs, which were formerly traditional branch libraries, were seen both positively and negatively. All four Lincoln participants felt that whilst these changes were beneficial from an inclusion and community perspective, it is at the expense of the library's delivery of its primary function, that of learning. The Lincoln participants argued that if the library cannot offer a place to learn, then citizens will no longer use it, and without citizens using libraries for education there will be no local community and no informed citizenry:

“If you go back to the root of libraries as places where you go for reading and learning, if you cannot read or understand what you have access to, you aren't going to use the library. out groups are all about learning, about language learning: reading, writing; speaking, listening and they will end up making use of the written and print resources on offer, but only because we're helping them as a community group, not the library.” (P27)

### 7.3.2 Services and resources

The library as a provider of services to the community, including computing and IT provision, were the main themes to surface during the phase 1 discussions about services and resources. This included both where users felt that there was adequate provision of services, and also in libraries where it was felt that resources were lacking. The above comment from participant 27 illustrates the frustration in their particular situation. The perceived learning and educational values of the local authority do not match the expectations of local library users (in Lincoln). This disjoin can also be seen with regard to resources and services provided by the library. The Lincoln participants observed a more commercial model of delivering services was in place, one in which community groups need to be self-sufficient and pay for the rooms and the spaces which they access, and this had been very negatively received:

“We've brought in so much diversity and new people into this library and yet now they are talking about charging us for using the space. Charging us

for doing community work that they should be doing! They don't see that if they don't support us, we'll have to go elsewhere for support." (P28)

Community engagement and serving the local community are regarded as essential functions and roles of the modern 21<sup>st</sup> century library, and is further validated with similar observations from the Liverpool and Tiverton focus groups:

"I've always been a social animal, and the library allows me to do that... bringing groups together and joining people up. Supermarkets have ruined the pub for example and more and more people think it's acceptable to be antisocial, like the Royle family, and if you take away libraries that will get even worse. You won't be able to get together, people won't be able to read, or spell, or express themselves... Keep on taking away these pillars of society and community will break down." (P49)

The feeling that the public library should offer and provide these social functions was also strong in Sutton, Newcastle and Chelmsford. However, at Chelmsford there was also some counter argument about local authorities not taking full responsibility for such provision:

"I go along with what you say about the library being a tolerant place and a safe place, but some of this has come about by default in libraries with regard to the whole community care issue. In a sense it has pushed the problem away from where it was. It works most of the time, but is there a limit as to what the library can actually support? There may come a time when you ask is that really what we want?" (P 23)

There was limited discussion about the role of the library in a digital society, but where this did occur findings suggest that it is support and internet provision which are regarded as more important than access to digital information resources. For example, the Redbridge participants entered into a conversation about the provision of computers and WiFi as being a function of the library, enabling digital activity, learning and inclusion:

“When I’m doing homework or a project I save things to my [laptop] hard drive. When I take pictures they stay on my phone and then I use the WiFi here to upload them onto Snapchat... but fiddling around with Bluetooth or Dropbox... I don’t have the time or energy for that.” (P30)

The Redbridge library users value the access they have to the Internet, to computer hardware and to WiFi and have developed their own digital behaviours to work with the different provisions in their own learning environments (e.g. the library, home and at school). Users demonstrate high degrees of digital competency, but not necessarily digital literacy or understanding of digital safety. This may be indicative of a modern generation of library users and reveals a potential demand for services and resources to support digital literacy and digital citizenship.

### 7.3.3 Support

In considering the role of the public library, the phase 1 focus groups discussed the place of professional library staff within the system and acknowledged that an expert level of professional support is necessary for a library to function. The phase 1 reflections also included notions of expecting and receiving a ‘reference service’ from the library and an understanding that librarians are pivotal to this. Five of the phase 2 focus groups generated further discussion about the staff support expected from a modern public library service. Users want support in using the variety of services, facilities and resources that they have access to. This includes understanding how to find and access information and knowledge, signposting, encouraging and facilitating community learning and development initiatives and support for using digital services and resources.

Library users at Tiverton and Chelmsford acknowledged that the staff help them to use the Internet for searching for information and resources and referred to this in the context of the ‘information revolution’ or the ‘information age’. Participants explained that they view the provision of such support as part of the role of the public library:

“It’s good for society and we want access to information. If you have a library with skilled people working in it then you have possibilities. Without

this the library is not a library and will close down. How would you know how to get the information, with the way that the information revolution is going?" (P52)

In addition to providing access and support for digital information and resources, library users at Chelmsford acknowledged a broader role of the library in providing Internet access for basic communications functions in a citizenship context:

"It's a place that you can connect with others within a small sphere as well as in a global sphere. The Internet, the World Wide Web is just that and the library needs to be facilitating that in the modern world. It cannot call itself a library unless it allows people to connect electronically. It's good that we can do it face to face in the library, but people need wider communication for that and there should be training in the library to enable that communication." (P24)

Staff competency and confidence in delivering information and community services effectively was considered in some of the focus groups. In some locations this was seen as an area where improvements need to be made, particularly in the Lincoln focus group, and to a lesser extent at Newcastle and Sutton. During the Lincoln focus group one participant stated that she empathised with the staff, suggesting that the library itself was lacking the vision to expand the roles of the library staff in order that they can confidently deliver the services and support that modern library users require:

"Once you get through the initial slight bafflement of 'oh I'm being spoken to' which you do get, you find the staff can be really lovely. When they are at their desks they keep their heads down and try not make eye contact with you, but when you do ask a question there is a kind of surprise 'rabbit in the headlights' moment. These are people who have trained to be librarians, but really they now need to be more like social workers." (P25)

Participant 25 suggested that the incompetency of the staff ultimately leads to them feeling unhappy in their work and subsequently has an adverse effect on their attitudes and behaviours. By way of illustrating this she provided a further, specific

example of an occasion when her [white] daughter had declared that she ‘doesn’t like brown children’ stemming from a falling out she had had with another child in her class. She went to the library to try to get some resources and some support in order to address this:

“... so I went to ask if they have any books for children to deal with white superiority complexes in children, and fair enough, that was ‘rabbit in the headlights’ moment, but I was asking for help, and for them to support me with the issues that I am facing.... I wanted books written from a white child’s perspective, but they had nothing and I just got a ‘gosh, why would you even ask me that’ kind of response from the staff.” (P25)

Critical discussions about staff support are significant for these findings as they demonstrate that participants are identifying that professional, welcoming, competent, confident staff support is an expectation of the role of the public library.

#### 7.4 Phase 3 focus groups (2017-2018) RQ3

At the beginning of the phase 3 focus groups participants were specifically asked to consider their library activities and engagement in the context of the generation and exchange of capital. Participants were also introduced to the idea of the Information Society and asked to reflect what their expectations of public libraries are within an Information Society context. This proved to be an effective framework through which to discuss public library use and the role of the modern public library.

General feelings about the values of the public library within UK society emerged in phase 3, with participants now able to join up different elements of the library and acknowledge the holistic library system as one that provides opportunities for learning, is inclusive in all that it offers, and is seen as a fundamental British institution, a basic right of UK citizenship. A comment made by one of the Chelmsford participants captures some of the essence of this:

“We talk about British values but I honestly think that libraries are central to British identity in a way that is unspoken, that we won’t really truly value until they are gone... one of those great unsung values!” (P24)

This sentiment was shared amongst all the focus groups with a sense that the role of UK public library is to enable British citizenship through effectively performing all of its other key functions and roles. During phase 3 participants were able to contextualise their own engagement with the library and their own resulting development as citizens in a more meaningful way than they had before.

#### 7.4.1 Learning and development

The provision of knowledge and information through a blend of print and electronic media had been widely discussed during phases 1 and 2. The role of the library as ‘knowledge provider’ continued to come over strongly in phase 3, and was still arguably regarded as the primary function of the public library. However, several sub themes emerged.

Firstly, the library is seen as a consistent and continuous presence in individuals’ lives and their communities and as such are often cited as being centres for ‘lifelong learning’, a place to go for learning at any and every stage of life. At Sutton, participants reflected upon wherever they might go in life, or wherever they access formal learning (e.g. school, college, university) they will always have a familiar reference point of the public library in order to continue learning at times in their life to suit them. The library was also championed as providing continuity in respect of the values of lifelong learning, in contrast to the ever changing infrastructure of formal education in the UK:

Figure 1 “One time, lifelong learning was about being life-enhancing, but then it became about being vocational and had to have targets and outcomes. The library is able to sustain those values, while all around other channels have to justify themselves.” (P43)

A second sub-theme to emerge is the authority of the public library, particularly within the Information Society, or rather the authority of the information resources

contained within the library. This was the case for participants at Redbridge when they discussed their use of resources in the library:

“To be a citizen, you have to have knowledge about politics, democracy, the economy and the law. So the library is great to find out about this stuff. Whether you pick up a book, or you go on the Internet you can explore these areas.” (P37)

At Sutton, similar discussion took place about using the library to inform oneself, particularly in an environment where ‘fake news’ is prevalent:

“Using the library gives me two sides to every argument. I can find out different points of view through using the papers and the reports that we have here. I don’t just jot one thing down to disseminate... it’s not a singular perspective.” (P41)

Discussion in Edinburgh also revealed some expectations of the authority of information derived through library usage, although there was an acknowledgement of being able to access information both through print and electronic media:

“I still love reading newspapers, but the younger generations are much more focused on computer-based information. They can get a lot more information on any item. It looks like newspapers are destined to go and we’ll probably be relying on the Internet, but I think there is a danger. News is summarised these days so that it fits online, but you become dependent on the guy who has summarised it. You don’t know how selective he might have been” (P15)

The notion of trusting the library as an authority within the modern, digital world was significant for all the focus groups, and a third sub-theme re-emerged regarding the primacy of print in the library delivering its epistemic role. There was still a general belief, in phase 3, that print material is more credible and more reliable than digital information and participants from all focus groups justified

their reliance on print over electronic media, as is illustrated through the excerpt from the Sutton discussions:

“Yes, there is so much information on the Internet, so people have started to think ‘what else is there?’ and I’m seeing somewhere along the line the digital age becoming sort of smaller.” (P41)

“Yeah, I think books have become the primary information. Everyone thought it would be e-books, but now it’s swung the other way and people have gone back.” (P44)

In the Liverpool focus group, participants continued to justify the physicality of the book as being a factor in how they choose to access information:

“...I love to feel books and I love going home with a big pile of books.” (P7)

“Yes and having them spread out. I’ve got a big coffee table and I like to see them on there when I come home from work.” (P8)

The Tiverton participants agreed that having books available to them in the library had been a significant part of their life experience and that without them they would not have read as much, and ultimately not have learned as much as they had throughout their lives. A different viewpoint was presented by Redbridge participants as to why provision of print books is deemed important. The younger members of the focus group reflected:

“I think my generation is slowly moving away from reading. We don’t read as much as we used to because we have it all online, but if we keep putting everything on the Internet people will forget what a book is and why it’s important. Because that’s where it all came from originally. It started with writing things on paper, and if we forget that then books will just disappear.” (P31)

#### 7.4.2 Services and resources

Lengthy discussions during the first two phases of focus groups generated insight into the services and resources that library users regard as important and this includes the provision of IT services, facilitating social interactions between users

and ensuring that the whole community is served by the library. The library has a significant role to play in providing services and spaces to the community and this continued to come through strongly in phase 3. This was seen as a positive attribute of libraries and another key role of the modern public library. One observation from Sutton conveys this sentiment:

“Some libraries definitely seem to encourage the social side of things... for example calling one of their libraries ‘The Life Centre’ tends to imply that.”  
(P42)

The focus around the Information Society in phase 3 also helped participants to contextualise what it means to deliver community-oriented services to library users. For participant 24 this was important in order to avoid and prevent social isolation of individuals within their communities:

“One of the negatives about social media and the information overload that we have is that we become highly individualised and isolated. Although we think we are connected physically, we’re actually quite isolated. So, the library allows you to access the information but to do it in a community setting, in a human setting, in a tangible and sustainable setting, so that you are still living and breathing it... it’s not just virtual. It keeps me grounded and connected to real life.” (P24)

Observations at Lincoln suggest that the community service delivery in libraries has taken over and the balance of provision is not equal. Whilst acknowledging that the library needs to deliver both knowledge and community services, one of the Lincoln participants felt that the infrastructure was not appropriately enabled to do this. Her criticism was that whilst library books and librarians were still provided, the demands of the users had changed and that the need for community oriented services, access to IT and professional support were higher than the need for traditional library services:

“My feeling was that, although you were walking into a room full of books, they were actually incidental. It looked like a library and felt like a library, but from a support point of view it was people coming in and using the

computers and job seeking and stuff. They weren't there to use a traditional library." (P25)

A final finding with regard to a service role of the library is simply to publicise itself. This came across in Liverpool, Newcastle, Lincoln and Tiverton and there was a feeling that libraries do not do enough to effectively promote exactly what they offer to the public and that if they did then expectations would be managed better and usage of the library might be higher:

"This facility open to all, but does everybody know that it is open to all? I don't know that they do. I don't know how they do their publicity, but they could be doing a lot more." (P26)

### 7.4.3 Support

The value of professional support and having access to a skilled library workforce came though during the first phases of the focus groups. In phase 3 however, whilst library staff were still included in discussions, several observations were also made about peer support from fellow library users. There were some positive experiences at Redbridge Libraries where digitally aware and technically expert library users were deployed as volunteer 'digital champions' to help to provide support to less digitally proficient library users:

"It was good to support the older generation as a digital champion. I found it a really valuable experience and I would definitely do it again. That's citizenship happening right there because you actually start the exchange of knowledge through supporting other people." (P31)

Where high levels of support are available, user expectations are set and libraries are accordingly responsive. However, as much can be learned from the support that libraries are unable to offer, and examples from Newcastle and Lincoln illustrate that the actual support delivered does not match the expectation of the library user. The Newcastle participants felt that there had been a detrimental change in respect of provision of staff support in their local libraries:

"It's just such a different atmosphere now. Apparently they got rid of 40% of the books when they brought in the Citizens Advice Bureau and the

Customer Service Hub, and I do just feel that when you go in now it's very sad. I hesitate to ask for help now because I sense that they are quite defensive, probably because they got a lot of flak from people because they can't provide the services that they used to." (P10)

These findings validate similar findings from phase 2. Participants have clear expectations as to the breadth and thoroughness of support that they require from their library service, and this includes the levels and quality of support provided through library staff.

#### 7.4.4 Capital *Social capital*

Through being at the 'heart of the community' library users have an expectation that they will interact with other people and build networks through using the library. Friendships and friendship groups, formed in the library, have been sustained, and subsequently are regarded as important socialisation for those experiencing them. One of the Sutton participants shared her experiences of friendship and networks that she had found through her reading group:

"Well we don't just talk about the books, we talk about films and people, and sometimes one or two of us might go to the theatre. We don't talk about politics, because it's best to stay away from that, but I see them once a month and it's nice to meet up and sometimes I might go for a coffee with one of them and have a chat. We discuss a lot of things that are going on in the world." (P44)

The discussion at Sutton took this notion of the library enabling social networks and social capital further. When thinking about what it means to be able to meet with and be with other people in a society where individuals are inundated and overwhelmed by information the group began to consider elements of pluralism in the library:

"I feel that the Information Society, to a certain extent is social and allows you to keep in touch with different people. But in another sense it is isolationist and you become completely involved in your own world. I'm

thinking of my autistic nephew. He can't access the normal interactions of his age group, and my mother who is elderly and does not use the Internet much. The library has provided them both with a space where they can interact with people." (P43)

In this particular instance the library is an important social space, where it is important that citizens feel safe, involved, included and part of society. This alone becomes a significant role for the modern public library.

### *Human capital*

A final example of capital exchange comes from the Chelmsford focus group, where participant 24 acknowledged that the human element and transactions which occur in the library have, for her, become a fundamental part her benefitting from her library usage. On arguing for the future of the library she said:

"There are one thousand reasons why we need libraries and maybe one of them is because we are always going to depend on human capital, and it is always going to generate social capital. You can do the information bit, and get the vast majority of information in other ways, but in the library you are always going to have to connect with human beings. We are humans and we need to be reminded of that. So every time I interact with staff, or other people in the library, I am reminded that I belong to the human race. The library is not just a machine and I'm not part of a mechanical world. It's an organic world." (P24)

## 7.5 Conclusion

The analysis of the data from every focus group discussion can be used when drawing conclusions to research question 3 about the role of 21<sup>st</sup> century public library. Synthesis of the focus group findings has allowed for trends to be observed around the expectations of active library users within the contexts of citizenship and the Information Society. Each focus group discussion has broadly been about how citizens use public libraries, which has shaped their perceptions as to the role of the modern day library.

The epistemic role and function of the library is achieved through a series of platforms, not least the provision of and access to information and knowledge resources, such as books, journals and IT facilities. Participants acknowledge that they are living in a digital information age, but in reality, this appears to have increased their reliance and trust of print media, and one of the fundamental roles of the library remains that of providing information in print. Noticeably during phase 3, participants were able to justify this stance more than they were earlier and the primacy of print and its association with literacy and lifelong learning have remained dominant themes throughout all three phases of focus groups. Provision of IT and digital resources is also expected as part of the library's role, but library users do not necessarily relate provision of IT as fundamental to the library contributing to learning and development. Instead the provision of IT and access to the Internet is seen as tool to enable participation or provide access to other services (e.g. job search, community information, renewing library books) rather than as a channel of quality information. These findings therefore suggest that the 21<sup>st</sup> century library has a fundamental epistemic role alongside one of enabling digital inclusion.

Libraries are expected to be inclusive and accessible to all and this is another fundamental element of libraries being able to provide services for the communities which they serve. Being part of a community is seen as being advantageous to both individuals and to the communities themselves, enriching people's lives and enabling networks and exchanges to take place in libraries. There is a real sense that part of what makes a community is its library, and that engaging with the library (and therefore the community) is a symbol of citizenship. For this reason, users expect libraries to have a community focused vision and mission and there is a feeling amongst active library users that libraries need to promote themselves and reach out to their communities, particularly those on the margins. These findings suggest that the public library has a significant community role, and in enabling citizenship also plays a local political role within the community.

Research question 3 asks what is the role of the 21<sup>st</sup> century public library in the United Kingdom? The findings conclude that there are three main roles which the

modern library plays: an epistemic role; a community role; a political role. Library users engage in the library in different ways making use of one or more of these three library roles, depending upon the outcome they want from their library use. The following chapter discusses each of the three roles separately and in more detail in order to contribute to a greater understanding of the holistic role of the public library in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Information Society.

## 8. Discussion

### 8.1 Introduction

Three distinct, but interrelated roles of the public library service in the United Kingdom have emerged as a result of the analysis of the research findings: epistemic; societal; political. All three roles have been shown to be significant in the way that libraries enable citizenship and in the way that the public library is used within the information society. In this respect, the boundaries between the three roles are often blurred.

In this chapter the research findings are discussed in relation to the theories of the information society (See section 2.5.1, p. 39), the societal value of public libraries (See section 2.3.2, p. 26) and capital exchange (See section 2.7.1, page. 51).

Subsequently the thesis makes a contribution to knowledge and understanding of how public libraries are used in the United Kingdom in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The chapter is divided into three sections, each addressing one of the aforementioned roles of the public library, presenting several sub-themes for discussion under each.

### 8.2 The epistemic role of the public library

Historically, the role of the public library in the United Kingdom was fundamentally an epistemic one, enabling libraries to be places of learning and emancipation (See section 2.2, p. 18). The results of the empirical study presented in this thesis show that public library users still consider that the primary function of the modern-day library is to provide access to information and knowledge. This is evident in the findings where the role of the public library was discussed (See section 5.2.1, p. 139; section 5.3.1, p. 147; section 5.4.1, p. 153). The focus group discussions around how users are advantaged through their public library use also pointed towards the provision of information and knowledge (See section 6.2.1, p. 162; section 6.3.1, p. 170). This traditional picture of 'library', prevails, and is validated in much of the LIS literature (See section 2.2.1, pp. 19 - 22). Such literature positions the education and knowledge roles of the public library as continuing to be high priority areas in which libraries should be functioning. These observations are important in analysing the research findings in that where library users (i.e. the focus group participants) speak about a love of books, of reading and of gaining new knowledge

they are effectively acknowledging a whole range of reading materials, and the epistemic role of the public library, without actually referring to it. The research method used a particular line of enquiry to provoke discussion about the topic of learning and development. The questioning was designed so that individuals' lived experience of learning and development in the library could be shared amongst the focus group. Similarly, the discussion allowed individuals to reflect upon how they had acquired and used information and knowledge for their own personal gain and for the benefit of the community. Whilst the provision and use of books and printed monographs was an ever recurring theme, the research fieldwork also revealed other essential elements which enable the public library to fulfil its epistemic function such as: IT infrastructure (See section 7.2.3, p. 190); staff support (See section 5.2.3, p. 147; section 5.3.2, p. 151); facilitation of groups (See section 6.2.3, p. 167) and exchanges of intangible capital (See section 5.3.3, pages 151 – 153; section 5.4.2, pages 154 – 158; section 6.4.4, pages 180 – 184). This latter point includes the generation and exchange of intellectual and social capital through library usage. Similarly, when looking at the knowledge and information functions of the public library, particular attention should be given to the information society context of this thesis. Where the information society literature focuses on information consumption and the public library as a definite public sphere, the LIS literature tends to consider the role of the library in the generation and exchange of knowledge and information. These are all fundamental elements of the epistemic role of the library within the information society.

The topic of books and print resources dominated many discussions during the first two phases of focus groups and subsequently is a useful sub-theme to use as a framework in discussing the epistemic role of the 21st century public library.

### 8.2.1 Books and print resources

Having access to print resources and to books in particular, is an experience shared by *all* public library users who participated in the empirical study. This is evidenced in the phase one and two focus group findings (See section 5.2.1, pages 139 – 142; section 6.2.1, p. 162 - 165), and as such is seen as a fundamental function of the library. Whilst this sounds like an obvious concept, it becomes all the more

significant within the current public library climate. The traditional notion of the library as a place to access and borrow books has been tested over the last decade as the number of visits to public libraries and the number of books loans has decreased significantly (See section 2.4.3, p. 34). Decreasing circulation figures are regarded as underperformance by a service, the core traditional purpose of which, has been perceived as relating to borrowing books. However, in a society where more and more information is published digitally, disseminated immediately and likely never to appear in print, this decline in circulation is an inevitable consequence of the 21st century information society in which we live. In order to counter this perceived decline in print usage, public libraries have subsequently promoted other elements of the public library service in order to offset this (e.g. access to computers, to digital resources, to social groups, etc.) This is due in part to the recent advocacy for promoting and facilitating access to digital information and resources as articulated in some of the recent policy and strategy documentation, as discussed in chapter two (See section 2.4.1, p. 33). The 'universal offers' discussed are focused on, and arguably heavily weighted towards libraries delivering cultural enhancement, digital inclusion and health and wellbeing missions to their communities. Therefore, many commentators are currently arguing that in response to the media-reported existential crisis, public libraries are now re-inventing themselves to offer and provide a much greater breadth, depth and variety of services and facilities in order to respond to the needs of individual citizens and the community (See section 2.4.4, p. 35).

The findings of this doctoral research, however, present quite a different picture. This one is of a library culture, where library users are still very reliant on their libraries providing them with books. The consensus from the findings suggests that library users expect libraries to provide them with access to information and knowledge, and still see printed books as the predominant vehicle for doing this (See 7.2.1, p. 188). While the focus group participants acknowledged the other offers and services from the library, they generally kept returning to the access and provision of print and to books as their main reasons for visiting libraries. When asked to consider their experiences, feelings and attitudes towards libraries, all

participants in all focus groups talked about the library being the place where they access, borrow and read books (See section 5.2.1, pages 139 - 118). This was the first thing that participants thought about, with regard to their public library usage, and was a strong recurrent theme in all focus group discussions throughout the three phases. Whilst library users acknowledge and fully appreciate the other community, societal, digital and cultural offers that their libraries provide to them, they were never the priority focus of the research participants when asked to discuss the library. The initial focus was always books, the joy of reading and the library being a place of learning. These library users associate books with knowledge and the research participants often spoke about being 'surrounded by knowledge' when in the library (See section 5.2.1, pages 139 - 118). This tangible knowledge, delivered through print formats, becomes integral to individuals and groups developing themselves through learning and knowledge exchange. Libraries are used to 'find things out', to 'satisfy curiosity', to study, to complement or consolidate learning done elsewhere and access to books and print resources is essential to all of this activity.

### 8.2.2 Resilience of print

For printed information resources to be resilient in a digital age, there must be attributes about them which appeal to a critical mass of library users. One such attribute, mentioned in some of the literature around digital inclusion is the appeal of print to older citizens (See section 2.4.1, p. 33) and subsequently digital media being accessed predominantly by younger citizens. Some of the research findings do suggest that the younger generations of library users are more likely to be the users of digital platforms, particularly social media platforms. This came through some of the focus group discussions conducted for this study. However, there does not appear to be any difference in demand for print resources and printed books within a library context. The findings suggest that library users of all ages like to read books, and to use them as a vehicle for accessing information. Focus group participants of all ages confirmed this to be the case and printed books continue to be the main resource in respect of libraries providing access to information and knowledge. The research shows acknowledgement of libraries providing more e-books, and some of the (older) research participants spoke of how they make use of

such resources, but always to supplement use of print resources, never instead of (See section 7.3.1, p. 193).

Printed newspapers also appear to demonstrate some resilience in public libraries. Newspapers such as the *London Evening Standard* and the *Metro* are now exclusively freely available, and are distributed to millions of UK citizens every day (Mayhew, 2019). Such publications provide a mix of local, national and international news in both print and online formats. In response, some mainstream British newspapers have switched to a hybrid model of publication, with significant amounts of content being made available online for free. However, the research findings suggest that there is still demand in the library for those newspapers that have not been made freely available in print format. Indeed, there is also demand for those that have been made available for free. Access to printed newspapers, as well magazines, was often cited during the focus groups, and regarded as a vital means of receiving up to date information (See sections 7.4.1, p. 200).

The research findings identify a number of reasons as to why print continues to be resilient within the digital age, and these will be elaborated upon below as part of this discussion. The perpetual increase of available information in the world is a key concept of information society studies. The continual production of information and the impact this has on those who consume it is at the core of several information society models, such as Feather's technological and social models (See section 2.5.2, pages 41 - 42), Duff's normative theory of the information society (See section 2.5.3.1, p. 43) and Whitworth's information obesity thesis (See section 2.5.3.1, p. 44). The role that printed resources, and in particular printed library collections become significant in this environment. In a society where citizens become overwhelmed by the amount of information available to them, a discrete tangible, printed collection, which can be seen and touched on the shelves of a library, becomes an instant filter for navigating the volume of information available. For the participants of this research, the library collections represent a particular type of information. In effect public library users are arguing that print resources are needed more and more, precisely because of the digital information explosion.

Many of the participants spoke of their social media usage, and the type of information they would consume through interactions on their digital platforms. This included news and current affairs, information about events and activities that they might be involved in, communications with friends and family, etc. generally speaking, such information was regarded by the participants as 'different' to that which they can access through print resources at the library. Indeed, some participants also acknowledged their own increasing use of and familiarity with online library resources, including electronic books, magazines and journals (See section 7.4.1, p. 199). However, the enthusiasm with which participants spoke about using their printed library collections dominated. When accessing printed materials in the library they feel that they are engaging with and navigating the information available to them, in a safe, authentic environment (See section 7.2.1, pages 188 - 190). Subsequently they become knowledgeable and well-informed and satisfied that the library has provided the information they required, or answered the questions that they had. Subsequently library users learn and develop themselves and the library continues to fulfil its epistemic function.

Both the LIS and information society literature both present narrative about how perpetual information generation lead to digital poverty and exclusion (See section 2.5.3.2, pages 45 - 46). The discussions often associated this with generational differences or socio-economic circumstances as affecting how citizens easily and readily accessing digital information. However, the research participants represented a diversity of ages and socio-economic backgrounds, yet none would claim to be 'information-poor'. On the contrary, having access to printed resources alongside digital resources heightened their sense of being 'information rich' and having access to the resources which help them to acquire knowledge.

In the current economic climate, where libraries are expanding their offer, there is an undercurrent in the media and the literature that the epistemic role of the library is diminishing as libraries increasingly become 'much more than about books' (See section 2.4, p. 31). Where there is an acknowledgement of the library's epistemic and information the narrative suggests that this will now be predominantly digital. However, for the participants involved in this doctoral

research, books are a major contributing factor to what makes a library a library. Digital libraries and paperless libraries do indeed exist in other sectors (i.e. academic libraries, corporate libraries) but it would appear that public libraries need to sustain and perhaps further develop a critical mass of quality, print resources in order to fulfil the expectations of their users.

The following sub-sections consider some of the reasons, as evidenced in the empirical research, that printed information resources have remained resilient throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century digital information explosion.

#### *8.2.2.1 Credibility of printed resources over digital resources*

In the report of the research findings there are several instances of library users suggesting that printed information is generally regarded as more credible than digital information (See section 5.2.2, p. 145). The overwhelming amount of information generated and disseminated through social media channels and digital platforms, can account for some of this perception, as well as an increased understanding of fake news and ever increasing volume of user generated content available. Information society models and research suggest that citizens can be phased or overwhelmed when consuming and trying to navigate digital information. There appears to be a general sense that citizens become anxious if asked to rely exclusively on digital information resources (See section 2.5.3.1, pages 43 - 44). Some of the research findings specifically cite fake news as a reason to be cautious about information sourced from the Internet. The general increased awareness of online misinformation and fake news has led several of the research participants to generally mistrust digital information. There are several studies which validate this in respect of trusting printed news and current affairs over online news and current affairs (See section 2.5.3.1, p. 44), but in the case of the focus group participants in this research, such mistrust has extended to all digital information. Whilst levels of social media usage differed between different focus group users (e.g. younger participants tended to refer to social media as an information resource more than older participants), the understanding of the credibility of user generated content was the same. Even those younger participants who were active social media users comprehended the aspect of fake

news and how information accessed through social media needs to be consumed critically (see section 7.4.1, p. 200)

There was an acceptance amongst the focus group participants, that information provided in print, regardless of how it is published, is more reliable and credible than that provided online (in any format). This includes print books and extends to newspapers and community and local information leaflets as well. Library users assume that the print media, made available through the library has greater validity than similar information found through online searching or social media (See section 5.2.2, p. 145). There is also a perception that if a public library has chosen to acquire particular stock, then they have acted as an 'authority filter' and this certifies the quality and credibility of the resource. This issue of credibility is one of the aspects that assures the resilience of print in a digital world. This also means that the library, in fulfilling its epistemic mission, is seen as a gatekeeper to quality of information as well as quantity, both fundamental roles of the library as public sphere within the information society theories.

This has implications for a public library service in fulfilling its epistemic role within a digital information society. Libraries provide access to credible, trustworthy information, but if public library users are saying that such credibility is only guaranteed through print, then libraries need to respond and ensure that they continue to collect and make available print resources, in order that their users can effectively navigate the digital information society. Public libraries also need to justify and account for their spending on information resources, and responding to this demand for print, alongside digital is not sustainable. The counter argument, posed in the literature is that it is the libraries role to provide library users with critical information literacy skills in order that they themselves can discern between credible and untrustworthy digital information (See section 2.5.3.1, p. 44).

However, digital information is not new and the attitudes towards it demonstrated by the majority of the focus group participants have been built up over several years, to the point that their resultant behaviours (as to how they access print and digital and discern between the two) are now engrained. As public spheres, public libraries need to be able to respond to this, acknowledging that library users'

perceptions of the credibility of printed information is valid and their reliance on 'trustworthy' printed comes as a direct result of the information society in which we live.

### *8.2.2.2 Accessibility of printed books*

According to the focus group participants, the actual format of the printed book is seen as being accessible to all, making it the preferred channel of disseminating information (See section 7.4.1, p. 201). Books continue to be regarded as vehicles for providing access to information within the information society, even when considering the implications of this in the digital age and the cost of publishing in hybrid formats. The printed book remains a universal common format, and individuals do not have to have any levels of digital or IT literacy in order to interact with a book. Whilst digital publishing has transformed access to information and digital inclusion continues to be a desired outcome of the public library system in the United Kingdom, the printed book is still seen as the most accessible and inclusive information technology by the focus group participants. This is even more the case when considering access to literacy and language learning, with several of the focus group participants expressing strong feelings that this should primarily be achieved through the provision and use of printed resources (See section 5.2.1, pages 141 - 142). Whilst 21st century children might be immersed in digital information and technology from a very young age, there is still an expectation that they need to learn to read (from books) before they can interact with text on a computer (See section 2.4.1, p. 33). Books continue to be used to teach and enable literacy in schools and there is a demand for enabling access to books for this purpose. This demand has sustained, with children's libraries still playing a fundamental role in the provision and access to books for literacy and language learning (See section 5.2.1, p. 141 – 141). This is discussed in some of the literature about the educational role of the public library (See section 2.4.4, p. 36) and is validated further through the research findings. Children's librarianship and access to children's libraries has not specifically been questioned during the recent public library crisis in the United Kingdom. The provision of books for children and reading initiatives are accepted as fundamental library services and have sustained, even

through the introduction of the wider universal offers. The literacy agenda occupies a valuable space in the library's epistemic mission and whilst it remains a priority for education policy makers, it will continue to be a necessary function of the library (See section 7.3.1, p. 194). It could be argued that literacy and learning to read are the first stages of enabling citizens to navigate the information society and this, in itself, is a vital part of the epistemic role of the public library. This is achieved, in part by making books accessible, yet at later stages of this journey, there is an unspoken expectation that citizens need to switch to consuming digital information. However, the findings of the empirical work, suggest that this is not done willingly by library users, and as they are in the habit of using printed books, and books continue to be accessible, they continue to be the format of choice (See section 7.4.1, p. 201).

Another contributing factor to this requirement for books to be accessible is the demand for dual language books, both for adults and children, in order to accommodate and provide appropriate resources for bi-lingual citizens and for citizens whose first language is not English. This is another specific example from the empirical findings that suggests that public library users find books to be a particularly accessible information technology (See section 5.2.1, pages 141 - 142).

Similarly, as a universally understood concept, the printed book becomes even more accessible to those citizens who do not have access to IT at home, or do not have the required levels of digital literacy, or even those citizens, whose first language is not English and can therefore not navigate technology because of a language barrier. In an information society, where the critical mass of digital information production results in such information inequalities, the library as a public sphere has a responsibility to redress this through making relevant information available and accessible through books and print media. Accessibility is therefore another contributing factor, along with credibility, in explaining how public library users need and expect to have access to print in order to operate in the information society.

### *8.2.2.3 Tradition and sentiment towards printed books*

Sentimental factors also contribute to the resilience of the printed book and this is due in part to library users' memories and experiences of using books. Many of the focus group participants reflected fondly upon their formative interactions with the public library, usually in childhood, where they would be introduced to the library for the first time and encouraged to browse and read the books contained within. Such memories tended to come from the older generation of participants and it was not uncommon during the early stages of the empirical research to hear, possibly exaggerated, but none the less, colourful and inspirational stories of how being able to read and then borrow library books opened doors to never ending adventures and fantasies as children (See section 7.2.1, p. 188).

As part of the story telling, during the focus groups, participants claimed that having access to library books helped them to learn to read and later on enabled opportunities for learning and development. This traditional and sentimental view of libraries sustains and was shared by the younger members of the research focus groups (See section 5.2.2, p. 145 - 146). Section 8.2.2.2 discussed how the accessibility of books in libraries enables literacy, and in the context of sentimentality this links through to provoking sentimental childhood memories about learning to read. Children's use of the public library and learning to read there, eventually becomes the citizen's fond memory of the public library and an association with the books that they read as a child. It is this sentiment that is one of the contributing factors to the resilience of print. Therefore, even in an environment where the number of libraries in the UK is diminishing, and circulation of books decreasing, whilst focused initiatives on reading and literacy continue to be delivered with children in mind, then the sentimental and traditional view of libraries and books will sustain, which in turn is a contributing factor to the resilience of print.

### *8.2.2.4 Aesthetics and browsing*

The physical format of the book was frequently referred to by the focus group participants when discussing access to the library and to information. Active library users often described the sensation of empowerment and opportunity when

surrounded by printed books and enjoying the sight and smell of books (See section 7.4.1, p. 201). The size and shape of books, as handheld objects of information and knowledge was commented upon, as was the ease with which readers can ‘flick through’ the pages of a book. This was also mentioned in relation to making use of printed text over electronic text, and some of the research participants perceived it as being easier to have several books open at specific pages, in front of them, than it is to have multiple digital resources, opened in separate windows on a computer screen. Similarly, mention was made of being able to have books open at specific sections on coffee tables in order to provoke curiosity (see section 7.4.1, p. 201). These aspects are all aesthetic advantages of print books which subsequently contribute to their resilience.

A commonly cited advantage of print books over their electronic counterparts, is that of the serendipity of browsing and a perception that this cannot be achieved online as it can in a physical library. Many of the focus group participants demonstrated this behaviour and frequently referred to being able to browse books on shelves to find information, and to enjoy having their trains of thought interrupted by the discovery of another title on a given subject (See section 5.2.2, p. 145). Making judgements on the relevance and appropriateness of a book by looking at the cover, ‘flicking through’ or reading the synopsis information on the back cover of a book were all regarded as advantages of browsing printed books. Arguably such serendipity and browsing is also afforded online but it is the physicality and aesthetic of the book, which library users are comfortable browsing (See section 2.2, p. 18). This is also a contributing factor to the resilience of the printed book, and user behaviours and attitudes towards books and their use of books have gone some way in determining this.

#### *8.2.2.5 The continued primacy of print*

A combination of all the above mentioned reasons (i.e. accessibility, credibility, aesthetics, navigability, tradition and sentiment) means that the printed book remains a resilient and sustainable platform through which knowledge and information can be obtained and exchanged. In the original and traditional emancipatory public libraries of the 19th century, the business of libraries was to

provide access to books, manuscripts and periodicals (See section 2.2, pages 18 – 19). It is only during the latter half of the 20th century that other media were included in the public library offer (e.g. film and music recordings) and then even more recently where libraries have truly diversified to offer a plethora of additional and complementary services and functions (See section 2.4.4, pages 35 – 36). Throughout their history, there has remained an expectation that the public library will provide access to printed information resources and that this access continues to be the primary access route to information (See section 5.5, p. 159). The findings of this doctoral study validate this and provide evidence that this expectation is as current today as it has ever been. This resilience and primacy of print is a significant observation with regard to the role of the public library in delivering its epistemic outcomes, particularly with in respect of its role as a public sphere within the information society.

Whilst the discussion has focused on attributes of the printed format contributing to its resilience, these are only fully realised when taking into account the information seeking behaviours and attitudes of those making use of them. The perceptions of the credibility of print, the accessibility, the sentiment and the serendipity of browsing shelves all contribute to the sustained primacy of print and this has major implications for public libraries. In the digital information society, there is an acceptance and belief, as borne out in some of the recent policy and strategic related literature that information will continue to be increasingly generated and consumed in digital formats, at the expense of print publishing. In reality, as evidenced by the research findings, this is not the case and consequently public libraries need to consider how they position themselves as public spheres in relation to collection development policies and enabling access to information.

### 8.2.3 Reference materials

The provision of reference materials or a reference collection in the public library forms part of its epistemic role and is a useful illustration of a potentially discrete print collection which demonstrates all the attributes that make print resilient: credibility; accessibility; tradition; aesthetic; serendipitous. Whilst itself, not responsible for the resilience of print, the reference collection can be regarded as a

manifest result of the resilience of print. Both the information society literature and the research findings demonstrate that users expect and need access to printed reference materials in order to get quick access to credible information and answers to questions. Reference collections, by their nature contain dictionaries, encyclopaedias, yearbooks, handbooks, directories, newspapers, etc. all of which can be obtained online, but the research findings demonstrate that library users expect to be able to access and browse these types of resources and look to the library as the place in which this element of information searching and retrieval takes place (See section 7.4.1, pages 199 - 200), with some participants referring to reference materials being fundamental to their understanding of politics, citizenship and participation (See section 5.4.2, pages 154 - 155; section 7.4.1, p. 199 - 200). In his Rawls-Tawney theorem, Duff argues that reference sections (contained in libraries) are a fundamental element of a democratic information infrastructure (Duff, 2013, p 90).

Access to information about council business, the European parliament and MP surgeries, access to reference materials for the pursuit of recreation and hobbies and being able to browse printed newspapers are all cited as relevant examples in the findings of where library users prefer to access print reference resources. Whilst all such material exists digitally as well as in print, the findings suggest that the credibility, easy access and ability to browse the printed versions of them, are the reasons for this, which in turn continues to result in the primacy of print as a format.

These examples of use of printed reference materials are intended to illustrate a particular way in which the library fulfils its epistemic function through providing print materials. What is more important to consider is that library users are looking to their libraries to provide this, and in doing so are expecting their public libraries to act as an intermediary and an aggregator in their quest for knowledge and information. This is significant in the current public library climate where less attention is given to the library's epistemic function than to some of its other functions, yet in the context of being a public sphere within the information society there appears to be more demand and more requirement than ever before.

### 8.2.5 Infrastructure (IT/networks/computers)

So far the discussion about the epistemic role of the public library has been exclusively about the primacy and resilience of print and printed information resources. However, there are several other elements which contribute to the public library fulfilling its epistemic role and holistic learning mission. The seeking and retrieval of information through books and its exchange and transformation into knowledge capital is just one of them. Libraries are known as places where information and knowledge can be generated and exchanged, and citizens frequent them because of this. In the findings of this research alone they are referred to as 'information hubs' and 'temples of knowledge' (See section 5.2.1, p. 139) and as explained in the literature review, on a very basic level are seen as a collection of books (See section 2.2.1, p. 20). However, a library is not an accidental room full of books, but a structured system, which allows information to be categorised and indexed, making the information visible and accessible in an ordered way.

Computers and the ability to be able to engineer and programme complex databases rich with sophisticated metadata and taxonomies have transformed information searching and retrieval behaviours, abilities and expectations of the citizenry. However, before the introduction of electronic information systems, libraries, and in particular public libraries were the very information systems, which allowed access to all the information available through the published word. The public library system, could itself be regarded as a monumental database system, where a wealth of information is catalogued, classified and tagged accordingly and then made available in an ordered sequence (to enable serendipitous browsing). All of this is engineered by technically expert librarians, who as well as managing the library collection, also develop the collection, by selecting and acquiring new items for the collection, and withdrawing obsolete items, in an informed and pragmatic manner. This description is of a pre-digital library, but the same could be applied to a digital library setting, where similar trained professionals work with information and knowledge assets (i.e. books and electronic resources) and make them available through metadata and automated library management systems. In either case what is being represented here is the structure of the library. The practice and science of librarianship itself is a fundamental part of the epistemic role of the

library. Without it the information contained within the library could not be searched or accessed and would remain invisible and unused. These observations are in effect an explanation of how a library system works, some elements of which are discussed in the literature about the structural capital of libraries contributing to the generation of intellectual capital (See section 2.7.1, p. 51).

The structure of the public library system and the technical infrastructure required in order for a modern public library to operate, are all elements required for the library to deliver its epistemic functions. Computers, Internet access and digital resources play an important role in enabling citizenship development in the public library in the 21st century and this was evident in the research findings. The reliance on technology and digital information resources was not as prevalent in the research findings as it was for printed resources, but it was acknowledged as a source of information and knowledge in respect of individual users' information seeking behaviour (See section 7.2.3, p. 190). Whilst there was an appreciation of the library system (i.e. in providing access to books), this did not particularly extend to the automated library system, responsible for the presence of books in the first place. Where there was an acknowledgement of this it was around the usability of the system to request books on loan at other libraries, to self-issue books and to check book availability on the catalogue. The focus of the research participants tended to be on the automated features of the library system that allowed them to borrow printed books, rather than the features enabling them access to much greater breadth and depth of electronic information through the library's electronic resource subscriptions (See section 7.2.1, p.188)

In response to the public library crisis, focus has been placed on digital inclusion and digital provision as areas in which public libraries still need to improve (See section 2.4.1, p. 33). However, public libraries have been providing access to computers and the Internet for digital learning and access to online learning resources and multimedia for many years, so it was interesting to note that Sieghart still saw this as a priority underperforming area. The research findings would suggest a general satisfaction amongst library users in respect of the digital provision afforded to them through their public libraries, although this did tend to

differ depending upon how the respective local authority prioritised digital provision. Interestingly there was no sense of digital exclusion from any of the focus group participants. On the contrary many associated their learning, development and citizenship with the digital inclusion initiatives facilitated by their libraries. Digital inclusion extends to enabling citizens to participate in society, and there was mention of this in the findings of the research. Participants referred to accessing job search clubs, accessing the library wifi, having their ipad synched, and being shown how to do something on a computer (See section 6.3.3, pages 174 – 175) but such findings were not overwhelming when compared to anecdotes about using printed resources. In some cases the digital experiences of the focus group participants were perceived as being negative on account of the staff skills gaps or reluctance to enter into a digital transaction (See section 7.2.3, p. 192; section 7.3.3, pages 197 - 198). Having said this, there was also a sincere gratitude and appreciation for digital inclusion initiatives which reach out to marginalised citizens (e.g. IT training for senior citizens) (See section 6.3.3, p. 174). This praise alongside the ambivalence towards computer and IT infrastructure, when addressed together suggest that there is now a simple expectation that public libraries provide access to computers and to digital resources, and that this is as much a part of the infrastructure as printed books on shelves, and that the overall provision is adequate in meeting the epistemic needs of the majority of library users.

The research findings point towards a modern public library environment where access to computers and IT, and digital inclusion is not perhaps the priority area for public libraries as it used to be. This is contrast to the academic literature and the policy makers, but in a society where home Internet access is common and many citizens are used to accessing digital information and resources via smartphones, there is perhaps less requirement for libraries to enable this. However, making such a statement, based solely on the research evidence, overlooks those marginalised users (e.g. those deemed to be information-poor, senior citizens, etc.) who are still reliant on accessing IT facilities in their public libraries. What does appear to be important for all citizens though is the infrastructure of the public library and the place of automated systems within this which enable information to be accessed.

This plays an important part in the generation and exchange of intellectual capital in the library and consequently in the library delivering its epistemic mission.

#### 8.2.6 The role of people in the library (transactional capital / social capital)

In the literature review, different types of exchangeable intangible capital were identified as being present in public libraries (See section 2.7, pages 51 - 52). There is a blurring of these different types of capital in the literature and this manifests itself where social, human and transactional capital are discussed and regarded as forms of intellectual capital. Similarly, the discussions about library infrastructure in section 8.2.5 (pages 222 – 225) has already identified intellectual capital (and structural capital as being part of it thereof) as being generated and exchanged in public libraries, and there is a wealth of literature that focuses exclusively on the generation of social capital in public libraries (See section 2.7.2, pages 52 - 55). Throughout the empirical work of this research, participants spoke widely about the impact that people have on their library experiences, and in particular on the learning and development opportunities afforded to them. Interactions with people in this environment fall into two distinct categories: interactions with library staff; interactions with fellow library users. In both instances the research findings produce lots of evidence of exchanges of intangible capital, and for the sake of clarity these will be identified as social capital or transactional capital, both of which can be regarded as contributing to intellectual or knowledge capital (i.e. when discussing the epistemic role of the library).

Transactions between library users and library staff are an essential part of the public library being able to fulfil its epistemic role. The research findings demonstrate that where library staff are able to help and support library users in their searching, retrieval and acquisition of knowledge and information it is always very well received and much appreciated. Technical and professional competency and confidence in supporting and assisting library users in this way is acknowledged in the research findings (e.g. in finding manuscripts, searching for information, accessing special collections, acquiring digital skills and competencies) (See section 6.4.1, p. 177 - 178; section 7.2.3, p. 190). This is also validated in some of the literature which acknowledges the exchange of human capital in developing skills

and capabilities in library users (See section 2.7.2, pages 52 - 53; section 2.7.3, pages 56 - 57)

Library staff with the ability to be able to support and assist users in accessing and using information contained within the library could be seen as part of the infrastructure of the library, but where it is effective it is much more than simple structural capital. The generation and exchange of transactional and social capital becomes evident in the discussions around the competence and confidence of library staff in providing support for the library's epistemic function. This observation is validated further through examples of where such confidence and competence does not exist. The research findings suggest that users expect library staff to be able to help them to use the library on many different levels, including searching for and finding information, support in using information technology to find information (i.e. on the Internet or using electronic resources) and in generally accessing IT. Where library staff are not perceived to be competent in this, users are critical as they have an expectation that technical and professional support is indeed part of the public library structure (See section 7.2.3, p. 192).

Where library users have less of an expectation in respect of transactional and social capital, is with other library users and where this occurs in libraries, it could be said to be accidental. The social and transactional capital shared and exchanged in these instances can have different outcomes, but some of them are epistemic, in that they contribute towards library users' gaining knowledge and information, and subsequently help them to develop skills, understanding, awareness or opinions. Examples of this from the research findings include participants' reflections on having impromptu discussions with other readers about the newspapers they were reading, or interacting with fellow library users in order to canvas opinion and obtain alternative perspectives on an issue or debate (See section 6.4.4, p. 183).

Most of the literature around the generation and exchange of social, transactional and human capital in libraries focuses more on societal outcomes rather than the epistemic outcomes of the public library service. There is less discussion concerning how such intangible capital is actually converted into intellectual capital in libraries and the impact that this has on library users. This is a significant aspect of the public

library operating as a public sphere and one that gets little attention. The findings of this doctoral study suggest that transactional and social capital exchanges are fundamental to the public library being able to deliver its epistemic mission, and in enabling library users to participate and engage intellectually with other people. As such, the roles that people play in this area of public library provision are significant when addressing how libraries develop users as citizens and need to be considered when building the different layers that allow for public libraries to achieve their epistemic roles.

### 8.2.7 The role of events and groups in the library (social capital)

Events and groups located in and facilitated by the public library help to bring people together. Subsequently they offer a clear social function and this will be addressed in more detail later in the chapter when looking at the community role of the library. However, in following on from the previous section (Section 8.2.6, pages 225 - 227) in the discussion about transactional capital, it is worth noting that groups, clubs and events held in the library also generate conversation, discussion and interaction from bringing people (often with common interests together). Where this happens then there is a likelihood that the social and transactional capital being exchanged will be converted into intellectual capital. Examples of this include book clubs and reading groups where members will share and exchange opinions and thoughts about literature (See section 5.4.2, p. 154 ; section 7.4.4, p. 204) or a discussion group, such as a Youth Parliament, facilitated to encourage political debate (See section 5.2.2, p. 146). Similarly, the actual focus group research method, used to conduct the empirical part of this doctoral research were rich in discussion and the exchange of social and transactional capital, which helped to form or consolidate opinion.

There is insufficient literature available to validate these observations of library facilitated groups and events. However, if the generation of intellectual capital is a measure of the performance of the public library in delivering its epistemic role, then the social and transactional capital generated in such groups and events should not be overlooked.

### 8.2.8 The epistemic role of the library in the public sphere

All the above discussion points towards the public library as operating as a public sphere within the information society. In his information society model, Webster contends that public libraries are places that should be and are considered “public spheres” (Webster, 2014, pp. 221-222). A synthesis of the literature and the research findings in this discussions demonstrate that this is indeed the case and that public libraries are well positioned in this regard. Public libraries provide: information resources (books, periodicals, online resources); IT and network facilities; expert staff support to organise and access information; a library building to bring people together. These elements make up the infrastructure of the public library and consequently is what places public libraries in the public sphere.

Whilst acknowledged as a public sphere in information society studies, the literature review informing this doctoral research identified that there remains a gap in the literature and the in-depth study of how public libraries operate as public spheres and how library users approach them as such (See section 2.9.1, p. 63). This doctoral study addresses this in that the longitudinal approach to the empirical research reveals new knowledge and understanding as to how library users engage with public libraries within the information society and how they make use of the public library in order to develop themselves as citizens. The first part of the discussion has focused on the specific epistemic role of the public library in order to frame this becomes the first layer of the theoretical contribution that this doctoral study makes to information society and LIS studies.

The research findings reveal that active public library users regard the primary function of the public library as being the provision of information and knowledge. It does this in a number of ways, through its infrastructure, technology, staff/volunteers, library users and predominantly, and most significantly, through printed resources. There is a risk that such statements made from the analysis of the research findings, result from a bias present due to shared characteristics of the focus group participants (e.g. they may all represent particular demographic, whose natural preference is still for print). However, this prioritisation of print over digital resonated with all focus group participants, across all age ranges. This key finding,

which prioritises print over digital formats, aligns with findings of prior information society studies research from the early twenty-first century (see, for example, Duff, 2000, p. 183). However, technology and digital information transmission has moved on rapidly and significantly over the last twenty years, but the information overload crisis remains the same. This makes the dominance and resilience of print all the more interesting. Of particular interest from the research findings is that the argument for the longevity of the print monograph has been consistently put forward by engaged, computer-literate, public library users. This cannot therefore be dismissed as the computer-illiterate rejecting progress and the adoption of digital information. Instead, it appears that digitally literate (and digitally included), computer-aware individuals are expressing a preference for information in print format. Throughout the discussion about the epistemic role a theoretical explanation has also emerged around the resilience of print being a direct consequence of the information society itself, in that citizens need and expect to access print in order to navigate and exist in the information society. This takes into account how library users acknowledge the breadth and depth of information available to them in both print and digital format, but that they require public library services to act as a filter, in respect of their information consumption. In these circumstances the epistemic role of the library is fulfilled through addressing the anxiety that information overload might cause citizens through providing them with print resources and collections, as determined by the library itself.

In a pre-digital information age the library still acted as public sphere, but its infrastructure consisted of the library building, the library books and print resources and the library's organisational structure, including staff support and skills. During this period the library had a secure position as the public sphere in that public libraries were regarded as the 'go to' place to obtain information. There was no competition from the Internet. There is a correlation between the rapid advancement of the information age and the ubiquity of digital information available outside the library and the 'public library crisis' which has been referred to in the literature, earlier in the chapter. One of the issues here is that library users themselves do not necessarily comprehend the library as a public sphere in

information society terms. During the initial phases of the research the participants did not attribute the provision of the whole library system and infrastructure (i.e. building, books, IT infrastructure, staff, etc.) as enabling their learning and knowledge acquisition. It appeared in some instances, as though individuals felt that simply being in a room full of books was enough for them to be advantaged through using the public library. Early reflections from the participants made little or no mention of things like staff support in searching for information, information exchange between fellow library users or cataloguing and classification systems. Users appeared as though they would have been happy simply browsing shelves of books in a random order. However, over the period of the research participants did acknowledge more widely the elements of the whole library system which allowed them to learn and acquire knowledge, in particular the role that staff and other library users play in the generation and exchange of knowledge and information.

However, whilst the research shows a particular set of behaviours and attitudes from library users with regard to the resilience of printed information, the reality of the situation is that to operate successfully and sustainably as a public sphere there needs to be an appropriate blend of print and digital resources, access to which is enabled through the library infrastructure, as well as a complement of human resource in the form of library staff and fellow library users.

For a library to be a secure and sustainable public sphere in the information society it needs to fulfil its epistemic function, and in order for a library to fulfil its epistemic function the library needs to be a reliable and acknowledged public sphere. Each requires the presence of the other.

### 8.3 The community role of the public library

As explained in section 8.2 (pages 208 – 209), the epistemic role of the public library is very much grounded in the provision of knowledge and information. How libraries enable this through books and electronic resources has dominated the discussion so far. This mirrors a lot of the academic and policy literature which in places suggest that public libraries themselves have been so wedded to their traditional learning and literacy functions and being the providers of information, that this had become a barrier to them being able to branch out and be responsive

to their communities by offering the other services which they demanded (See section 2.2.1, pages 19 - 20). Often public library scholars and commentators supplement such discussion about the public library's epistemic role with narrative about the library being 'so much more than books and resources' (See section 2.4, p. 31; section 2.4.3, p. 35), and such comment normally precedes discussion and narrative about the societal role that the public library plays in its community, which according to the literature academics have always recognised as the 'other' fundamental role of the public library. This observation is echoed in this doctoral study, in that the analysis of the research findings suggest that public libraries in the United Kingdom today are visited and used as much for their community functions as they are their epistemic functions.

However, the local authorities in England and Scotland, the actual providers of public library services, do not appear to have been as quick to acknowledge this second major function that the library fulfils for its users. This is evident in the early, phase one focus group findings, where the discussion is dominated by the topics of books, resources and library staff enabling access to information (See section 5.2.1, pages 139 - 142; section 7.2.1, pages 188 - 190). These initial focus groups took place during 2014 and 2015, which was around the time or just before the major policy and advisory publications from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2014), the Scottish Library and Information Council and the Carnegie Trust (2015) and the Libraries Taskforce (2016) were published. Collectively such publications attempted to broaden the scope of public libraries (as perceived by local authorities and the general public) this consequently there emerged a definite focus on the public library's role in the community, on health and wellbeing, and on citizenship and culture (See section 2.4.4, pages 35 - 39). The multifunctional community role of the library is currently realising a high profile in England and Scotland, and is evident in the research findings from the latter phases of focus groups. The public library's community function has several separate complex layers and attributes which fall from the library as an abstract service and a physical space, which will be expanded upon in the following sub-sections. Collectively the themes of the sub-sections are those which enable the public library to fulfil its

community role and in doing so expand its impact and influence in citizenship development to entire communities.

### 8.3.1 Neutral space

Libraries are often regarded as 'neutral space' and were referred to as 'safe' space during several of the phase one and two focus groups (See section 5.2.2, p. 143; section 6.3.2, p. 172). Physical and emotional safety is considered and discussed later in this chapter (section 8.3.4), but the notion of neutral space is central to the public library fulfilling its community role. In the case of public libraries neutrality is seen as a strength and the physical spaces need to be available and accessible to all citizens and members of the community in order to serve entire communities. They must be inclusive and endeavour not to exclude any areas of society (in contrast for example: academic libraries may intentionally exclude children or commercial users; health libraries may intentionally exclude non-clinicians). In order to achieve inclusivity, the library space must take on a neutrality which welcomes everyone and offends no-one. The space needs to make all that use it feel safe and secure and in doing so library services can be provided for all within the physical space. Neutrality, in this sense, ensures that individuals are treated and regarded equally and are not judged in respect of being able to access the library. The research findings concur with this latter stance, with the focus group participants all feeling included in their respective local communities through their public library use. This in turn enables them to be comfortable in the space, making it all the more conducive to individuals and groups of individuals to engage in learning and development and to access library resources, which is ultimately what makes the library space a public sphere.

### 8.3.2 Access to all, for all

An underpinning value of the service element of public libraries is that of access. This includes access to information and knowledge, through books, journals, newspapers, audio-visual materials and electronic information resources. The latter is enabled through providing access to an IT network infrastructure (including Wi-fi) and to computer hardware through which the infrastructure itself is accessed. This can all be regarded as physical access, to resources, where the library user enters a

physical library building in order to gain access. In this respect the service is delivered through the physical building and library users mostly associate their access to knowledge and information with the physical library building. The findings of this research demonstrates that such physical access extends also to: community information (i.e. about events and activities taking place in the library or elsewhere in the community) (See section 6.4.2, p. 178); community activities themselves (i.e. reading groups, knit and natter groups, homework clubs, youth parliament) (See section 5.3.1, pages 147 – 148); and support through library staff with making use and accessing all that the library has to offer (See section 5.3.3, p.152).

Consequently, the notion of access, to both physical tangible resources and to more abstract services and support, manifests itself through the physical library building. The evidence provided from the empirical study suggests a genuine realisation of some of the social and digital access inclusion outcomes which public library advisors and policy makers are suggesting should become the new priorities of public libraries in England and Scotland (See section 2.4.3, p. 36 - 37). For example, focus groups participants in Edinburgh and Chelmsford explained how accessing leaflets about community information enabled them to participate in community events being held both in the library and at external venues (See section 5.4.2, p.154 - 155). Participants at Newcastle, Tiverton and Sutton associated their digital inclusion as being a result of having access to computers and support in their job search activity, which again enabled them to participate in society and maintain their dignity (See section 6.2.2, p. 166). These examples all focus on access, and how having access allows for citizenship development to occur.

The epistemic role of the library dominates the information society discussion around the public library as public sphere, with 'information' being at the centre of the narrative. However, in discussing the community role of the library and shifting the focus to 'access' to information and to the library as a whole, this doctoral research begins to add an extra layer to the theory of how public libraries are used as public spheres. The participants of this research access their library services and resources, predominantly through visiting the physical space, but there is also an acknowledgement that where information resources themselves are provided in a

digital format, then access can be provided remotely. Similarly, for those library users who might be housebound, mobile library services are available, and used, in order to enable access. As a principle and as a value of public library services in the United Kingdom, equal access forms an important layer in enabling the library to fulfil its community roles, and in doing so adds depth to how the public library operates as a public sphere in the information society.

#### *8.3.2.1 Access to people: expertise, support and friendship*

The area where this doctoral research could most contribute to the knowledge and understanding of how the citizenry of the United Kingdom use public libraries a public sphere, is in the exposition of the role and place of 'people' in the public library. Library staff are considered as part of the infrastructure in both the LIS and information society literature (See section 2.6, pages 49 - 51) and the concept of social and human capital exchange is often considered in some of the academic LIS literature which focuses on outcomes of public library usage (See section 2.7.2, pages 52 – 56; section 2.7.3, pages 56 - 58). However, the narrative around public sphere, is largely dominated by the role and place of 'information', as generated, accessed and consumed by the public. In reality, placing tangible objects and resources in an ordered space (i.e. books on shelves, notices on notice boards), enabling reference to online resources through information systems and allowing groups and activities to take place in the library space are only one part of the access layer within the public sphere. Of equal importance is the access to people that libraries afford. This includes access to library staff and volunteers, who provide expertise and can assist users in: searching for and retrieving information; making use of the information systems available through the library; co-ordinating, facilitating and leading group activities that take place in the library. Over the course of the latter focus group phases, the research participants spoke very positively about these types of support, and where it was regarded as being effective, the value of such support is realised and library users are able to engage fully with the library services and resources available to them (See section 5.4.2, p. 154; section 6.3.3, p.174; section 6.4.3, p. 179). Transactions and exchanges between library staff and volunteers and library users effectively become

exchanges of transactional and human capital which contribute to users being and feeling part of the library, and subsequently part of the community in which the library is located. Such exchanges of human and transactional capital are fundamental elements to the generation of information and knowledge capital within the public library. This access to staff and human resources in the public library is as important as access to physical and digital informational materials when considering how the library is used as a public sphere.

Similarly, the physical Library (including mobile library provision) enables different people to come together and to form communities or sub-communities through the physical library. This manifests itself through general library usage such as conversations triggered through curiosity in amongst the book shelves, or on seeing a particular book or newspaper being read. It also occurs through more specific usage through clubs and groups. Examples of activities provided in the findings include job search clubs, reading groups and friendship groups (e.g. knit and natter) (See section 5.4.2, p.154 - 158; section 6.2.2, p.166) where participants acknowledge the social exchanges which take place and the transactional capital generating through sharing knowledge and understanding with other library users. Examples of specific exchanges include instances where individuals might be informed of job vacancies or activities to become involved in a group or a discussion, and also where library users simply wish to speak to other library users in order to get a broad range of opinions on a local or current issue (Section 6.2.4, pages 168 - 169). These examples and observations about the public library enabling community through citizens being able to access other citizens resonate with much of the literature about the generation of social capital in libraries (See section 2.7.2, pages 52 – 56).

Some participants spoke of being in the physical library equating to 'being in the community' and 'being a citizen'. Communities have people at the heart of them, and in the sense of local community, they have citizens at the heart of them. Through providing access to library services, through physical buildings and through people, communities are able to form and develop, which again, reiterates the underlying value of access as a foundation through which public libraries can deliver

their societal functions and optimise their role as the public sphere. The empirical research findings suggest that citizens access the public library in a holistic manner, where access to the human resources is as important and as valued as access to the physical and digital resources.

### 8.3.3 Inclusion and inclusivity in the public library

The clientele of libraries, especially public libraries, is self-selecting. Nobody is ever forced to visit a library, rather every visit is intended by the individual choosing to go to the library. With this being the case, public libraries need to ensure that they do not exclude any member or group of the library and that all that they offer is available to all. In order to truly provide access for all, libraries need to be inclusive and inclusivity is central to libraries delivering their community missions. The neutrality of public libraries (See section 8.3.1, p. 232), as a place where all are welcome, helps to achieve this, and this is evident in the research findings. With regard to the physical library building, it needs to be accessible to all in the first instance. As well as ensuring that premises are compliant with the 2005 Disability Discrimination Act<sup>14</sup> and the 2010 Equality Act<sup>15</sup>, with regard to enabling physical access to those with mobility difficulties, libraries as public buildings also lead the way in enabling access and inclusion to users with other forms of disability such as sight or hearing impairments. However, inclusion is not just about disability, and the Equality Act legislation of 2010 provides a framework for enabling inclusion in considering how to prevent discrimination against all protected characteristics (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identification, disability, pregnancy, nationality, age, sexual orientation)

Libraries are often located in large physical premises that local authorities make accessible to the public, and therefore it is imperative that they are seen to be compliant with statutory requirements concerned with equality and inclusion. Having such a framework can assist public libraries in developing policy for delivering their community oriented outcomes, but at the heart of this is ensuring that libraries are successful in making their users feel included. Statutory

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/13/contents>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

compliance alone cannot guarantee this and the evidence from the research suggests that enabling feelings of being included is achieved through a number of other library initiatives. For example, a sense of belonging in the physical space of the library can be achieved in a number of ways including having welcoming reception areas, current and appropriate displays, particular furniture layout, visibility of specific resources. Libraries have a role in making sure that everybody who uses them feels that they belong there and are comfortable in accessing the resources, facilities and support on offer. Libraries need to ensure a sense of all people being equal when they are in the building, and indeed when engaging with the library remotely. Some of the focus group findings included descriptions of both positive and negative experiences of public libraries being inclusive in this way (See section 7.4.4, p. 204)

In respect of cultural inclusion, focus group participants commented on how they liked being exposed to books and information which provided a variety of international and cultural experiences. There was also mention of library displays celebrating 'Black History Month' and reminding users of its significance, and of libraries celebrating Chinese new year and different religious festivals, all of which are intended to include as much of the local community as possible (See section 5.3.1, p. 149). In doing so, the public library is not just including different groups within the community, but is introducing new and different cultural norms and activities to all library users.

Public libraries also provide specialist spaces for children and for parents with children. In addition, libraries strive to provide multi faith and prayer spaces, disabled toilet facilities, assistive technology, information and guidance in a variety of languages, etc. All such initiatives are used to try to ensure as much inclusivity as possible, and for the most part the participants in this research claimed that their libraries are inclusive and that consequently they felt included in the space and the service, which in turn contributes to being part of the community. This finding is validated further where particular library authorities are seen to fail to be inclusive. An example of this would be Lincoln where the range of themes and topics included in the children's books are deemed to be inadequate (See section 5.3.1, p. 149).

On the whole, the analysis of the research findings demonstrate that users feel that being welcomed, included and a part of the library enables them to be part of the community which the library serves. Whilst not a separate layer in enabling the public library to operate as a public sphere, inclusion and inclusivity are significant in creating the right environment for communities to develop and thrive and consequently enable citizenship and participation.

#### 8.3.4 Safety and security

Safety and security were also identified as important elements of inclusivity and in creating the right environment in which the public sphere can operate effectively. Participants suggested that they felt that they could relax and be themselves in the library, without worry or fear of what others think or without any threat of danger that they might experience outside the library. Feelings of safety and security in libraries are achieved through a number of channels. One of the main ways in which libraries generate a safe environment is through having user-focused security presence, particularly in inner city or city centre libraries (e.g. Newcastle, Redbridge, Lincoln), and there was an acknowledgement that having such staff helped library users to relax into the space. A further observation from the analysis of the findings, is that because library users are self-selecting, users of the library are usually surrounded by other users of the library at any one time. This effectively means that most of the time, all those in the library and making use of the services and facilities are there because they want to access the services and facilities and have respect for the institution. The fact that the users of the library are respectful of the space and the people in the library means that there is less likelihood for disruptive or inappropriate behaviour to occur, and subsequently users find the library to be a safe, non-threatening environment. Creating safe environments in libraries is not accidental and the official guidance from those advising public libraries recommend that libraries achieve 'safe and inclusive spaces' in order that they can deliver on their health, mental health and wellbeing initiatives, acknowledging that this cannot be achieved unless users feel safe in the library spaces in the first instance.

### 8.3.5. Social inclusion as a library outcome

Social inclusion is an outcome of, rather than a contributing factor of public libraries effectively delivering their community and societal missions. For a local authority, understanding the community and being aware of the needs of its library users, means that library staff can anticipate particular needs of citizens and offer responsive services. This might include ensuring particular collections are developed or made visible or making sure that specific community information is available. It also encompasses the provision and facilitation of groups, clubs and societies within the library. For people who might feel alone, isolated or marginalised, having access to resources and to other people is essential for social inclusion. Groups and clubs facilitated in libraries are available to all members of the community and are inclusive by their nature. This means that individual participants of such groups get the opportunity to share experiences and activities with other people, where they would not normally have been able to. Simply by being in the library and engaging in what it has to offer, has a significant impact on an individual's social inclusion.

This inclusive aspect of library provision in turn positively impacts upon and affects individuals' wellbeing and sense of citizenship through participation. Library groups and activities do not normally evolve, instead it is often the customer insight and interpersonal skills of the library staff which enable these significant acts of social inclusion. The social human and transactional capital exchanged within such environments, both between library staff and library users and amongst library users themselves is equally as significant when considering inclusion in the public library environment.

The research reveals a real sense of libraries achieving a physical space and place where everybody is equal. The parity and egalitarianism that libraries enable was important for the participants of the research in that there were no resources, support or facilities that were out of their reach or exclusively accessible by a single group of people. Access to rare manuscripts, to historic collections, to local government consultations, to reading groups, to friendship groups, to diverse collections, to community information and activities is all equal and nobody is

excluded. The values of 'access to all' and 'access for all' demonstrated in public libraries is not only inclusive, but also empowering and enables a sense of belonging and provides opportunities for users of public libraries.

These values are at the heart of the social inclusion mission of public libraries in that they afford opportunities for all members of society, especially those who are otherwise considered to be marginalised, to engage in social situations and to meet other people where social and transactional capital can be exchanged, enabling greater and deeper social inclusion. That is to say that through engaging in activities in a library (for example a knit and natter group, or a job search club), individuals are able to meet and socialise with other people which might meet to longer lasting friendships and acquaintances which might prove to have longitudinal benefit to all involved, (for example: companionship, skills development, knowledge, understanding, employment). The examples provided through the analysis of the research findings include finding employment, which in turn enables economic participation as well as affording dignity and wellbeing advantage (See section 6.2.2, p.166). Similarly, increased knowledge and understanding might enable participation in local community activity or politics, all of which contribute to an individual sense of active citizenship (See sections 5.4.2, pages 154 - 158; section 6.4.4, pages 180 - 184).

Social inclusion is an outcome of successful and effective community librarianship. In the context of this doctoral research, social inclusion achieved in this way is a significant contributing factor to the theory of how public libraries operate as a public sphere. The research findings provide lots of evidence of social inclusion being achieved through public library use, and often this leads to, and is also a result of the public library enabling citizenship and democracy. It is important for public libraries that citizens feel welcome, safe and included and able to contribute and participate in their own development and learning as well as development of communities and friendships. The emerging theory of how citizens make use of the public sphere needs to take all such activity and outcomes into account.

### 8.3.6 Digital inclusion as a library outcome

Another outcome of which can be associated with how citizens of the United Kingdom use their public libraries as public spheres is that of digital inclusion. Provision of and access to computer hardware and software and to the Internet is a lifeline for many library users. The 21st century information society is only equal if all citizens have equal access to the Internet, either through network infrastructures, or more increasingly through wifi so that information and opportunities can be accessed through mobile technology. Provision of resources through mobile web technologies represents a major change within the digital revolution and information society studies and as such can exclude many marginalised citizens who either, do not have the financial resource or relevant understanding to engage in contemporary information and communications technologies, or more likely, are not digitally literate enough to effectively engage.

As part of its role within the public sphere and in fulfilling its community and epistemic functions, libraries have to ensure equal access to digital information and communications technologies and to digital resources. Subsequently libraries have positioned themselves well to fulfil these roles and are seen by their users as the places where digital access and inclusion is provided (see section 8.2.5, p. 222 - 224). The modern 21st century public library now needs to go beyond just the provision of computer hardware, IT software and infrastructural access to the Internet. Library users expect and require support in making best use of digital resources and libraries need to be in a position to respond to this and fulfil these expectations (e.g. online searching, navigating web resources, accessing web platforms, using social media, making best use of mobile devices, etc.)

This means that librarians and library staff must be able to facilitate the acquisition and development of digital skills and digital literacy. Public library advisors and policy makers acknowledge the importance of digital inclusion and the required flexibility in public library provision in order to deliver it effectively, and this is a major theme running through some of the literature (See section 2.4.4, pages 35 – 39). The research findings suggest that the majority of public libraries provide adequate infrastructure to enable access to computers and digital resources, but

the levels to which digital activity, development and learning differs between different local authorities. Where libraries are meeting these digital requirements, library users are benefitting and are developing as digitally literate citizens. Examples of this include positive experiences of having access to IT support and training in enabling access to information and resources on individual devices (e.g. phones, tablets, etc.) and to facilitated online job searching taking place in job club environments (See section 6.2.2, p. 166; section 6.3.3, p. 174). Where libraries are ill-equipped to meet these demands, such as in Lincoln, and to a lesser extent in Sutton, it is very much noticed by the library users, who subsequently feel let down and excluded by their library service (See section 6.3.3, p. 175). Library staff capability and competency in delivering the digital citizenship agenda is a major factor which affects how well public libraries can operate as a public sphere.

Improved digital access and literacy is now regarded a key societal and epistemic outcome of public library usage (See section 2.4.4, p. 35 - 39), but one that the some of the literature suggests is not being fully delivered (See section 2.4.3, p. 35). Those public library critics who suggest that the mission of the public library has become too broad in order to deliver quality in everything expected of it, often point to inadequate digital provision and support and the analysis of the research findings affirm this in some locations, in that there still appears to be several instances of public libraries being ill-equipped to provide the digital support that library users expect, which in turn becomes a barrier to achieving digital inclusion. The information society literature acknowledges the digital explosion of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and suggests that this shift and change within the information profession needs to happen if the profession is to adequately deliver on digital inclusion (See section 2.6, pages 49 - 50). The human resource and library staff skills and expertise in supporting digital citizenship and digital inclusion need to be considered alongside the discussion in section 8.3.2.1 (pages 234 – 235) in order to develop any theory of how public libraries are used as public spheres.

### 8.3.7 Diversity of public library users

Following on from the theme of inclusion is the sub-theme of diversity and how in fulfilling its societal role, the public library enables and encourages true diversity.

Through providing access to all and being a space and place for ‘everyone’ to make use of, UK public libraries genuinely have something for everyone. Regardless of age, disability, nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation the library has both universal and specific offers which provide opportunities for all members of society. Because of this holistic inclusive nature of libraries all members of society are able to make use of them and this was remarked upon in several of the early focus groups that have informed the research findings. The diversity of ethnicities and religions present in public libraries was highlighted as a strength, and users appreciated the opportunities that the library afforded them in respect of being part of a broader, more diverse community (See section 5.2.2, pages 142 - 147). Observations were made about how this environment promoted greater understanding and awareness of cultural differences within communities and enabled individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to come together in a safe and secure place, where everyone shared the same experiences or had the same objectives (i.e. to learn, to develop, to be part of a group, etc.) Similar observations were made about the range of ages of library users, from babies and children through to senior citizens and how the library enabled people of different ages to interact, quite often in accidental ways, but ways which were beneficial to all involved. Examples of this which surfaced in the analysis of the research fieldwork include examples of: initiatives whereby school pupils provide IT skills training for senior citizens in the library (See section 6.3.1, p. 170); library users reaching out to different demographics through asking questions of other library users in order to inform their enquiries (See section 6.4.4, p. 183); disabled citizens being included and accommodated in community activity through use of the public library (See section 7.4.4, p. 204). Several of the focus group participants were disabled themselves and all spoke of feeling included and having equal access to everything that the library offers.

The inter-sectionality found in public libraries should also be noted during this discussion in that individual library users do not necessarily hold a single protected characteristic. For example, a sample group of library users could consist of a BAME female teenager, a white middle class male, a disabled working class senior citizen,

etc. The participants of the focus groups were representative of several different age ranges, ethnicities and nationalities and there was a representative gender balance. Through being a public place for all libraries not only present a diverse mix of users, but also an intersectional mix of users. This differed from focus group to focus group depending upon location and community, but comments were made about glancing around a public library and seeing a microcosm of the community in which it was located.

These observations from the research findings are intended to illustrate how public libraries are diverse in their membership and usage. Consequently, citizens interact with and engage with fellow citizens, who perhaps have different backgrounds and characteristics. This is essential if the public library is to be regarded as being inclusive, which is in turn necessary for the library to play a part in generating social capital and achieving success in and for the community. This again becomes a further significant contributing factor in how library users make use of the public library as a public sphere.

#### 8.3.8 Tolerance amongst library users

The findings and observations are not simply suggestive of a presence of diversity in libraries, but that libraries also proactively enable tolerance and increased awareness of diversity and in bringing people together from different backgrounds, ethnicities, nationalities, ages and social classes they are developing a community and social space in which all people are truly equal. For many citizens this might be one of the few places where they find true equality within society, and subsequently the presence of diversity and tolerance become a fundamental aspect of the societal role of public libraries.

From the point of view of the library, all users are equal and all users have equal access to all that the library has to offer, whether it is use of space, access to resources, staff support, or participation in community groups and activities. Through sharing spaces, resources and support, individual library users become aware of the needs and requirements that others have from the library. It was observed in the findings that library users were aware of how library staff were able to interact with different people in different ways. For example, there was mention

of how library staff at Chelmsford dealt with homeless users in a dignified fashion and how they knew how to handle individuals with specific needs (See section 6.4.3, p. 180). Awareness and exposure to the diversity of the community in this way has a societal impact on library users in general. Library users, who might not otherwise be exposed to such diversity, become aware of specific requirements and needs, such as prayer or multi-faith facilities, large print, assistive technologies, resources available in other formats or languages, etc.

The library being regarded as a neutral public space helps it to be inclusive, and through not excluding any one group or section of society, libraries actively promote diversity, and more importantly tolerance and awareness of this diversity. This again, is a very powerful way in which public libraries function as public spheres. In turn, through creating such environments, public libraries encourage and promote the generation and exchange of knowledge and social capital.

#### 8.3.9 Bringing people together and generating social capital.

The sub-sections of this thesis about neutrality (Section 8.3.1), inclusion and inclusivity (Section 8.3.3), safety and security (Section 8.3.4), diversity (Section 8.3.7) and tolerance (Section 8.3.8) all describe these attributes as being significant parts of the holistic community library environment. Having created the appropriate physical environment and through being inclusive and providing equal access to resources, services, facilities and support the library becomes an attractive place for all people to visit. People choose to visit libraries to do something specific (e.g. borrow books, browse books, read a newspaper, study, research, obtain a specific resource, ask a question, participate in a group, keep warm, etc.), and in doing so, individuals will often achieve specific intended outcomes (e.g. learn, develop skills, increase awareness, gain intellectual stimulation from conversations, etc.) Entering a public library in order to achieve an objective or outcome, is usually an individual and independent decision, in that an individual decides to go to the library to achieve their own objectives or intended outcome. The exception is where a parent/guardian might take their children or dependents, and in this case the parent/guardian has made the decision for themselves and for their dependents.

In all cases (perhaps with the exception of dependents) individuals visit the library out of choice and once they are familiar with the physical space and the services available to them, will quickly be comfortable in their surroundings. Invariably individuals will enter a library in order to do something by themselves (e.g. read a book, consult a journal, etc.), or potentially to meet with or interact with other people in a group or club, or to enquire something of a member of library staff. All the focus groups findings affirm this as being regular public library usage. Similarly, the discussions from the third phase of focus groups suggest that whilst individuals do not enter a library with the intention of generating and exchanging capital, a whole host of variable occurrences can lead to this happening, as is validated through the analysis of the research findings. Much of the literature discussed points to libraries being effective incubators and generators of social capital and the impact that this has on both individuals and communities is often seen in a positive light (See section 2.7.2, pages 52 - 56). The social capital literature explains how communities that have good social capital have good levels of social engagement, and that citizenship, social networks and civic participation are all characteristics of such communities (See section 2.7.2, p. 55). Such discussion takes place within the context of public libraries and the analysis of research findings demonstrates that such characteristics are evident in UK communities as a result of citizens' usage of public libraries.

For example in the case of one of the Chelmsford participants, because she was reading a particular newspaper, appeared approachable and perhaps familiar as a regular frequenter of the library. Because of this she made an acquaintance, who assumed she held a particular political persuasion because of the newspaper she was reading. This social interaction eventually resulted in her getting involved in local politics and drawing upon her new network to help her organise her own lobbying and protest against the local council (See section 6.4.4, p. 183). Another example is when the same participant in a particular section of the library and met someone who was able to introduce her to areas of Chelmsford's Anglo-Chinese community and subsequently make new friends and networks through this connection (See section 5.3.1, p. 149).

Institutions and organisations other than libraries can claim to bring people together and create an environment where capital can be exchanged. Schools, colleges, universities and places of work would be good examples of this. However, in these instances, whereas at the first time of encountering a school, college, place of work, etc., an individual will usually know other people there and choose to be amongst people or colleagues that they know and are familiar with. Where this occurs, opportunities for social networking and exchanges of social capital can be limited. In the case of libraries and their role in encouraging and enabling the exchange of social capital, they are regarded as a 'third space', that is neither home nor an individual's place of work/study. In the research findings there is much mention of the library being a safe environment and an inclusive environment, both key attributes of an effective third space. A useful way to illustrate the effectiveness of the public library as a third space, and one which lends itself to enabling community, and bringing people together is to compare it to other types of 'third space'.

However, there are other examples of third spaces, where there is potential for social capital to be generated and exchanged. Churches (or other places of worship) are mentioned in the research findings as being places where individuals can meet each other, but there is a perception of exclusivity around who would be welcomed into a place of worship, based on the particular religion or denomination that the place of worship serves. Similarly, community centres for specific ethnic groups or youth clubs, might be public facing and welcoming on the surface, but essentially are catering for specific communities and existing groups. Third spaces do not need to be public facing as they can come in the guise of community based clubs, such as amateur dramatic societies, community choirs or groups established through specific hobbies or activities (e.g. rambling, bell-ringing, painting). Again, whilst welcoming and safe, they do not reach out to 'everyone' or to the entire community. Pubs and social clubs are also often cited as being neutral spaces where social capital is exchanged, and whilst most would claim to be welcoming, inclusive and safe, in reality that is not always the case. Whilst much conversation, debate and discussion takes place in pubs, they can be intimidating and sometimes

dangerous places and are often entered and frequented by groups of people, who already know each other, rather than as independent individuals.

Institutions that can be considered to be closely aligned to libraries, such as museums and art galleries do meet several of the criteria with regard to being third spaces, in which capital can be exchanged. They are public facing, accessible, inclusive and safe and are welcoming to individuals from any community. However, the chief difference between museums/galleries and libraries is the specific nature of them against the ever-increasing general nature of public libraries. Whilst still acknowledging the primacy of the epistemic function of public libraries, it is the branching out and diversity of services and facilities offered and facilitated that make libraries a superior third space for bringing individuals together. Libraries welcome individuals of all ages, races, religions, nationalities, physical and mental abilities and develop and offer services for all. Having said this, there is currently an increasing trend towards museums becoming more locally and community oriented and providing general space for their communities, but this is still in its infancy. On the whole, it is difficult to find such a level of inclusivity in any other comparable organisations and this makes public libraries a natural and effective third space to bring individuals together. Those individuals who frequent public libraries, do so for many different reasons and intentions, but the opportunities to engage with like-minds or opposing minds and a diversity of users, representative of the entire community are much greater in the public library than any of the other aforementioned institutions. The social capital generated in these interactions account for another particular outcome of the bringing together of people in public libraries, that of discussion and debate leading to the formation of opinions and ideologies, which in turn enable citizens to actively participate in society. The information society literature argues that accessible debate and opinion is a fundamental outcome of the public sphere, and essential for democracy (See section 2.5.4, p. 47). The generation and exchange of social capital, human and capital and transactional capital become fundamental outcomes of the public library as a public sphere, and the findings of the empirical research demonstrates how the public library positions itself as a place where such capital can be

generated and exchanged within the community. The position of the library as a place where such activity takes place is unique in society and in the community and is an integral attribute of the public library's role in enabling citizenship development.

#### 8.3.10 The community role of the library in the public sphere

The sub-sections of 8.3 have described elements of the community role of the public library in the context of them being either a significant contributing factor or a significant outcome of public library usage connected with their role as public spheres. The epistemic role of the library (section 8.2) allows it to be associated with the provision, generation and exchange of knowledge and information and it is this arena which is often considered when identifying the library as a public sphere within the information society. However, section 8.3 has brought in a second layer, that of the community role, which in itself consists of sophisticated social factors and attributes, all of which need to be regarded with equal importance when identifying the constituent parts of the public sphere.

Individual citizens and library users require a physical space in which they can be part of a community. Communities require multiple participants and the public library enables this through bringing together public space, public services and people. Similarly, the notion of public libraries as public places owned by the community is tightly connected with the outcome of community cohesion.

Through the provision of public libraries, individuals are encouraged and enabled to come together in safe, secure, inclusive and accessible public community spaces to learn, discuss and exchange ideas and conversation together. This is community in action, and the public library is at the heart of it. It is through discussion and networking that sense is often made of learning, including navigation and guidance around information in order to process what is relevant and what is not (e.g. identifying fake news, information literacy, etc.). Through citizens exchanging advice, information and experience with other citizens, and indeed through library staff providing information, support and guidance to citizens, vast amounts of social and intellectual capital are generated in public libraries.

The findings of the empirical research provide evidence of civic participation and active citizenship through public library use. Being able to contribute to the community, to be involved in local political discussions, to vote and to help other citizens are all attributes of citizenship. They are all afforded through public libraries fulfilling their community roles and functions. This in turn becomes a second significant layer in developing a theory of how citizens use the public library as a public sphere.

#### 8.4 Political role of the public library

The previous section (8.3.10) concluded that some of the outcome of the community role of the public library are around political participation and that this element of citizenship development results from the consumption and filtering of information alongside the exchange of ideas, ideologies and discussions with other people within the library environment. Democracy and participation are indeed significant outcomes of this layer of public library usage, and this section of the discussion will proceed to expand upon this and to blur the boundary of the library's community role with a third role, the political role of the public library. In doing so, this section considers the concept of information as a tangible output and therefore the public library as a political domain.

##### 8.4.1 Information as a public good

Information is constantly generated, ubiquitous and consequently overwhelming, as discussed in the information society models in the literature review in section 2.5.2 (pages 41-43). Outputs of the information society include information and data in a wealth of different formats: print and electronic monographs, periodicals, journals, magazines and newspaper; television and media broadcasting; political reports, white papers, parliamentary acts, council minutes, etc.; social media outputs; email; texting; computer game and computer generated image coding; digital audio-visual media; a wealth of locally produced community information, literature and ephemera. These information outputs, in turn are disseminated and transmitted via a number of digital and analogue channels so that the information and data can be accessed and consumed through a variety devices and in virtually any location.

Information is available (but not necessarily accessible) to all, and is also therefore regarded as a public good, essential for democracy and development. There is much written about the inequalities of information on a macro scale and how it hinders or helps the development of nations (See section 2.5.3, pages 46 - 47). Similarly, a major strand within the information society literature is about information inequality on a local and national level, and an argument that information needs to be made available to all citizens in order for a nation to exist as a democracy (See section 2.5.3.2, p. 45).

The political role of the library therefore does not particularly concern 'any-time, any-place', inclusive access to information and knowledge, nor does it focus on the community and the role that other people and infrastructure play in the provision of information. The political role of the public library within the information society is more about ensuring and enabling access to the information which citizens, need, expect and are entitled to in order to exist as a community and as a democracy. As highlighted in the discussions about the public library's epistemic and community roles in sections 8.2 and 8.3 the public library enables access to information through its infrastructure and through information management practices. Library systems ensure that information is acquired, catalogued, stored, preserved and made available to citizens and in doing so provide a filter layer to make navigating the often overwhelming amount of information easier. Section 8.2.2.1 (pages 214 – 215) considers why public library users trust the credibility of printed library resources, and section 8.2.2.5 (p. 219) presents a theory and explanation as to why there exists a primacy of print library resources over digital library resources. These sections explain how and why information provided by and through the public library is regarded as credible and trustworthy. However, the political implication of this situation impacts upon how the public library operates as a public sphere, in that there is an expectation from public library users that credible, trustworthy (ideally printed) information will be made available and accessible to all citizens in their public libraries. For those active public library users involved in the research study, failure of public libraries to provide this was unacceptable (see section 7.2.1, p. 189).

This situation puts added pressure on the public library, in that assuming local authorities are aware of such demands, then there may be unnecessary tensions between what is being asked of public libraries by the policy makers and advisors and what library users actually want and expect of their public library within the information society. Focus group participants in Liverpool, Edinburgh and Newcastle all alluded to their democratic right to access credible information and there was acknowledgement throughout all focus group locations that it was a citizen's civic right to have access to a library service (See section 7.2.3, p. 191). Both these claims position information as a public commodity, and one which the public library is perceived to be responsible for. With this comes a new level of responsibility of the public library, within the public sphere, in enabling democracy at a local level.

#### 8.4.2 A civic right

If public library users regard information as a public commodity which they require access to for political, as well as developmental reasons, and one they which they also feel they are entitled to as British citizens, then the concept of information as a 'right' or entitlement' needs some discussion within the context of the political role of the public library. The analysis of the research findings suggest that the public library in the UK is in itself a symbol of civil society and democracy, with several focus group participants making such claims throughout the period of the longitudinal study (See section 6.2.1, p. 164). Whilst most participants were unaware of the statutory obligation of local authorities in England (and Wales, although out of scope) to provide access to a public library service<sup>16</sup>, they certainly expected this and expressed anger and frustration at cutbacks and closures, in the locations that these were taking place. In all the fieldwork locations, whether there were closures taking place, or threats of library closures looming, participants were anxious and concerned about having, what they perceived as their civic right taken away. Focus group discussions in the first two phases of the research also suggested that public libraries are regarded as a civic right within a community context as well as for individuals. They represent a civil society and are therefore seen as essential

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<sup>16</sup> 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75>

to the communities that they serve and to restrict or remove public libraries represents a failure and betrayal by politicians and local authorities.

The research findings also reveal how on a very basic level, simply having access to a public library instils a sense of citizenship in library users, in that they feel part of their community and are actively engaging within it (See section 6.2.1, p. 164; section 6.3.1, pages 170 - 172; section 6.3.2, p 172 - 174). Engagement with the library differs depending on the intended outcome of the individual user, but citizens often use the library to access information and resources to further develop themselves as citizens, enabling greater participation in community and society. Examples of such engagement include scrutinising civic plans and disseminating information back to community and neighbourhood groups (See section 6.3.2, p. 173), organising U3A (University of the 3rd Age) events and outings (See section 6.2.2, p. 166 ), exchanging transactional capital in order to organise political rallies (See section 6.4.4, p. 183), participation in youth parliament initiatives (See section 5.2.2, p. 146).

These examples are outcomes that go well beyond the library succeeding at delivering its epistemic role. Whilst information and intellectual capital may well have been generated and exchanged in these examples, the outcome of each is more about civic participation than simple self-development, and subsequently places the library in a unique civic position within the community, in that it has a political role in developing citizens so that they might engage further still in society and continue to develop their individual and community citizenship. It could be argued therefore that the very presence of a public library within a community encourages and enables citizenship and that the public library plays out its political role simply by existing. Similarly, by not existing (i.e. where public library services have been reduced or removed), a political role is still present, in that the local authority is seen to be hindering and restricting democracy and participation and a political statement is made by the library not being there.

#### 8.4.3 Enabling democracy, political engagement and participation

Section 8.3 discussed the role of the library within the community in the United Kingdom, and in doing so situated the library in a 'local' setting. Where 'locality' and

'localness' are important in discussing the role of the library within the community, so too is it in a political context and indeed there is a blurring between the two. Being representative of the community in which it sits the public library can be regarded as a 'microcosm' of said community. This means that the citizens or users of the public library share local concerns and issues and have a central, local space in which to debate, consult and problem solve and essentially to participate in local community.

The analysis of the research findings provides significant evidence of the library operating as a local, community centred, public sphere. From enabling youth debates about budgets and spending by the local authority (See section 5.2.2, p. 146), to providing access to local planning documents and facilitating discussion around them (See section 6.3.2, p. 173), public libraries use many channels to engage with and inform the citizenry about local political events and activities. Similarly, through the generation and exchange of intellectual and social capital, public libraries enable engagement on a broader national or international level. Again the analysis of the research findings demonstrates this, with examples of citizens gaining access to or information about their Members of Parliament through the library, as well as citizens ideologically informing themselves through reading and discussion (See section 6.2.1, p. 163)

The information society literature reviewed in section 2.5 argues that this is an essential role of the library in the normative information society, and how libraries play a fundamental role in addressing information poverty, through providing access to 'normal democratic information' (Duff, 2015) The analysis of these doctoral research findings suggest that in addition to simply providing normal democratic information, through bringing people together in the public spaces, public libraries also encourage and enable significant use of this information. On a basic level, citizens become informed and are able to make use of information in order to function and operate within their communities, but also where social capital is optimised, the exchange and discussion of democratic information can lead to much greater participation, such as political lobbying, involvement in

political demonstrations or evening making decisions about joining or following particular political parties (See section 5.4.2, pages 156 - 157 )

The provision of information, resources, infrastructure, spaces and platforms for the exchange of capital have all been identified as significant factors in enabling the public library's epistemic and community roles in within the public sphere. By optimising and bringing these factors together within a political function, library users are able to participate in democracy and engage in political activity, making the public library a very powerful platform for enabling democracy and citizenship development.

#### 8.4.4 Community ownership of public libraries

The final attribute of the political role of the public library is that of community ownership. Effectively this is an extension of the concepts of information as a public commodity (See section 8.4.1, pages 25050 - 252) and public libraries being regarded as a civic right (See section 8.4.2, pages 252 - 253). Throughout the fieldwork carried out, focus group participants all conveyed how access to public libraries was important to them, for a number of reasons, as discussed in this chapter, but significantly in respect of it being a resource paid for by the citizenry through taxation.

In the research findings from phases two and three, and particularly in areas where library users found fault with aspects of their public library services (e.g. Lincoln, Newcastle, Sutton, Liverpool), the perception of some users was that local authorities were doing a dis-service to their publics by not investing in public libraries. Where these sentiments were strongest, in Lincoln, participants suggested that their local authority were managing the services inadequately and were quite alarmed at some of the decisions being made in respect of the library service, a service that they essentially regarded as belonging to the community. Decisions that were questioned included the closure of particular branches, reduction of opening hours and the conversion of branch libraries into community 'one-stop shop' hubs (See section 7.3.1, p. 194). The Lincoln participants, who regarded themselves as tax paying funders of Lincolnshire Libraries expressed frustration and anger that they were not asked to contribute to discussions regarding their library

services and felt that the local authority managers of the service were ill-informed to make decisions and were too far removed from how libraries work and what users want from them. Similarly, in the case of Lincoln and also Newcastle, the libraries were criticised with regard to the printed stock on the shelves, which was perceived to be ever decreasing and becoming more and more irrelevant to their needs as library users and to the community (See section 7.2.1, p. 189). The point being made here is that as a community resource, situated within the community, public libraries should be responsive to the needs of the community that owns them and uses them.

In the same way that criticism of library services indicates community ownership, so too does the reverse, where citizens feel that they are listened to as stakeholders of the library and that they have an influence in how the library is run and which resources are made available. This was especially the case where the library service might have an active stakeholder group like the 'Friends of Tiverton Library Group' or the Redbridge Youth Parliament which made decisions about activities and events in conjunction with library staff (See section 4.9.3, p. 135; section 5.2.2, p. 146). Similarly, there are instances where library users had very positive experiences of library staff responding to them and making specific resources available to them, either through purchasing new titles or loaning them from other libraries.

The sense of community ownership complements the perception that information is a public good and that citizens living in a democracy have a right to access this through a public library service, in order to sustain democracy. This epitomises the notion of public library as the public sphere and it is the combination of ownership and entitlement that the library users in the United Kingdom have that result in the library performing this important political role within the public sphere.

#### 8.4.5 The political role of the public library in the public sphere

The argument for the public library as public sphere is strengthened further when investigating its political role. In respect of public ownership of information and knowledge, on a macro-political scale the public library can be regarded as an instrument for mitigating information poverty, and on a local scale this is indeed an

outcome within the communities that are served by public libraries. The locality of the public library within the community, positions it very much as a local public sphere, but in fulfilling its epistemic role public libraries are able to politically inform citizens on all levels. The political aspect of this is the entitlement that citizens of the United Kingdom feel that they have in respect of having access to public libraries.

However, the political role of the public library as public sphere only truly occurs if the library is effective in fulfilling its other primary epistemic and community roles. In being at the centre of a community and enabling access to all members of that community, regardless of social class, age, race, religion, nationality, ethnicity and physical ability, and through providing information and enabling and facilitating learning, the library becomes the physical (and virtual) space where political public discourse can take place. Such discourse generates important social and transactional capital which in turn can be argued, results in an informed citizenry, and in doing so situates the public library in a very Habermasean version of the public sphere (See section 2.5.4, p. 46). Regardless of which public sphere model is being applied, the political role of the public library in the United Kingdom becomes a further layer for consideration when discussing how the public library system in the United Kingdom is used as a public sphere in citizenship development.

### 8.5 Conclusion to the discussion

The discussion chapter of this doctoral thesis has been presented using the three main roles of the public library, as identified through the analysis of the research findings: epistemic; community; political. In doing so, a comprehensive answer to the research question 'what is the role of the public library in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?' is reached. In providing answers for this broad research question, conclusions can also be drawn in respect of research questions one and two. Discussion about the how individuals are advantaged through their public library use (research question one), directly contributes to articulating the role of the public library. Through active use of the public library individuals benefit from all three identified roles. They become more knowledgeable, better informed, better connected and able to participate in society through their public library use. Similarly, in respect of individual and

community citizenship (research question two), public library users feel that they are part of their community, and are able to actively contribute to their community through their public library use. Individuals benefit from socialisation and engaging with other people in the public library, which are fundamental outcomes of the role of the public library.

In answering the research questions, this doctoral study makes contributions to knowledge, particularly about how the 21<sup>st</sup> century public library is used as a public sphere within the information society. The research demonstrates that the public library operates as a public sphere through delivering its three distinct epistemic, community and political roles. The public library provides a secure, neutral place, and consequently enables the generation and exchange of social, human and transactional capital. This is a key element of the public library operating as a public sphere. The research concludes that the way that the public library operates as a public sphere is much more significant than previously identified in the information society and LIS literature, as reviewed in chapter two.

These contributions are significant in that, whilst public libraries have been recognised as part of the public sphere in information society studies (see section 2.5, pages 39 - 49) the focus has been mainly on the epistemic role of the library in providing access to information, without acknowledging the infrastructural elements of the library which allow for the generation and exchange of social, human and transactional capital. In the LIS literature the role of the public sphere has been underplayed at the expense of focusing on value, impact and performance measurement of societal outcomes (see section 2.3, pages 23 - 31). The LIS literature does not appear to acknowledge of the how the different epistemic, community and political roles that the library plays all need to be present in order for the library to effectively operate as a public sphere.

## 9. Conclusions

### 9.1 Introduction

The broad aim of the research presented in this thesis was to investigate the impact of role of the 21st century public library in England and Scotland within the information society. In doing so the focus of the empirical study was the value and use the public library as a public sphere.

The research aims were achieved through the development of a theoretical framework which considers how library users generate and exchange various forms of intangible capital through their public library use. Through establishing a theoretical framework, a flexible research method was designed and used to conduct a longitudinal empirical study to gather data through which to perform the investigation.

In this concluding chapter the research findings are revisited and synthesised. This allows for direct articulation of answers to each of the three research questions and the main significant contributions of the study. This work contributes to existing knowledge within the Library and Information Science discipline, particularly the domains of information society studies and library and information studies. These contributions to knowledge are presented as the final part of the chapter.

### 9.2 Research question one: To what extent is an individual's position advantaged as a result of using public libraries?

Public library users regard the primary role of the public library as an epistemic one, and see the library as a place and space where learning and development takes place. Citizens who make active use of their public library in order to access information and knowledge in order to learn and develop feel advantaged with regard to being able to participate in society. One of the main features of the library's epistemic role is the provision of information and knowledge resources. Public library users value having access to books, computers, digital information and other learning resources, which they attribute to their personal learning and development journeys

The primacy of printed books in public libraries is a significant finding. Books are still regarded by public library users as the most accessible and credible vehicle for

transferring knowledge and information. Consequently, printed books have remained resilient, even within the digital information society. This is due in part, to the information society itself, and public library users making use of printed resources in libraries as a filtering layer in their information consumption. Public libraries and their users' preference for printed books has effectively resulted in the primacy of print within an information society context.

A further main contributing factor to individuals feeling advantaged through their public library use, is the knowledge and information exchange through interacting with other people in the library. Public libraries are rich in social capital, human capital and transactional capital, all of which contribute to the information capital generated by individuals and which advantages those who harness this. Social capital in libraries also contributes to citizens benefitting from social networks, socialisation, friendship and participation in community activities.

The public library is seen as a support service for individuals, in providing learning and social opportunities, which library users also regard as being advantageous to them. The public library service in the United Kingdom is seen a lifelong 'cradle to grave' service, enabling lifelong learning from learning to read and supporting literacy in children to providing continual learning and social opportunities for citizens throughout their lives. In effectively delivering its epistemic and societal/community roles, public libraries provide access to resources and support that enable individuals to advantage themselves within society (i.e. find employment, socialisation, friendship groups, learn new skills)

### 9.3 Research question two: What is the impact of using a public library service on individual and community citizenship?

Public libraries are regarded as safe, secure public spaces, in which individuals and groups can come together to share learning, social, recreational and leisure activities. Library users are able to interact and engage with the public library through a number of different channels: discussions with other library users; consulting library staff and seeking support from them; joining groups and activities facilitated by and through the library; accessing and searching knowledge and information. Through engaging in such activity active library users feel a sense of

citizenship on two different levels. Firstly, as individuals they are engaging in civic life, informing themselves and enabling themselves to participate in society. Secondly, through being an active user of a community based institution (i.e. the library), they become part of the community. The collective use of the library by groups of citizens, in turn enables community level engagement in civic life, manifesting itself as community citizenship. In effect, through engaging with the public library, library users become active citizens and community citizenship is generated through the library enabling individual active citizenship to take place. The social capital generated and exchanged in public libraries is a major contributing factor to this and contributes to the sense of community both inside and outside the library.

The public library acts as a public sphere and plays a significant role acting as a filter for the consumption of information for those citizens who make use of it. Consequently, the library plays a role in developing an informed citizenry. Consequently, citizens are better informed and feel better equipped to participate in society. The public library itself is a symbol of community and democracy, and active public library users see it as a 'human right' to have access to a community based public library. This leads to a sense of community ownership of the public library system, especially amongst those citizens who make active use of them. They feel that they have a stakeholder role to play in the development and function of the public library within their community

#### 9.4 Research question three: What is the role of the public library in the 21st century?

The public library has a fundamental epistemic role, which it delivers through providing access to information. It does this through continual collection development in which printed resources still feature as a resilient and dominant medium. Digital information resources and community information resources also form significant aspects of the information resource provision. The epistemic role is not fulfilled simply by tangible information resources. The infrastructure of the public library system, along with the librarianship practices which allow for

information to be available, visible and accessible are also essential factors. Similarly, the professional and technical support provided by library staff and the exchange of intangible capital through social and human interactions also contribute to the public library delivering its epistemic role

The second major function of the public library is its role in the 'heart' of the local community. Individual citizens are able to engage with the library and come together with other people and in doing so create 'community' through their library usage. The public library also delivers many of its societal outcomes through its community role, such as social inclusion, socialisation, support for mental health and wellbeing. There is a blurring of community role with the epistemic role in delivering some societal functions (e.g. digital inclusion, literacy, language learning, digital citizenship, etc.) but library users do not discern which function they are making use of.

The third discrete role of the public library is a political role and public libraries themselves can be regarded as political institutions. Where they effectively fulfil their epistemic and community roles they also enable democracy, participation and citizenship. The combination of the ways in which citizens engage and make use of their public library services, with the position and status of the library in the local community create a significant public sphere in the United Kingdom

## 9.5 Contributions to knowledge

The analysis and synthesis of the research findings of this doctoral study make several new and significant contributions to knowledge within the discipline of Library and Information Science. These contributions can be divided into four domains within the wider LIS: Information society studies; library and information studies; LIS research methodology; library practice.

### 9.5.1 Contribution to the domain of information society studies

The major contribution to knowledge that this study makes is in providing a deeper understanding of the way in which the public library operates as a public sphere in the information society. The depth of the research has elicited insight into the perceptions of the citizenry in respect of public libraries in England and Scotland, focusing on how they generate and consume information in this setting. The gaps

identified in the information society literature suggested that this insight is needed and the findings allow for a greater theoretical understanding of the public library as public sphere.

Specific original findings include the resilience and primacy of print within the digital information society. This is particularly significant in light of the emphasis and focus on digital information and provision and the societal functions of the library which dominate the scholarship and literature in this area. The resilience of print itself can be attributed to the very existence of the information society, in that public library users are making informed judgements to turn to print media, accessed through the library, which they regard to be a credible and reliable information source, appropriately filtered for their consumption, by the public library.

Similarly, the position of the public library, as a secure and neutral space within the community, also contributes to its effectiveness as a public sphere. In doing so, the environment becomes conducive for the generation and exchange of social, human and transactional capital, which all contribute to the ways in which individual citizens access and consume information within the public library setting. These attributes have a significant impact on the ways in which public library users develop as active citizens and subsequently engage in community and society. The emergence of these library based transactions as factors which enable the library to operate as a public sphere also feature as a contribution to public sphere theory.

#### 9.5.2 Contribution to the domain of library and information studies

The deeper understanding of the way in which public libraries operate as public spheres also makes a theoretical contribution within the domain of library and information studies. One of the early conclusions of the literature review was that, for the most part, library and information studies scholarship and literature does not appear to concern itself with information society studies, and therefore the notion of the library as public sphere is missing from this corpus. The findings and discussion of this doctoral research redresses this and makes a significant contribution to LIS scholarship and knowledge as a result. Acknowledging the public library as a significant public sphere provides a new lens and theoretical framework

through which public library value and impact studies can be viewed within library and information studies.

### 9.5.3 Methodological contribution

Section 3.8 (pages 105 – 86) explains and details how the flexible research design of the multi-location, longitudinal, focus group method contributes to LIS methodological studies. The research design was successful and effective with regard to generating a critical mass of relevant data for the study. The time period over which this doctoral study has taken place has allowed for the longitudinal approach to evolve and be carried out, and subsequent the depth and validity of the findings is significant. In this respect the study contributes methodologically to the discipline and the domains in which it is situated and the method can be replicated for future similar research studies.

### 9.5.4 Limitations

Whilst the research undertaken for this doctoral study has been thorough, it has been limited in its geographic scope, both in respect of representation of the United Kingdom, and also of the breadth of local authorities in England and Scotland. Future research into the user perception of public libraries or the role of the public library in the information society, should attempt to reach out to a wider representation of the United Kingdom, in order to generalise at a national level. This could have greater impact on public library policy development

### 9.5.5 Implications for practice

The final area in which this research makes a contribution is in its implications for librarianship and public library management practice. In the same way that the research method could be replicated for future similar academic research, it could also be used to evaluate the value and impact of public library services, by library authorities themselves as a performance measurement tool. Public library managers and practitioners could adopt the longitudinal method at a local level to gain insight into usage of their libraries with regard to satisfaction and perception of services.

## 10. References

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## Appendix A – Pilot/phase 1 focus group questions

### 1. Feelings and Attitudes

- What are your feelings towards the public library (i.e. how do you feel when you are making use of the library?)
- What would you say your attitude was towards the public library?

### 2. Who are libraries for?

- Who do you think libraries are for and why?
- What do you think libraries contribute to society?
- What would happen if there were no libraries?
- What do you think about the future of information?

### 3. Citizenship

- What do you think is meant by the term citizenship?
- How do you think your citizenship is affected by using the library?
- Have you been able to do anything different as a result of using the library?

### 4. What do you like about the library?



## Appendix C – Phase 2 and 3 focus group questions

### **Phase 2 questions**

- How have you used the library since participating in the first focus group?
- Thinking about your recent library usage, do you think that you have learnt to do anything new? And can you provide us with some examples?
- How does what you do and learn in the library help you participate in society as a citizen?
- What role do you think the library plays in providing access to hardware and also digital resources and platforms? Has the library helped you to be digital and do digital things?
- What role have the library staff played in helping you to use the library?

### **Phase 3 questions**

- How can you relate your lifetime of library experience to the above ideas of human capital, social capital and knowledge capital?
- How has the library helped you as an individual to acquire any of this capital?
- How do you see your life within an Information Society?
- How has using the library helped you to live and work in the information Society?
- How has using the library helped you to become an active citizen?

## Appendix D – Research protocol for longitudinal focus groups

This research uses a longitudinal focus group method, based on three phases of focus groups, spaced approximately 8 – 12 months apart

Each phase has different stages as detailed in the protocol below:

### **Stage 1 - Pre-phase 1 – general preparation for longitudinal focus groups**

#### **1. Determine how many focus groups need to be run**

- Multiple focus groups will enable comparison between discussion and allow for emerging themes to be identified
- Focus groups to be run between 60 and 90 minutes in length

#### **2. Identify participants**

- Determine how many participants are required for each group. Recommended focus group size is between 5 and 8 participants (Krueger & Casey, 2009). These size suggestions should be applied flexibly, but the uppermost number of participants should not exceed 10. More than 10 will be unwieldy
- Participants need to be active public library users
- Work with local library authorities to promote focus group participation
- Secure participant names and contact information and send out invitations

#### **3. Generate questions**

- Based on purpose and goals of the research, identify up to six questions to be asked during the focus group
- Revisit the questions to make sure that they will yield the required data
- Order questions from general to specific

#### **4. Develop script**

- Part one: welcome participants; explain purpose and context of research and the focus group method; introductions; explain informed consent; obtain informed consent; explain recording and that information is confidential and will be anonymised; explain longitudinal approach
- Part two: ask questions; remember to use probes and follow up questions to explore key concepts more deeply
- Part three: close the focus group; thank participants; provide contact information; re-explain the longitudinal approach and how participants will be contacted to reconvene the focus group in 12 months' time

## 5. Facilitation

- Facilitator needs to be knowledgeable about the topic and the research.
- Facilitator needs to be able to keep the discussion going, deal tactfully with difficult or outspoken group members, and make sure all participants are heard.
- Facilitator needs to ask questions and probe, but not participate in the dialogue or correct participants.

## 6. Choose locations

- Scope is limited to English and Scottish library authorities
- Eight local authorities is considered sufficient for breadth of England and Scotland
- Make approaches to library authorities in both England and Scotland until representation of different types of local authority is achieved (unitary, two-tier, city council, metropolitan borough council, London borough)
- Negotiate suitable space in each local authority location (i.e. a meeting room in the library, which affords some familiarity for participants)
- Choose a space that does not bias the information gathered (i.e. not a reading room)
- Arrange refreshments

## Stage 2: Conduct the phase 1 focus groups

### 1. Materials

- Voice recorder, charger, notebook, pens
- List of focus group participants
- Script for focus group
- Watch or clock
- Amazon vouchers (if incentivising)

### 2. Arrive before the participants

- Check-in with library staff
- Set up room
- Check refreshments

### 3. On arrival of participants

- Sign-post to refreshments
- Housekeeping (toilets, fire alarms, etc.)
- Carry out focus group as per script

### 4. Conducting the focus group

- Set a positive tone

- Make sure that everyone is heard; draw out quieter group members
- Probe for more complete answers
- Monitor questions and time closely – ensure that you are on track and on time
- Don't argue any points with participants.
- Thanks participants and inform them of next steps (i.e. invitation to phase 2)

### **Stage 3: Interpreting and reporting the results of the focus group**

#### **1. Summarise/transcribe each focus group**

- Immediately after the focus group consult notes and have a first listen to the recording in order to produce a quick summary
- Fully transcribe the focus group, as soon after the focus group has been conducted (NB one hour of recording takes between four and six hours to fully transcribe)

#### **2. Analyse the summaries/transcripts**

- Read the notes and look for trends. Note down any themes that occur more than once
- Context and tone are just as important as the words spoken. If comments are phrased negatively or particularly positively or trigger an associated emotional response, this should be noted in the analysis
- Upload transcript into Nvivo
- Apply themes and nodes from coding tree
- Generate phase one data for analysis

### **Stage 4 - Pre-phase 2 focus groups**

#### **1. Generate questions**

- Analyse phase 1 focus group data
- Based on purpose and goals of the research, alongside the analysis of phase 1 move the line of inquiry on to a more sophisticated level and identify up to a further six questions to be asked during the phase 2 focus groups
- Revisit the questions to make sure that they will yield the required data
- Order questions from general to specific

**2. Develop script**

- See stage 1, 4 above and adapt as per questions identified in stage 4, 1

**3. Choose location**

- Contact library authorities used for phase one to check availability and to plan date and time for phase 2 focus group to take place

**4. Identify participants**

- Make contact with original participants from each given focus group location.
- Invite participants to phase 2 focus groups
- Allow for attrition. Not all original participants will be available or able to attend. As long as the number does not decrease below two, then focus group can go ahead as planned.

**Stage 5: Conduct the phase 2 focus groups**

- Apply stage 2, 1 – 4 above

**Stage 6: Interpreting and reporting the results of the phase 2 focus group**

- Apply stage 3, 1 – 2 above

**Stage 7 - Pre-phase 3 focus groups**

**1. Generate questions**

- Analyse phase 1 focus group data
- Based on purpose and goals of the research, alongside the analysis of phases 1 and 2 move the line of inquiry on to a more sophisticated level and identify up to a further six questions to be asked during the phase 3 focus groups
- Revisit the questions to make sure that they will yield the required data
- Order questions from general to specific

**2. Develop script**

- See stage 1, 4 above and adapt as per questions identified in stage 4, 1

**3. Choose location**

- Contact library authorities used for phase one to check availability and to plan date and time for phase 2 focus group to take place

#### **4. Identify participants**

- Make contact with original participants from each given focus group location.
- Invite participants to phase 3 focus groups
- Allow for attrition. Not all original participants will be available or able to attend. As long as the number does not decrease below two, then focus group can go ahead as planned.

### **Stage 8: Conduct the phase 3 focus groups**

Apply stage 2, 1 – 4 above

### **Stage 9: Interpreting and reporting the results of the phase 3 focus groups**

- Apply stage 3, 1 – 2 above

## Appendix E – Sample focus group transcription

### **Redbridge, phase 1 focus group, March 16th 2016**

LEO

What are your feelings towards public libraries?

Participant 30

I think the library is an alternative to a school. My school closes at 4 or 5 and then I can come into the library to carry on my study. It's easier. It makes me feel at ease and less anxious

Participant 32

Makes me feel confident in that I am able to do what I want without having a fear. Things like using the computer and doing my work. It gives me a feeling of independence. Know what I am looking for when I have the opportunity to look I can do it myself

Participant 29

It makes me feel safe and secure as somewhere I can go

Participant 36

We usually go to Gants Hill Library, where it is very quiet and relaxed. You can go and it is nice and quiet. For me I find this library a bit intruding, too many people. Gants Hill is more relaxed, they have refurbished recently and you can sit down and read what you want

Participant 6

I feel really neutral when I come here. If I want to find something I can always find it because there are always books on it.

Participant 4

But there are some negative attributes towards it. On the computer side you can hear them on the phone, and you can't just say to them 'can you be quiet and let me continue what I'm doing'

Participant 30

I feel that sometimes some people feel the need to misuse the library and it's a good place to be. Know for a fact that it's a good place to be. If everyone behaved it would be a better place to be.

LEO

So when we're talking feelings it's a feeling of frustration

Participant 31

I kind of feel like it's my second home. I study there but also my friends can go there and we can study and socialise at the same time. But I also like reading books so I can read there by myself and have fun but I always go to the library

Participant 37

I feel more motivated and productive when I go to the library because everyone else is studying around you. It makes you feel like you are getting things done

Participant 33

It is good for older people as well. They can come and pass the time and read the paper. It is very good, and safe and inclusive.

LEO

So for particular groups of people it has particular functions. Can you think about your attitude towards the library now?

Participant 32

I could say that I look forward to coming to the library because I know that I am going to find things. I know that I am going to be assisted in finding what I want to find and also because I know the subject that I know I'm going to look for, something like creative writing I can look into that if I am using a computer. I will type something to do with creative writing and it comes up or I go to the catalogue system or I can ask the people

Participant 36

When you are researching online you can also grab a book

Participant 29

I think that when you come to the library you can get a book and get a=immersed in it and lose yourself. Because it's such a calm environment it gives you such a positive vibe which is why you look forward to coming here.

Participant 30

I think that my attitude towards the library I like coming into here and grabbing a book, like [participant 32] said, and reading it and getting involved and then I want to really know what happens next. You feel that this book is for me. And when you go to the computer you can find everything and it's free and you think 'Yeah I'm actually getting something out of this place' you see what I mean.

Participant 31

It's a very welcoming environment and a welcoming community. Even if you're lost and you ask directions you can go to the library and they'll happily help you. It is a very welcoming and warm place to be.

Participant 30

What is really good about the books is that they have the categories, like thriller books, or sci-fi or romance and you don't need to go through A to Z. You can actually just find the section and it's there, you read it and you get engrossed into it.

Participant 29

And what I really like is you can also find other similar books, so if you like a certain book by a certain author you can find other books which that author has written, and if it's not there you can reserve it so you know you're going to get it and I think that that's really useful as well.

Participant 31

Speaking as a student I find even if you are not immersed in fiction books you can immerse yourself in studying and I find that environment really useful especially when you are revising for exams.

Participant 32

Besides studying and other things the library is a good source for things to entertain like music and DVDs

Participant 35

You pick up a book and you start reading it and the first or second page you get lost and you want to keep reading it and you want to know what happens next. If it's a genre that you really like you can get engrossed into it, like action. It persuades you just to move on

Participant 30

I was going to say about socialisation. If you're not like a social person you might find someone in the library who has the same interests as you. It helps people who don't have much confidence build their confidence. You might find someone who likes the same book as you. At the end of the day you might find a friend in there.

LEO

Has anyone made a friend or acquaintance in the library?

Participant 31

I had to go to a meeting in the library and there is this one girl who goes to my school and I saw her in the library and I thought oh I might as well wait with her and talk to her. And she talked to me and we talk in school now and it's really nice

LEO

Can I pick up on something that you said \*\*\*\*, in terms of asking for advice and support. How do you find the staff and the help they give?

Participant 36

Always ready to help and give you information. Any activities coming up for the children, during the summer reading events and activities

Participant 31

What's really good is that they also have younger volunteers who are more our age who you can ask and then they have the older more experienced librarians that you can ask for, so there's someone to cater for each demographic.

LEO

And who do you normally go to?

Participant 31

I always go to the front desk where the older people are, but if there is someone walking around I'll naturally approach them because I know they can help me and I naturally relate them to them more

Participant 33

Sometimes they wear the uniforms to identify them.

Participant 29

I was going to say that all the staff are so helpful. When I go to other libraries they say turn left and the books in that section, but here they actually take me there, so I know that I won't get lost again. They always help.

Participant 30

When you're researching you've got like the older librarians who might know about things, maybe like the Victorians because their great-great grandfathers were in there, and then I guess everyone in the library has got a story to tell.

LEO

Who do you think libraries are for?

Participant 32

Everyone

Participant 36

All generations

Participant 35

Similar to what everyone is saying. Everyone. Old and young, anyone who feels they can drop in. That's what I like about the library it is so open

Participant 33

Especially because there is no restriction to come in. You can come and sit down and do whatever you want

Participant 30

You're never too old to go to a library. You see really old people reading newspapers and you see really young people on the computers or like reading a book or studying or researching. A library is place where you see every generation and you end up socialising with every kind of person.

Participant 29

When you come to a library you see so many different people. Some people come to use the computers, some people come to read, some come to study, some come to get out of

the rain. There is no restriction. It's so easy. It's such a calm environment that you don't really want to leave.

Participant 32

Also, I sometimes come to share a cup of tea and have a discussion about a certain subject.

Participant 33

20 years ago I made a friend in the library and then last week I saw him in there again.

Participant 31

But young people socialise with young people and older people socialise with older people, but there is no cross over. I feel that if they did there would be some much experience, but there's not much interaction between them and this could be improved.

Participant 32

The young generation, kids, enjoy story reading.

Participant 31

But there's a separate section for children so you automatically have that segregation.

Participant 33

I think this is something like a school for everyone, young people and old people. Playing and reading. It is a really lovely place

Participant 31

Outside of Youth Parliament we often organise events outside, such as sporting events or dramatic events, and events that are book based, and the library can be used for some of these types of events and to encourage people to socialise with others.

LEO

Are you in a position to influence the Youth Parliament to see if they can hold these events in the library?

Participant 31

It's not with the Youth Parliament it is with Redbridge Libraries, but we do have influence to create these events.

LEO

What do you think libraries contribute to society?

Participant 30

Libraries contribute a lot to society. Without libraries we would not associate with each other. You meet loads of people at libraries. You meet Asian people, you meet black people, you meet white people, loads of people, and at the end of the day it makes us realise that we are a society and it brings us together. Libraries are one of those places that make you realise that 'yeah we are people'

LEO

Are we saying that that actually happens though? Do libraries get people together?

Participant 30

If we do come together we will understand each other and that people come from different places and that it's a great place to be.

Participant 32

I think it tries to contribute towards that.

Participant 29

The library does its best. It plays its part. It's really down to us to decide who we want to be with. The library is there for everyone and you see all different people come in and then from there on I think it's our own choice to go and speak to people and to go and socialise with them.

Participant 31

And there's the stereotype of libraries that they are boring and people are like 'oh I don't want to be there' especially amongst people at school, young people. And we all like to go to libraries, so we all use it, but generally most [young] people I know won't consider going to the library to revise. They'll just do it at home.

LEO

How does that make you feel?

Participant 31

It makes me feel annoyed because it's here for everyone and they have this stereotype, but they haven't really used it.

Participant 36

Depending upon the books, school children will come in to revise. In Ilford there are plenty of resources. In Gants Hill there are no educational resources for secondary school children. No revision guides, no reference books. They have taken most of them out lately, just only a few left. So they are not encouraging them basically.

LEO

So that effects who comes into the library?

Participant 37

I think they are bringing their own books in to study with

LEO

So they're making more use of it as a space.

Participant 29

I think it's more resourceful, this library. If you came here from home there are more books than what you might have at home. So instead of just using the books you have at home you can see around different ones. And they give different research as well because different people make them. So it's better to come to the library because there are different ways of finding out, on the computers, read books, read articles and the library caters for all of that. I agree with \*\*\*\* and I get annoyed because I don't see why more people don't utilise the library.

Participant 32

Apart from that you can use the computers to communicate with the world, your friends, your relatives....

Participant 35

Linked to \*\*\*\*'s point. Because people stereotype the library it makes the library less efficient. People are less likely to go there. It's not being used to the full

Participant 30

I would say it's like a social media website that you can actually physically go in. It's like Instagram or snapchat, a place you can go to. You can go in there and you can just find people and you can find information on things. It's like a physical place you can actually go to.

Participant 32

Added to that, it also aims to promote equality and opportunities and to prevent discrimination of all kinds.

Participant 31

But like social media in a digital platform, people still misuse the space physically. I was there a few weeks ago and people are using it as a rap battle scene or a dance battle scene. They do misuse the space sometimes. You can socialise with your friends and revise, but lots of young people just mess around...

LEO

But of the library is for everyone and for the community, what's wrong with the space being used for these functions?

Participant 31

Primarily it should be like to study. People are there to study and respect other people. When you misuse that, start playing music outside... you annoy other people. There is space to do that outside. People shouldn't do that in the library

Participant 32

In this library there are rooms where they have sessions as well.

Participant 36

As long as it is sound proofed

Participant 32

I think they do some of that upstairs in the other rooms

LEO

What would happen if there were no public libraries?

Participant 32

Life would be boring

Participant 36

Still people would carry on. You can order books on Amazon. Everyone has computer at home and can go online. Still people would carry on but the whole concept of the community would go

Participant 35

Life wouldn't go on for everyone. They might need to rely on the library because of their circumstances at home. They also need it to move up the social ladder. They need this library.

Participant 37

If there was no library, people would think twice about buying books. The free access to books.... It would mean access to knowledge would be restricted.

Participant 34

There would be a lot more people on the streets, as they have a lot less places to go to now after school. Now they might go to the library to hang out or to revise if they have a test like tomorrow.

Participant 33

The problem would be when school is finished, the young people would have nowhere to go. There may be more trouble outside. It is happening now. People got stabbed, do you remember, a couple of years ago, right in front of the police station...school kids. It would be bad for the old people as well... coming to this place. They need the library.

Participant 32

Things like technology and computers would be more expensive as well.

Participant 30

If you close all the libraries you would be closing the door on opportunity an education. You don't just learn in the classroom, you also learn in the library. You don't just learn from teachers, you learn yourself, so if we close our libraries you are closing down opportunities for people who might not have a computer at home or can't afford a printer. It's taking your right to have an education way from you and I think people would not do as well and they would get into more trouble. I know for a fact that people, if you close the library, people would go out there, and hang out with the wrong people and do the wrong things. We would be closing down opportunities for people

Participant 29

If you take away libraries you are kind of just killing the atmosphere. There is such a calm and peaceful atmosphere here. Life would carry on, but you cannot create the same atmosphere at home.

Participant 34

If libraries closed slowly over time, maybe nothing would change much. I read that one in three people have a phone and go on the internet. This would increase, and the internet would become the new library.

LEO

What do you think citizenship means and how libraries contribute to it?

Participant 35

I think what citizenship is, is like sort of a belonging. Your identity. Libraries contribute to that. You go there to study, but you might be wearing your uniform, so it's part of your identity.

Participant 31

When I think of citizenship I think of community and bringing people together. Like citizens coming together. Making that community and bringing people together regardless of age gap. But like I said before, sometimes demographics can just remain segregated and I do feel like sometimes people have the opportunity to socialise and meet and it's the only place where we all can meet.

Participant 32

For me it brings a sense of belonging. The library gives me that

Participant 30

I would say that the library is... you're a citizen of the library, like you're a citizen of the United States of America, or you're a citizen of England or something, so I think you're a citizen, which means that you're a part something. You're a part of the library, part of a small community in a building that makes you feel safe and that you can educate yourself, you can meet new people. The library is a great place to be.

Participant 36

Redbridge is like my place. I belong to this one. Redbridge, Gants Hill and Seven kings Library. If you go to other libraries you don't feel that you're a part of it. Here you can borrow a book here and return it somewhere else. Here in Redbridge I feel like I belong to Redbridge libraries. Not so in other places.

LEO

What is your very favourite thing about the public library?

Participant 29

My favourite thing about the public library is that you can just grab any book that you like and you can just sit as long as you like and read it. And if you really like it you can get another one! Books!

Participant 30

As I said before I think it's a door opener. It's a door opener for opportunities, for being engrossed in your learning and taking the opportunity as it comes to you because very soon libraries will be taken over by phones, so I think we should take the opportunity while we have it for reading, revising and borrowing books. Libraries are a great place to be,

Participant 31

I can meet new people and socialise with new people. I don't get much chance to do that at school because I'm a very introverted person, but when I'm in the libraries I can talk to people, I can meet new people, and my friends can go there too. It's a great place to meet!

Participant 32

Informative

Participant 33

No time restriction

Participant 34

Quiet and organised

Participant 35

It can be key to break down barriers between people.

Participant 36

For me it is a peaceful and relaxed atmosphere

Participant 37

Motivating and confident

## Appendix F – Node/Code Structure Report

# Phase one focus groups

12/11/2016

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
<b>Node</b>			
<b>Nodes\\Casebook</b>			
Nodes\\Casebook\\---		No	None
Nodes\\Casebook\\LEO		No	None
<b>Nodes\\Thematic structure</b>			
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Access		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Access\\Access to computers and Internet		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Access\\Access to services		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Access\\Atmosphere		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Access\\Physical buildings		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Access\\Safe and secure		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Attitude		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Attitude\\Negative		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Attitude\\Neutral		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Attitude\\Positive		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Human capital		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Human capital\\Expertise		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Human capital\\Friendly and approachable staff		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Human capital\\Negative staff experiences		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Intellectual capital		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Social capital		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Social capital\\Clubs & societies		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Social capital\\Courses		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Social capital\\Events		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Social capital\\Helping other library users		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Social capital\\Meeting new people		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Transactional capital		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Capital\\Transactional capital\\Expertise in support		No	None

Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Citizenship	No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Citizenship\\Community	No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Citizenship\\Democracy	No	None

Reports\\Coding Structure Report

Page 1 of 2

12/03/2020 07:16

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Citizenship\\Digital citizenship		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Citizenship\\Digital citizenship\\IT Support		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Citizenship\\Digital citizenship\\Online participation		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Citizenship\\Health and wellbeing		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Citizenship\\Political engagement		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Citizenship\\Societal impact		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Citizenship\\Societal impact\\Community resource		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Citizenship\\Societal impact\\Community resource\\Community		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Inclusion		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Inclusion\\Outreach		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Knowledge		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Knowledge\\Computers and IT		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Knowledge\\Digital information resources		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Knowledge\\Information resources		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Knowledge\\Print books		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Reading		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Reading\\Literacy		No	None
Nodes\\Thematic structure\\Staff support		No	None

## Appendix G – Nvivo thematic structure and casebook node examples

Name	Files	References	Created On
Access		1	3 10/03/2016 13:32
Access to computers and Internet		4	38 10/03/2016 13:34
Access to services		5	28 10/03/2016 14:18
Atmosphere		3	15 28/05/2016 15:25
Physical buildings		6	31 10/03/2016 13:34
Safe and secure		2	8 28/05/2016 15:26
Attitude		0	0 10/03/2016 13:36
Negative		5	57 10/03/2016 13:37
Neutral		2	7 10/03/2016 13:37
Positive		6	80 10/03/2016 13:37
Capital		0	0 10/03/2016 13:35
Human capital		5	15 10/03/2016 13:35
Intellectual capital		3	3 10/03/2016 13:36
Social capital		5	12 10/03/2016 13:35
Transactional capital		5	11 10/03/2016 13:36
Citizenship		4	13 10/03/2016 13:35
Community		6	74 10/03/2016 14:27
Democracy		4	20 10/03/2016 14:03
Digital citizenship		3	22 10/03/2016 13:36
Health and wellbeing		5	29 10/03/2016 14:00

Name	Files	References
Participant 1	2	47
Participant 10	1	14
Participant 11	1	19
Participant 12	1	15
Participant 13	1	7
Participant 14	1	9
Participant 15	1	7
Participant 16	1	5
Participant 17	1	3
Participant 18	1	10
Participant 19	1	6
Participant 2	1	8
Participant 20	1	10
Participant 21	1	6
Participant 22	1	2
Participant 23	1	16
Participant 24	1	16
Participant 25	1	37
Participant 26	1	29
Participant 27	1	17

**Reference 7 - 1.00% Coverage**

Participant 25

Something that I've noticed here is that there a lot of dual language books which is just fantastic. My daughter just pulls them off the shelf like any other. They're not segregated, they're in a space where you can find them. Because they're in English as well I can point to them and say 'guess what language that is' and sometimes she might come and play with it, but it's open to her.

**Reference 8 - 0.23% Coverage**

Participant 25

It goes back to that ownership attitude that we can actually ask for more.

**Reference 9 - 0.17% Coverage**

Participant 25

That's really empowering for that group of women.

**Reference 10 - 0.18% Coverage**

Participant 25

Everyone knows it exists. We've been here for centuries

## Appendix H – Nvivo analysis – examples of queries

The screenshot shows the Nvivo interface with a text search query. The search criteria are set to 'Files & Externals' and 'Selected Items...'. The search term is 'print'. The results table is as follows:

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
Chelmsford	Files\Focus group transcripts	2	0.04%
Edinburgh	Files\Focus group transcripts	1	0.04%
Lincoln	Files\Focus group transcripts	1	0.01%
Liverpool Focus Group Sept 2014 Transcript	Files\Focus group transcripts	2	0.03%
Newcastle City Library	Files\Focus group transcripts	1	0.05%

The screenshot shows the Nvivo interface with a matrix query. The matrix criteria are set to 'Files & Externals' and 'Selected Items...'. The matrix is titled 'attitude and citizenship - Result'. The results table is as follows:

	A : Access	B : Access to computers...	C : Access to services	D : Atmosphere	E : Physical b
4 : Access to computers ...	0	38	8	0	7
5 : Access to services	1	8	28	5	8
6 : Atmosphere	0	0	5	15	2
7 : Physical buildings	0	7	8	2	31
8 : Safe and secure	0	0	3	3	1
9 : Attitude	0	0	0	0	0
10 : Negative	0	4	4	2	3
11 : Neutral	0	2	1	0	1
12 : Positive	0	16	14	4	11
13 : Capital	0	0	0	0	0
14 : Human capital	0	4	3	1	1
15 : Expertise	0	2	1	0	0
16 : Friendly and approa...	0	0	1	0	1
17 : Negative staff exper...	0	0	0	0	0
18 : Intellectual capital	0	0	0	0	0