realising the potential of cultural services

the case for libraries

contents

executive summary

Introduction

Many commentators suggest that libraries are in a state of transition. Some suggest that new technology and an increasingly competitive retail book market are eroding their sense of identity and purpose. Some argue that a narrow 'leisure' rationale is no longer sustainable, while others suggest that libraries have always performed a wide variety of social functions. While there are clear 'best practice' examples of libraries which address a variety of social issues roles, much of the debate is conducted with limited data – mostly *output* rather than *outcome* based. Kerslake and Kinnel (1997) suggest that there is an urgent need for a debate about the meaning, function and impact of public libraries.

Key findings

Inclusiveness and safety:

- limited survey data and strong qualitative evidence suggest that *local* libraries provide valued safe 'social spaces' for a range of social groups, often contributing to psychological well-being; and

- there is a need to explore the perceived and actual constraints on library use by a range of groups and to collect data on the extent of use within library catchments.

Social cohesion:

- research indicates the *potential* for libraries to provide services for a range of minority and marginalised social groups, which serve to legitimate their place in, and strengthen their relationships with, the wider community; and

- much of the existing research is qualitative and there is a need for research to explore the precise (and longer term) *outcomes* of such work.

Local image and identity:

- many local libraries support and stimulate the desire to sustain local identities via initiatives such as local history groups;

- libraries can develop and maintain community self-esteem, especially in areas which lack other local facilities and resources; and

- research evidence on the impact of closures of local libraries indicates their importance for local identity.

Libraries and the arts:

- libraries have traditionally been hosts to arts exhibitions, but the relationship with the arts community is ad hoc;

- libraries have the potential to offer arts organisations access to a socially diverse community of users; and

- there are a number of example of imaginative collaborations, but there is a need for a wider sharing of 'best practice and more systematic collaborations.

Individual and community empowerment:

- libraries can encourage and support voluntary groups, providing opportunities for 'active citizenship';

- best practice examples indicate that libraries can 'empower' by providing relevant social and legal information for vulnerable and marginal social groups; and

- much of the case study data is based on descriptions of output and assumed outcomes. Systematic monitoring and evaluation would provide a better understanding of the contribution of such initiatives to both individual and community empowerment.

Young people and literacy:

- libraries are one of the few social institutions to welcome and positively encourage children as members;

- both quantitative and qualitative evidence illustrates the potential of *local* libraries to support the development of pre-school literacy and contribute to educational development (eg homework classes) - especially in socially deprived areas, where home conditions might not be conducive to working; and

- despite substantial qualitative evidence, there is a need for more systematic monitoring and evaluation of the impact of libraries on the development of literacy among both pre-school and schoolchildren.

Adult skills and literacy:

- quantitative data indicate the ability of library-based projects to assist adult skill development and provide access to flexible learning resources;

- libraries are often regarded as more approachable than educational institutions;

and

- available evidence suggests that adult literacy and training have a lower priority than children's literacy.

ICT literacy:

- libraries have a crucial role to play in exploiting and providing access to information and communication technologies (ICT);

- best practice examples illustrate the potential to provide access and develop ICT skills for children and adults; and

- despite the potential, evidence suggests that such initiatives are not widespread, with more research required about the role and effectiveness of libraries in promoting the community use of ICT.

Economic impact:

Libraries have the potential to make direct and indirect contributions to local economies, although this varies widely. The potential impacts include:

- their purchasing power;

- a resource for new start-ups and other small businesses, especially in collaboration with relevant organizations;

- an important source of information for those seeking jobs and training opportunities;

- in small towns and villages the library can attract users who then may use local shops and services (Matarasso, 1998a; Landry,

1993); and

- providing information about benefits.

  More systematic work is required to illustrate and estimate the economic contribution of libraries to local communities.

  Health:

- by providing inclusive 'social spaces' libraries can contribute to the psychological health and well-being of certain social groups;

- more directly libraries can act as an accessible and non-threatening source of health-related information; and

- the impact of health information provision in UK public libraries has not been fully explored. In view of the potential illustrated by examples of best practice this requires further investigation.

  The limits of current evidence:

- the *theoretical potential* of libraries to contribute to a wide range of social and community issues is clear and is illustrated by the range of research material available; and

- much evidence is largely *output* based, with *outcomes* assumed, or illustrated by limited, qualitative evidence. Much current evidence permits only conditional statements.

  The need for adequate output measures:

- There is a widespread absence of robust and

relevant *output* measures relating to the use of libraries.

Processes and provision:

- it cannot be assumed that the potential positive outcomes of libraries will be achieved in all circumstances by all participants. The way in which needs are identified, provision is organised, publicised, delivered, managed and monitored all have an impact on outcomes; and

- there is a need for more detailed information about the various organisational factors which lead to successful outcomes.

Identifying constraints and demand:

- there is a need to develop a greater understanding of the nature and distribution of the socially excluded, their needs and the perceived institutional, social, personal and environmental constraints to use libraries.

Outcome definition and impact measurement:

- there is a need to identify robust and valid *outcome* performance indicators; and

- to 'make the case for libraries' there is an urgent need to address issues relating to the definition and measurement of both intermediate and final outcomes and to prioritise more clearly the areas to which they wish to make a contribution (ie the social and economic impacts, educational impacts, community development).

1 introduction

1.1   New rationales or affirming old roles?

- Most commentators agree that libraries are in a state of transition. The concern is that an era of new information technology and an increasingly competitive retail book market, libraries are in danger of losing their sense of identity and purpose. In this context, Kerslake and Kinnel (1997) suggest that there is an urgent need for a debate about the meaning, function and impact of public libraries.

- The reduction in book issues may undermine their assumed rationale, with quantitative indicators making public libraries vulnerable to cuts. Some argue that a narrow 'leisure' rationale (lending books (usually fiction) for leisure reading) is no longer sustainable. For example, in the ten years to 1997 there was an overall drop of 19 per cent in book issues (Audit Commission, 1997). Recent statistics (Maynard, 2000) indicate that there has been a 21.2 per cent reduction in borrowing since 1989. Issues of adult fiction have declined by 31 per cent since 1989, with a 14 per cent reduction in non-fiction. However, the picture is mixed, with issues of children's books up by over seven per cent (Kerslake and Kinnel, 1997; Dunlop et al 1995, p57) and loans of materials other than books have risen by 100 per cent between 1987 and 1997 (Audit Commission, 1997, p11).

- There has been a reduction in library services. For example, a survey of local authorities in England and Wales (Proctor et al, 1998) found that, between 1986 and 1997, 179 building-based library service points in 56 local authorities were lost - a 5.5 per cent reduction. Pateman (1999) also reported the decline in service points, with 107 being lost over a three year period to 1999 (down to 19,203). Because of reductions in opening hours and an adoption of standard patterns of opening (9am-5pm), "access to libraries is now less than it was 10 years ago in 8 out of 10 library authorities in England and Wales" (Proctor et al, 1998, p82).

- The developing information society and the 'commodification' of information raise issues of cost and the possibility that free access to a range of information via the internet is threatening the lending and information roles of libraries.

- Demographic changes, social fragmentation and increased poverty among the most marginalised groups and increased need for life-long training/learning, mean that there is an increased need for educational and cultural provision.

- Some question the extent to which libraries cater for the whole community. Greenhalgh et al (1995) suggest that, as with many publicly provided cultural services, the social base of libraries is narrow as they are used most extensively by the middle class. However, British Library research demonstrated that 27 per cent of regular users of public libraries are from social class DE (compared to their 22% share of the population) (DCMS, 1999). Others suggest that, even if this is true, libraries retain a value for *the poor who use them* and such general analyses ignore important local differences. For example, a study of the impact of a library strike in Sheffield (Proctor et al, 1996) illustrated that in one ward, where 40 per cent of users were university graduates, only 20 per cent used the library weekly; in a ward where only one per cent were graduates, 72 per cent used the library

at least once a week - a much greater degree of dependency.

1.2   The ubiquity of libraries

The ubiquity of libraries is emphasised by Matarasso (1998a) who points out that:

- in 1993, there were 7,265 libraries in the UK open for more than 10 hours per week, with 58 per cent of the population being members (although much fewer are regular users).

The Audit Commission (1997, p7) comment that:

"In comparison with other discretionary cultural and leisure services, libraries attract large numbers of users. In England and Wales 24 million adults are public library members and 12 million people use a public library at least once a fortnight. This level of use is achieved with relatively modest resourcing (£13 per head of population) – the library service is well used and well liked (even by non-users)".

Consequently libraries are more evenly spread and reach across more age, gender, class, cultural and ethnic divisions than any other cultural service. Matarasso (1998a, p17) asserts that "the principle of unquestioned inclusivity is kept alive today by the Library Service almost single-handedly". Landry (1993) suggests that the wider social profile cannot be over-emphasised - although certain researchers question the limits of this in practice for, for example, lone parents and disabled people (Linley and Usherwood, 1998) and people from minority ethnic groups (Roach and Morrison, 1998).

Library users tend to place a high value on them.

- A survey in Sheffield found that 75 per cent of users visited their local library at least weekly (Proctor et al, 1996).

- A survey in three towns found that the proportion making weekly visits ranged from 52 per cent to 67 per cent (Proctor et al, 1998).

- Following closures of local libraries, 82 per cent of users surveyed had found an alternative library. (Proctor et al, 1998).

1.3   The social impact of libraries

Commentators argue that analyses which centre on libraries' 'leisure' and book-lending aspects misrepresent their historic functions, current reality and potential. Kerslake and Kinnel (1997, p1) argue that "public libraries' effectiveness and use to society is not waning and this can be best demonstrated by understanding their social impact more specifically". Matarasso (1998a, p v) argues that:

"Existing library performance indicators [eg number of books issued] are an inadequate management tool for the library of the 21st century. New performance indicators must be developed to reflect the broad social impact of the most imaginative library services and to encourage others to take a wider review of their mission".

This 'new' emphasis on the 'social impact' of libraries (Greenhalgh et al, 1995; Kerslake and Kinnel, 1997; Matarasso, 1998a; Harris, 1998) is an attempt to move beyond established library functions and the one-

dimensional output performance measure of book loans. For example, Matarasso (1998a, p32) argues that "the elasticity of the library idea is of great value" – libraries' multi-functional nature and extensive local provision provide them with the ability to develop a range of services to meet a wide variety of local needs. Landry (1993) suggests that libraries often cross the boundaries between learning and leisure, enlightenment and entertainment, casual use and dedicated study, which many other arts and cultural facilities fail to do.

Greenhalgh et al (1995, p89) propose an ambitiously wide ranging remit and significance for public libraries which:

"…have become part of the fabric of civic society. They are sources of support for many different kinds of activities. Libraries can be a bedrock helping to sustain the life of a locality. They are used by individuals carrying out the day-to-day activity that keeps society going. This is what we have termed the social impact of the library".

These approaches go 'beyond leisure' to suggest that public libraries have the potential to make a contribution to a wide range of social issues (Matarasso, 1998a and b; Linley and Usherwood, 1998; Kerslake and Kinnel, 1997). Most published research relates to the following areas of claimed individual, social and economic impacts:

Personal development

Social cohesion

Community empowerment and self-determination

Local image/identity

Health and well-being

Economic impact

However, measuring such, often amorphous, impacts raises a series of conceptual and methodological problems. For example, as with many other cultural services, many of the claimed impacts are inter-dependent – *outcomes* such as personal development, community empowerment and self-determination and social cohesion are inter-dependent (as well as being very difficult to quantify).

Consequently, there are a range of methodological issues which must be acknowledged before we review the research evidence for the social impact of libraries.

1.4   Problems of evidence

Limited output information

Matarasso (1998a, p49) suggests that although libraries collect a wide range of information, most of it is 'internally focused' and output driven (see also Harris, 1998). However, he suggests that even these data are of limited quality, with many libraries unable to state accurately their level of use and users. In a survey to explore the impact of library closures, Proctor et al (1998, p8) requested information on registered readers. However, "most authorities had either not kept or could not find the data required".

Proctor et al (1998) also assert that the analysis of management output data undertaken by most authorities is flawed. For example, because of the problem of intervening variables, they argue that "it is questionable whether the impact of individual

reductions in opening hours can ever be determined accurately from statistical data" (Proctor, 1998, p34). They conclude that "the impact of reductions is so varied and so subject to other unidentified variables that the result of any specific reduction cannot be predicted with any accuracy" (Proctor et al, 1998, p84).

Problems of assessing outcomes

However, the difficulties are even greater when attempting to measure and evaluate the claimed *social impacts* of public library services - a problem facing most cultural services. For example, most people's use of library facilities is casual and often goes unrecorded, reducing greatly the ability to measure their impact on individuals, social groups and communities. Even where the impact of library services on identifiable individuals and groups can be measured, there remains the issue of establishing a direct causal link.

Matarasso (1998a) offers the example of a highly valued homework support programme and an associated improvement in educational attainment among attenders. However, he suggests that neither of these facts *proves* that access to homework clubs and library facilities *produced* the recorded change – other factors may be responsible (parental support, school). In the absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation, the issue of 'other factors' remains a major constraint on definitive evaluations of many aspects of the social impact of public libraries.

For example, Linley and Usherwood (1998, p96) in a study to establish new performance measures for libraries, admit that most of their findings are "derived from qualitative, often

anecdotal, evidence". Nevertheless, they argue that "the key message…is that qualitative data, rigorously gathered, are valid evidence and should be treated as such by both politicians and professionals". Green and McKrell (1998, p21) support this view and claim that the benefit of public libraries to individuals and communities "cannot be demonstrated by statistics alone" and that "qualitative evidence, properly gathered, provides valid evidence of the values of libraries".

Balance of probability or beyond reasonable doubt?

Matarasso (1998a, p5) argues that many of the methodological issues involved in 'proving' cause and effect for the social impact of libraries may be impossible to overcome. However, while this may be unsatisfactory from a theoretical research perspective, "it does not invalidate …the attempt to assess the social impact of library initiatives". He suggests that "the decision-making processes of public administration …depend on the balance of probability rather than on the elimination of reasonable doubt".

Others are less sanguine about the lack of quantitative evidence about the social impacts of libraries and suggest that more research is required to demonstrate more clearly their value and impact (Proctor et al, 1998).

Because of the widespread absence of quantitative data on the social impact of libraries, much of the evidence falls within this area of 'the balance of probability'.

- An evaluation of the educational impact of two local libraries concludes that:

11

"In the area of educational impact, as with many other themes, the data illuminate and illustrate rather than represent the role of the library. We can, however, say that public libraries provided *some* support to *some* adult and young learners and have *some* beneficial effects in *some* circumstances". (Linley and Usherwood (1998, p23)

- A review of the impact of libraries' work with community groups states that:

"…while it may be an exaggeration to say that the library directly promoted active citizenship there was much evidence to suggest that it built confidence in individuals which *might* [emphasis added] then have an effect on the wider community". (Linley and Usherwood,1998, p40)

- A review of projects submitted for the Holt Jackson/Library Association Community Initiatives Award, argues that:

"…if nothing else the findings suggest that the social and community development potential of library services is much more significant than has often been perceived". (Matarasso, 1998a)

Factors affecting impacts

The potential role of libraries depends on a range of factors - location, alternative resources of information and provision (eg educational institutions), the accessibility/friendliness of other organisations (eg welfare, legal advice), the status of the chief librarian, the relationship between the library and other social services. Further, evidence suggests that rural libraries may fulfil slightly different functions than those in urban areas. Linley and Usherwood (1998) suggest that it is often in the smaller, or less well resourced, communities that libraries have the greatest impact, even though the library may be small (see also Matarasso, 1998b).

A library system or meeting local needs?

Because of the large number of libraries, diversity of type, differing levels of resources, varying responses to change and differing locations it is impossible to generalise meaningfully about the library *system.* Some see this diversity as both inevitable and desirable (Matarasso,1998b), others suggest that greater efforts need to be made to establish a more coherent (and measurable) set of standards of provision (Proctor et al, 1998), while others (Harris, 1998) suggest that it is not possible to establish standard criteria and that emphasis should be placed on *processes.*

The best practice case studies outlined in this report cannot be regarded as 'typical' and there are wide variations in practice. For example, a small study of three local libraries, concluded that "libraries are not perceived either by people in communities, or by many of their staff, to be associated with community regeneration or social inclusion" (Harris, 1998, p13).

Pateman (1999, p450) suggests that this is because few library authorities have a "strategy, structure and culture" to address the issue of social inclusion. Further, despite claims to inclusivity, Roach and Morrison (1998), in a study of library services for minority ethnic communities, suggest that library professionals often lack the understanding and skills to develop more

inclusive service provision. Linley and Usherwood (1998) suggest that the development of a wider social role for libraries is constrained by a lack of public awareness of library services and negative perceptions of library rules, culture and atmosphere. For example, Roach and Morrison (1997) suggest that in some disadvantaged communities, libraries are seen as excluding and are not always the "default information-providing agency" (Harris, 1998, p2).

More generally, Harris (1998, pp1-2) suggests that the consideration of the social contribution of public libraries is faced with three problems:

- the *unevenness* of activity, the status of the chief librarian and relationships between libraries and other social services;

- the lack of sustainability of many innovations and inadequate dissemination of good practice; and

- the lack of the ability/methods for demonstrating libraries' value for money.

  Consequently, the mostly qualitative and often anecdotal examples of the social impact of libraries in the following quotations cannot be taken to be *representative* of the work of libraries. However, they do indicate the *potential* of libraries under certain conditions and in certain locations.

2 inclusiveness and safety

2.1   Inclusiveness

Many commentators suggest that *the* key feature of public libraries, and one which underpins their potential, is their inclusiveness and the perception of them as being a 'safe' environment. For example, Landry (1993), in a study of libraries in town centres, suggests that libraries are used by a wider cross-section of the local population than almost any other public, commercial or retail institution in the town center; in part because they were felt to be a 'safe' environment in which to meet people, sit and browse or use without payment or pressure (an increasingly rare use of space in the modern town centre). Greenhalgh et al (1995, p92) suggest that:

"…the neutrality of the library and the claim to serve the higher sphere of general interest establishes public libraries as safe and legitimate places for most people. Public libraries create non-discriminating spaces for people to be".

2.2   Social isolation and psychological well-being

Linley and Usherwood (1998, p32), in a case study of libraries in two authorities, emphasise the role of the library as a *social centre*. Most respondents felt that the libraries helped people to overcome aspects of social isolation. As one user said, libraries are important for "somebody…living on their own…can sit as long as they like, you're not hassled".

Consequently, libraries can have a beneficial effect on psychological health and well-being, especially for isolated and vulnerable elderly and disabled people. For example, during a strike in Sheffield libraries 60 per cent of users who attended activity classes or social events

at the libraries missed these the most (Proctor et al, 1996).

In explaining the lack of popularity of mobile provision compared to local libraries, Proctor et al (1998, p84) conclude that "a building-based library offers the user something quite distinctive and unrelated to the utilitarian need to find something to read". One of their respondents (Proctor et al, 1998, p63) stated that:

"I think that socially, libraries provide an excuse to get out of the house and meet people …good for any age group who find themselves lonely".

Another named the worst aspect of the closure of a local library as:

"…not having a place to meet locally or relax and sit down".

Linley and Usherwood (1998, p23) suggest that the library is often viewed as easier to approach than organisations with more obvious associations with welfare, leisure and culture and that it "is a more accessible resource for those who may still be building up their confidence in approaching official institutions". Kerslake and Kinnel (1997) suggest that libraries provide a free, safe and open space for those not in the labour market - women carers, volunteers, middle-aged unemployed men and elderly people.

- In a survey 70 per cent of elderly people (over 55 years of age) used their library at least once per month, with 20 per cent using it weekly. Use of libraries was as frequent among more elderly people - 70 per cent of over 75s also used their library regularly, with

29 per cent using it occasionally (Lucas, 1993).

This perception of accessibility, inclusiveness and safety underpins many of the claimed social benefits of public libraries. However, it should also be remembered that even supporters of the public library system suggest that its social base of users remains narrow (Greenhalgh et al, 1995) and not all libraries are perceived as welcoming (Roach and Morrison, 1997; 1998).

Further, there is a related issue of availability - reduced opening hours may have had a negative effect on library users, especially those in full-time employment and families (DCMS, 1999).

2.3   Case study

Sunday Opening: Essex

In a pilot scheme five libraries were opened on Sunday afternoons and attracted on average 384 people to each library. A user survey indicated that the majority had chosen to visit because they had more time, with about one fifth using the library because the family could visit together. There were indications that Sunday opening attracted a higher proportion of younger and middle aged people than during the week. Following this pilot, one library in each district council area opened on Sundays.

2.4   Conclusions

1. **Although there is an absence of large scale quantitative evidence, there is some survey data and strong qualitative evidence that *local* libraries provide valued safe social spaces for a range of social groups.**

2. **This perception enables libraries to make a distinctive contribution to reducing aspects of social isolation and exclusion.**

3. **Such 'inclusiveness' seems to underpin many of their wider information-providing functions.**

Nevertheless, it is suggested (Roach and Morrison, 1998; DCMS, 1999; Greenhalgh et al, 1995) that not all groups share this perception of 'inclusiveness'.

4. **There is a need to explore the perceived and actual constraints on library use by a range of groups and to collect data on the extent to which all groups within library catchments are users.**

3 social cohesion

3.1 Introduction

The actual or potential perception of 'inclusiveness' underpins the potential of libraries to contribute to the development of social cohesion. Further, although there is a variety of claimed social impacts, most are viewed as making a contribution to increased social cohesion and inclusiveness - personal development; skill development; literacy; information about rights; community development; developing community organisational capacities and empowerment. All are taken to contribute to the social integration of individuals and social groups.

In an examination of 18 library projects submitted to the annual Holt Jackson/Library Association awards (plus a small survey of 69 participants in four projects), Matarasso (1998) highlights a number of ways in which some libraries extended access to their core information services and moved library services closer to a community development approach. He describes a number of projects which, it is claimed, have assisted a range of minority groups to raise their profile, develop confidence and become part of their local communities.

3.2 Case studies

Examples offered by Matarasso (1998a) include:

Merton Asian Women's Association

The local library offered a safe and respectable meeting place for local Asian women (who brought their children to use the library). This resulted in the establishment of the Association, which had 250 members, with monthly attendances between 25 and

30. The Association, with the support of library staff, organised workshops, discussions and invited speakers on relevant topics. It is suggested that the Association and its activities served to increase the confidence of the women - empower and increase their organisational capacities - and greatly extend their social networks.

Library of Information for the Elderly (LIFE), Renfrew

This outreach programme was aimed at the housebound and elderly (60 plus) in Areas of Priority Treatment. In 1993-97 the outreach team made an average of 800 home visits per year, with enquiries averaging about 2,500 per year. It also referred 40 people to the Housebound Library Service.

Birmingham Irish Studies initiative

Following the Birmingham bombings, the Irish community felt isolated and misunderstood. An exhibition on the Irish in Birmingham led to the establishment of an Irish Studies Group, the purchase of new library stock, author events and the establishment of a directory of the Irish in Birmingham. It is suggested that this initiative provided a sense of identity and status for the Irish community and its perceived success led to its extension to other ethnic groups.

Gateshead Disability Information Project

This addressed problems faced by people with disabilities by developing a range of media, including talking daily newspapers, video and sound information.

Matarasso (1998, p24) suggests that the success of many of these projects has enabled

the participants "to develop confidence, connections and respect within the wider community". A major aspect of this success was the opportunity to develop social networks. For example, in the (small) survey of 69 participants in four projects, 88 per cent claimed to have made new friends through the project. It is significant that this outcome was most likely where there was a substantial element of self-organisation by volunteers (eg the Merton Asian Women's Association).

Islington Library Services for black and other ethnic minority groups

Islington Library Services liases with 50 ethnic minority groups and outreach librarians discuss their library and information needs, involving them in the selection and acquisition of materials. The library also supports the groups in promoting their cultures, runs educational programmes and trains co-ordinators in information provision. Library material is translated into 15 minority languages.

3.3   Conclusions

1. **The concepts of 'social cohesion' and 'social inclusion' are amorphous and complex, making any evaluation of the impact of library services difficult (it will inevitably be only one factor in a much more complex process).**

2. **Existing research indicates the *potential* for libraries to provide services for a range of minority and marginalised social groups and by doing so strengthening their relationships with the wider community.**

3. **However, much of the existing research is qualitative and assumes**

that the inevitable outcome of successful projects is greater 'social cohesion'.

4. **There is a need for more detailed follow-up research to explore the precise (and longer term) outcomes of such work.**

5. **To address systematically issues of social cohesion, libraries should identify the nature and distribution of the socially excluded in their catchments and their library-related needs.**

4 local image and identity

4.1   Introduction

This role for libraries is closely related to concerns with 'social cohesion'. Many commentators (eg Kerslake and Kinnel,1997; Matarasso, 1998a and 1998b; Linley and Usherwood, 1998; Harris, 1998) suggest that libraries have an important (if often under-developed) role to play in communities undergoing radical change and social and economic dislocation.

They can do this by providing access to local identities in a globalising world, by validating a sense of local identity and historical continuity and strengthening community pride and confidence. This is seen in the widespread use of local library facilities by local history groups – a form of 'serious leisure' which combines a leisure time activity with a concern with social cohesion, integration and identity. For example, Harris (1998, p12) in discussion groups in three local authority case studies found that:

"…what was being talked about was more than just 'local history' - community identity might be a better term; the library might be the key contributor to initiatives in this area; and such initiatives can add greatly to the sense of coherence and integration of a community".

There are widespread examples of libraries hosting local cultural activities such as storytelling sessions, local literature competitions, local history exhibits and providing help and assistance to voluntary groups concerned with all aspects of local history.

4.2   Case studies

Horley Local History Centre

This initiative, which is based in the local library and staffed by volunteers, was the winner of the 1997 Community Initiative Award. It offers information on local issues and history and in the year to March 1997 it was staffed for 99 days and dealt with 415 inquiries. The model has been extended to three other such centres in East Surrey Area libraries.

Link Memories, Fife Central Area libraries

This project seeks to promote awareness and use of the local library and gather local historical information. The project resulted in the establishment of a core group who eventually became self-managing and worked to publish a book on local history.

Proctor et al's (1998, p88) research on the impact of the reduction of opening hours and closures provides some of the most definitive information about the value of libraries because "it is based, not on views and opinions about existing services, but on changes in behaviour when an obstacle is put in the way of library use".

- The research emphasised the distinctive value of *local* building-based libraries. Those who had expected to use an alternative library had eventually gone back to their own local library, despite having to adapt to restricted hours.

- Many respondents felt that the local library provided a focal point which, via its information role, contributed to a sense of community.

"All the posters and notices [in another library] are about things which have nothing to do with us and which we don't want to go to" (Proctor et al, 1998, p88).

"It [the local library] was an opportunity to keep in touch with local activities, theatres, talks and features, local government activities and what was going on within the borough" (Proctor et al, 1998, p61).

Proctor et al (1998) further emphasise the role of *local* libraries in local identities by highlighting the importance of the importance of *spontaneity* and *convenience* in their use. In post-closure surveys in three authorities, although 82 per cent of users used another library after closure, most were visiting the library less frequently. They concluded:

"The results seem to show that the value of the local library goes well beyond its convenience and proximity. Respondents felt very strongly about community identity and ownership of the facility. They described the former libraries as focal points for the community, highlighting the library's information and social role" (Proctor et al,1998, p66).

One respondent commented that:

"…[the closed] library was helpful and welcoming. You felt you were considered important. The staff know everyone's name. Now you are part of a larger concern and the personal touch has gone" (Proctor et al, 1998, p62).

1. **Related to their potential social inclusiveness and contributions to social cohesion, local libraries have the ability both to support and stimulate the desire to sustain local identities.**

2. **They can develop and maintain community self- esteem, especially in areas which lack other local facilities and resources.**

3. **Research indicates the importance user attribute to *local* libraries.**

4. **Research is required about the social composition of such groups and the extent of the definition of community and identity which they support.**

4.3   Conclusions

19

5 libraries and the arts

5.1 Introduction

Libraries' potential role in promoting the arts is related to local identities, individual and community empowerment and literacy. Libraries have traditionally been hosts to art and photographic exhibitions and have been partners in festivals. A Library Association working party concluded that:

"…all publicly funded libraries can and should contribute to the cultural life of the communities in which they are situated [and] that art is more than literature and libraries should seek to promote music, crafts, video and developments in new technology as well as creative writing and reading" (quoted in Liddle et al, 2000).

Further, there is a major incentive for the arts world to collaborate with libraries:

"…libraries can offer arts organisations access to a community of users that in its diversity and socio-economic range exceeds anything to be found in any other arts or cultural institution…it is clear that the majority of arts organisations at present have no idea of the range of users that libraries attract. This is an argument waiting to be made". (Liddle et al, 2000, p35)

On the basis of a survey of all UK library authorities and more than 300 arts organisations, Liddle et al (2000) conclude that relationships between libraries and arts organisations:

- are ad hoc (dependent on individual initiative);

- tend to be dominated with a concern with art and literature; and

- need greater mutual understanding between arts workers and librarians if the existing good practice is to be extended.

Much of this research is concerned with the nature of partnerships and working relationships which deliver certain types of output (author events, readers' groups/ workshops). However, Liddle et al (2000) do provide some examples of imaginative links between libraries and the arts.

5.2 Case studies

Visual arts and book connections

A visual arts project developed as part of National Galleries Week, involved taking a group of librarians into a gallery to 'read' the paintings and make connections with library book stock. This resulted in the compilation of creative reading/book lists which were supported by library stock taken into the gallery.

Community musician

A community musician, whose aim was to celebrate local arts, worked in a local library to get in touch with local people. The library was a key partner in an adult improvisation group and in the children's summer school - operating as an icebreaker and a means of publicity, and providing the opportunity for new participants to get involved. A training day was held for librarians to explore and expand skills in creative storytelling and in making libraries more accessible for people with disabilities. The outcome was that librarians committed to providing more creative work within libraries, but felt that this should be in support of artists rather than providing workshops themselves.

5.3 Conclusions

1. Such examples illustrate the broad potential of libraries to contribute identity and empowerment via 'arts development'.

2. Most initiatives are ad hoc and tend to be concerned with art and literature.

3. There is a need for greater collaboration between arts workers and librarians.

4. However there is little analysis of *outcomes*. Liddle et al's (2000) survey of UK public library authorities found that, while two thirds collected performance data, much of it was based on volume indicators (attendances, number of events and income), usually collected via relatively unsophisticated techniques.

5. A survey of arts organisations (Liddle et al, 2000) found that nearly two thirds (63 per cent had not worked with libraries, mainly because a lack of awareness of the opportunities or, the related, lack of contact with libraries.

6. There is a need for further research into both the potential social impact of joint libraries/arts projects and the basis for successful collaborations.

6 individual and community empowerment

6.1 Introduction

Roach and Morrison (1998, p41) define empowerment in terms of libraries' contribution as "access to information that assists in the translation of knowledge to the potential for economic, social and political action". However, Matarasso (1998b) suggests that although libraries have the capacity to act as empowering institutions, this is not always realised. This partly reflects people's limited ideas of the potential of libraries:

"…participants in discussion groups ….. shared a certain incomprehension at the idea of libraries having an active, empowering role in the community" (Matarasso, 1998b, p32 - see also Linley and Usherwood, 1998 and Harris, 1998 for similar analyses).

Nevertheless, while such analyses might apply to most libraries, there are a number of examples which clearly illustrate the potential of libraries. The direct contribution of libraries to 'empowerment' can be divided broadly into two approaches.

(a)   Volunteerism and increased
         organisational capacity

- Many library projects depend on substantial community involvement in the organisation and management of their work and "this kind of development is both a consequence of and dependent on the development in skills and confidence reported by participants" (Matarasso, 1998a, p29)

- In a small survey (69 participants in four projects) about three-quarters (72 per cent) reported improved self-confidence as a result

-

of taking part in library-based projects (Matarasso, 1998a).

Some library-based projects had either served to strengthen and support existing groups, or had resulted in the development of new community groups (eg local history, literature development).

(b)   Empowerment via information

Some libraries have gone beyond the more traditional responsive approach to the provision of information and adopted a proactive, targeted approach to provide vulnerable and marginal groups with access to information about their social and legal rights.

6.2 Case studies

Factbank, Angus

This project was part of the decentralisation of information to scattered rural communities, which provided a database of information about the full range of council services, with named contacts to ensure personal service. A hard copy of this was placed in 300 locations.

L8 Law Library, Liverpool

The L8 Law centre was established after the 1981 Toxteth riots to provide free access to legal advice. Its users vary widely and include people looking for information in support of their cases before industrial tribunals and benefits appeals. Its services have been expanded to included a variety of resources on black history and culture (Matarasso, 1998).

Children's Information Bureau, Wrexham

This provided a central information point for a wide range of children's services and, although located in the Association of Voluntary Organisations, it was run by staff from library, education and social services. It had a database of over 1,300 entries on registered childminders, playgroups, leisure activities, health services, nurseries, youth clubs plus a collection of books on parenting and childcare. It received 1,000 enquiries in first 12 months (Matarasso, 1998).

6.3 Conclusions

1. **Library service support for community groups and activities can provide the opportunity to build confidence in individuals which *might* then have an effect on the wider community (Linley and Usherwood, 1998).**

2. **Like other cultural services libraries can provide encouragement to, and support for, voluntary groups and provide opportunities for 'active citizenship'.**

3. **However, although anecdotal evidence suggests that libraries can make a vital contribution, there is little research regarding either intermediate or final outcomes of such opportunities.**

4. **There is a need for more systematic monitoring and evaluation on such outcomes and the relationship between individual and community empowerment.**

5. **More critical work (Harris, 1998; Roach**

and Morrison, 1998) suggests that library professionals often lack the understanding and skills to develop more inclusive service provision, indicating a need for staff development.

7 young people and literacy

7.1 Introduction

Most of the research-based literature places strong emphasis on the contribution which public libraries can make to the development of literacy among children and young people. In part this is because of the supposedly 'special relationship' between young people and libraries.

- A national survey of library authorities found that 99 per cent of respondents offered regular events for children and 61 per cent for teenagers, with just under half (46 per cent) offering events for parents (McKrell et al, 1998).

- Libraries are one of the few social institutions to allow children to become members and positively encourage this via storytelling, literacy and welcoming children's areas (Kerslake and Kinnel,1997) (see Elkin (1996) for a review of types of provision).

Further, Kerslake and Kinnel (1997, p9) suggest that:

"Public libraries are the only means whereby the widest choice of titles can be made available free of charge to the user... the public library is the only statutory library service that is available to pre-school children ...where introduction to books and the pleasure of reading is vital".

Comedia (1993) suggest that public libraries are one of children's first links to a wider society and one of the first ways of being recognised as an individual citizen. A survey of teachers and parents following library closures, concluded that libraries brought children into contact with the wider community, because:

"...library visits are not just about books... [following library closures] children have now lost an opportunity to gain a wider range of skills and experiences that the school cannot offer... The library was seen as a place for social interaction, promoting a friendly and familiar environment in which children can learn important social skills. It helps them build relationships with adults and respect and understand elderly people". (Proctor et al, 1998, p79),

Several authors offer examples of 'best practice' (Matarasso, 1998a; Kerslake and Kinnel, 1997; Linley and Usherwood, 1998).

7.2 Case studies

After Hours Activities, Knowsley, Merseyside

The library provides homework clubs and a more relaxed and informal range of after-school activities for 5-12 year-olds on two weekday afternoons and Saturday morning. It recorded 573 attendances in the first nine months by 125 children, with individual sessions attracting over 30 children. It resulted in 500 additional book issues in nine months and attracted 23 children as new library members.

Homework Help Clubs, London Borough of Southwark

These were established in response to disappointing exam grades in local schools, via a partnership between the library service and the After Schools Service. They are open for two hours after school (some also on Saturday mornings), with trained helpers. The clubs encourage IT literacy and CD-ROM provision and free internet access are

planned. The clubs are well used and extended hours are planned, with children developing a sense of attachment to the libraries and each other and school grades are improving (Raven, 1996).

Pendle Pakistan Welfare Association

Concern about the poor educational attainment of young Pakistanis led to the establishment of self-help homework centres, with Section 11 funding from the Home Office. Because of difficulties obtaining books the Association established its own community library, with the assistance of the library service. The Home Office requirement of a three per cent annual improvement in the children's grades was surpassed in the first year, with a 17 per cent improvement (it is acknowledged that the causes of such an improvement were complex) (Matarasso, 1998a, p19).

Play and Learn, Newcastle

In a deprived area local families expressed a concern about the lack of access to quality, educational toys. This led to the establishment of nine toy libraries in libraries, schools and community premises. In June 1997, 205 families and 362 children were members and the libraries were being run by volunteers.

Bookstart, Leeds

Leeds Library and Information Services in partnership with Social Services, East Leeds Family Learning Centre and a local employer established this scheme. The health visitor gives each new mother a *Bookstart* bag (a leaflet, poster, a questionnaire about the parents' current use of the library, a wall chart and a board book). The aim is to promote

reading with children, particularly among parents who do not see themselves as natural readers and to encourage them to enrol their babies as members of the library.

Read It, Leeds

A community consultation process revealed that young people's literacy was a greater concern than crime. The library service established the 'Read It' project and provided an activity pack which included record cards for reading plus a reward system. The project was so successful that a 'Super Read It' scheme was introduced for the more than 300 who had read more than 40 books. There were 3,500 registered children, which was estimated to include 75 per cent of 5-13 year-olds in the target area. Of these, 48 per cent returned record cards, or attended 'Read It' sites and more than 100 reading volunteers have been trained.

Matarasso (1998a, p18) admits that "it is too early to describe in detail the scheme's impact on local literacy levels, still less on wider educational attainment and only a full evaluation with controls will be able to place its contribution in the context of children's general education" (see also Linley and Usherwood, 1998, for similar arguments).

Nevertheless, two preliminary studies provide suggestive evidence about the value of 'Read It.'

- A qualitative survey of project workers, parents, children, volunteers and teachers (Beverton, 1997) found that teachers viewed the project very positively and regarded it as having a significant impact.

- An evaluation of 33 children, about half of whom were assessed as having a reading age at least six months below their chronological age, found the following (Houdmont, 1997):

  93 per cent thought that weekly attendance had improved their reading skills;

  81 per cent felt cleverer as a result;

  79 per cent reported that they read more at home;

  51 per cent read alone for at least half an hour a day.

Brightstart Early Literacy Project, Birmingham

This was the first in the UK to emphasise the importance of pre-school learning and, by helping parents to work effectively with their children, promotes the development of essential learning skills. Other similar schemes are run in Sunderland, Staffordshire, Walsall, Croydon, Wandsworth, West Sussex and Hertfordshire.

Readabout Bookbus, Cynon Valley

This scheme works with playgroups and schools, delivering books, running storytelling sessions and holding face painting and craft sessions. It also runs *summer reading programmes* to prevent children from losing literacy skills and maintaining reading readiness over long summer break. This is regarded as especially important in rural communities, where such events as storytelling sessions offer children a chance of social interaction.

7.3 Children and the need for *local* libraries

In addition to formal education-oriented programmes provided by some libraries, there is widespread casual use by children. In this regard Proctor et al's (1998) survey data illustrate the importance of *spontaneity* and *convenience* in young people's use of libraries (especially for homework tasks). They argue that such (unquantified) use is constrained greatly by reduced opening hours, or the closure of *local* libraries. The loss of local libraries seems to impact most on young children.

A survey of parents found that 44 per cent of respondents said that their children had not used an alternative library since their local library has closed and 36 per cent thought that their children were reading less (Proctor et al, 1998).

7.4 Conclusions

1. **It is difficult to estimate the direct impact of libraries on young people's literacy and educational performance (Linley and Usherwood, 1998; Matarasso, 1998a).**

   "In the area of educational impact, as with many other themes, the data illuminate and illustrate rather than represent the role of the library. We can, however, say that public libraries provided *some* support to *some* adult and young learners and have *some* beneficial effects in some circumstances". (Linley and Usherwood, 1998, p23)

2. If the test of the 'balance of probabilities' is accepted, research indicates that libraries have a significant potential for supporting both the development of pre-school literacy and providing subsequent educational development (eg via homework classes). This is especially so in socially deprived areas, where home conditions might not be conducive to working and books might be in short supply.

3. Data suggest that libraries help to develop the reading ability of young children, including English language skills in children whose parents first language is not English.

4. There is a need for systematic monitoring and evaluation of the impact of libraries on the development of literacy among both pre-school and schoolchildren.

8 adult skills and literacy

8.1 Introduction

Libraries' potential contribution to literacy and educational development extends to lifelong and open learning and the development of skills and literacy among adults.

- A survey of 69 participants in four library-based projects found that 45 per cent had taken up training as a result of being involved in the library project, 58 per cent had learnt new skills and 77 per cent had tried new things (Matarasso,1998a, p iv).

  Kerslake and Kinnel (1997) suggest that libraries have an important role to play in the personal, skill and literacy development among adults because they are viewed as more approachable than educational institutions and offer greater anonymity for the most vulnerable.

- In 1995 the Open for Learning scheme involved 90 per cent of public libraries in England. Between 1993 and 1994 there were 38,000 loans of open learning packs from public libraries. Staffordshire libraries' open learning centres targeted unemployed people, women returning to the labour market and cultural minorities. Multi-media flexible learning materials and the use of IT equipment enabled participants to re-equip themselves for the labour market. Most centres exceeded their effectiveness performance targets (Green, 1995).

- Stockport library worked with Age Concern day centres whose members had no access to book or book-related activities and were losing interest in reading. The library development worker worked with the Age Concern co-ordinator to identify needs and interests. As a result story, quiz, heritage and browsing sessions and reading aloud groups were set up – it "has boosted members' confidence and undoubtedly enhanced their quality of life" (Raven, 1996, p519).

8.2 Conclusions

1. **The limited available quantitative data indicates the ability of library-based projects to assist adults in the development of skills.**

2. **In terms of available evidence, it would seem that adult literacy and training has a lower priority than children's literacy.**

3. **There is an absence of systematic output and outcome data.**

9 IT literacy

9.1 Introduction

Information technology can be viewed as a threat (the reduction in the importance of libraries' book lending and information functions). However, the DCMS (1999) argue that public libraries have a crucial role to play in exploiting the new information and communication technologies (ICT) to generate social cohesion, community involvement and participation (especially via assisting in the achievement of an equitable use of internet resources). They suggest such things as IT awareness days, the development of community calendars and virtual reality community planning, and offer an example of good practice.

9.2 Case studies

Sunderland Electronic Village Halls

The Sunderland Libraries have developed a network of 'electronic village halls', based in library buildings, a further education college, a community business centre and around a community and voluntary group network. They provide free access to PCs and the Internet, a wide range of software for adults and children and trained staff. They also run a range of free IT courses, homework support and support lifelong learning with Computers Don't Bite, University for Industry and IT for All.

More generally, Kerslake and Linley (1997) suggest that libraries can make an important contribution to the development of IT skills (for both children and adults) either via direct provision of (say) homework clubs and induction classes, or indirectly via the widespread use of self-service computerised catalogues. Kerslake and Linley (1997, p7)

refer to two major projects seeking to address such issues.

Project EARL

Project EARL (Electronic Access to Resources in Libraries) provides public libraries with help in getting connected to the web and access to the EARL information service, with pointers to the useful information and sites. Partners in the project are creating sites which will then be accessible under EARL. For example, Essex Libraries are creating a site for European information.

UK Citizens Online Democracy

The UK Citizens Online Democracy (UKCOD) is being developed in conjunction with Brent and Norfolk and aims to assess the potential contribution of online communication to an informed and active participative democracy.

9.3 Conclusions

1. **Although there are a number of individual initiatives using ICT, its use is still generally limited (Audit Commission, 1997).**

2. **The clear potential means that there is a need for more research-based information and evaluation about the role and effectiveness of libraries in promoting the community use of ICT.**

3. **More specifically there is little research into the contribution of public libraries to children's IT literacy (Denham et al,1997).**

10 economic impact

10.1 Introduction

Issues of literacy and IT, which are intimately related to the development of employment skills, are closely related to the potential economic impact of libraries. The economic impact of libraries is both direct and indirect and it depends partly on location (with rural libraries having a potentially greater impact).

10.2 Purchasing power

This is the most obvious direct economic impact of libraries. For example, in 1993-94, UK public libraries spent just under £113 million on books and £11.6 million on audio-visual materials (Kerslake and Kinnel, 1997). However, Pateman (1999) reported an expected overall decline in expenditure on public libraries over the period 1998-1999. Although statistics obtained from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability (CIPFA) suggested that expenditure was expected to rise by 2.8 per cent, this was in the context of 3.5 per cent increase in the retail price index.

10.3 Stimulating town centres

Comedia (1993) suggest that libraries in town centres are more widely used and can contribute to the regeneration of town centres - people attracted to the library may also use local businesses and vice versa. Kerslake and Kinnel (1997, p14) claim that there are economic benefits to local retailers "in that library usage doubles if they are relocated to shopping complexes" (although they caution that locating public libraries in commercial developments risks marginalising individuals and groups excluded from consumer-based activities).

However a survey of retailers provided rather ambiguous evidence - they were generally unaware of the library as an attraction drawing people into a shopping area and the report acknowledges that the precise impact of a library on local retail businesses is difficult to quantify (Comedia, 1993).

Further, Proctor et al (1998) provide evidence that, while library use may increase, this is often not the main motivation for the trip. In an examination of behaviour patterns following the closure of local libraries they found that when people had used alternative libraries "a key factor in choosing an alternative was not distance but the presence of an alternative *in a location to which users already travelled for other purposes*" [emphasis added] (Proctor et al, 1998, p65).

10.4 Information for small businesses

Many small businesses do not have the resources to access a wide range of relevant information A study of the perception of owners of small businesses about the potential effect of closing a public library found that 24 per cent said that it would have significant impact on their business, with a further seven per cent estimating some impact. Vaughan et al (1996, p269) argue that continued public library provision is already essential and is becoming more so:

"Considering that small business is the sector of the economy that is currently expanding, the proportion of young businesses will increase. This means that the services of public libraries will be needed by a larger percentage of businesses and the closing of these services will have an impact on a

greater percentage of businesses in coming years than it does at present".

This seems to be partly confirmed by Proctor et al (1996) who found that, during a library strike in Sheffield, self-employed people were the most adversely affected.

Research indicates that such information services for small businesses are most essential in rural areas, where alternative sources of information and support are limited. Kerslake and Kinnel (1997) provide an example of this.

Somerset Rural Business Information Services (RBIS)

Somerset public libraries established RBIS after identifying a growing need for information about increased legislation and regulation from the Ministry of Agriculture, Farming and Fisheries and the European Union (EU) and as economic pressures increased the need for agricultural diversification (Raven, 1996). This improved access to information helped the businesses to become aware of new issues. Further, RBIS also acted as a contact point assisting new businesses to set up and, it is claimed, supported the development of teleworking in the county.

10.5 Connecting people and businesses

Matarasso (1998a, p31) suggests that, "libraries have... shown their potential in facilitating links between local people and business... perhaps because of their responsible image and links with education". He offers a number of examples of library-based projects obtaining local sponsorship - local history groups, a children's information

bureau which provided information about such things as childcare for employees and the 'Read It' project which had the involvement of 30 local businesses (see case study in section 7.2).

10.6 Job seeking

Libraries have long been used to obtain access to local and national newspapers and professional journals to seek job opportunities. Some also provide more formal assistance, providing Employment Resource Centres which offer the use of computers and the support of vocational guidance workers (Roach and Morrison, 1998). Proctor et al (1996) found that during a library strike in Sheffield some job-seekers were prevented from using the library to look through the local newspapers for jobs, or preparing for interviews by researching local employers.

10.7 Alleviating poverty

Another aspect of the potential economic impact of libraries is the alleviation of poverty, largely via the provision of information about the social security system. The importance of libraries in this area is that, it is claimed, that they are a less 'stigmatised' environment and, especially for women caring for young children, are regarded as accessible and non-threatening. For example:

A library in Hartlepool (winner of the 1992 Library Association/Holt Jackson Community Initiative Award) worked extensively with unemployed people, providing information about vacancies and also offering basic literacy tuition, help with writing CVs and completing forms. This resulted in 147 people finding employment during the first 26 months of the service (Kerslake and Kinnel,1997).

For a number of vulnerable groups libraries have the potential to provide employment and welfare-related information in a non-formal and non-stigmatising environment. However, a national survey of UK libraries (McKrell et al, 1998) found that such information services and support were rather ad hoc and not integrated in local authorities' corporate planning for anti-poverty strategies.

Library of Information for the Elderly (LIFE), Renfrew

In addition to the provision of books, this outreach programme for the housebound and elderly (aged 60 plus) also provided information about benefits. Nearly half (46 per cent) of enquiries were about council services and 41 per cent were directly related to benefits. It is claimed that between 1993-1997 such information helped pensioners to claim over £1.7 million (at a project cost of £60,000 pa) (Matarasso, 1998a)

10.8 Measuring economic impact

On the basis of a 'social audit' of libraries in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the County of Somerset, Linley and Usherwood (1998) concluded that there were substantial difficulties in measuring the, largely indirect, economic impact of libraries. Because the business environment depends on a wide range of factors, much of the indirect impact of the information provision is very difficult to assess. However, Linley and Usherwood (1998) suggest that it would be possible to estimate the economic value of the information by comparing the cost of (say) obtaining it from other sources (although this would provide a rather limited measure of 'impact').

Kerslake and Kennel (1997) quote a more sophisticated Canadian study (Sawyer, 1996) which estimated the economic contribution of Ontario public libraries, based on such direct measures as purchases and interaction with businesses and indirect ones, such as the value of skills acquisition and business information. This estimated that in 1993-94 the direct economic impact amounted to $286 million plus 6,480 jobs and the addition of the indirect contributions resulted in a total of $486 million and 9,000 jobs. However, no similar work has been undertaken in the UK.

10.9 Conclusions

Linley and Usherwood (1998) conclude that the potential economic impact of libraries includes:

1. **A resource for new start-ups and other small businesses, especially if delivered in collaboration with partner organisations who increase awareness of what is available.**

2. **An important source of information for those seeking jobs and training opportunities.**

3. **In small towns and villages the library can support economic vitality, by attracting users who then use local shops and services (see also Matarasso (1998a; Landry, 1993).**

4. **Libraries have the *potential* to make some economic impact, both direct and indirect, although this will vary**

widely between locations and will depend on the available of alternative organisations and sources of such support.

5. **Such issues are clearly worth more systematic investigation.**

11 libraries and health

11.1 Introduction

Anecdotal evidence suggests that via their social role, support for voluntary organisations and the provision of benefits-related information, libraries can contribute to improved psychological health and a sense of well-being. However, there is a specific 'empowering' contribution which they can make to health - via the provision of health-related information in an environment often regarded as less threatening than doctors' surgeries or hospitals.

11.2 Case studies

Healthfacts, Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham

Based on a partnership between library and health professionals, this initiative provided patient information in lay language - it "humanised medicine and returned some sense of control to the inquirer" (Matarasso, 1998a, p42). In 1996/7 there were 1,200 inquiries (in 1995 it won a 'Health of the Nation' award). In a 1994 user survey 52 per cent had wanted to be better informed, 13 per cent had wanted reassurance and 14 per cent had wanted information to make choices about treatment (Matarasso, 1998a, p15).

Teen Health Information Network

In the Teen Health Information Network in San Francisco, the public library and other groups increased access to health promotion by providing more relevant materials and establishing a community health information network (Kerslake and Kinnel,1997).

One of Proctor et al's (1998, p64)

interviewees illustrates the individual importance of such health-related information:

"I've learnt a lot through libraries. The biggest value was when my father and brother-in-law had ulcers. I got a book out of the library which was all about how to cure yourself… I still follow the diet it told me today, now I wouldn't have known about that if it hadn't been for the library".

11.3 Conclusions

1. **Libraries can increase access to health-related information by providing it in a non-threatening and accessible environment.**

2. **Although there is substantial potential for the expansion of such library-based health information programmes, the impact of health information provision in UK public libraries has not been fully explored (Kerslake and Kinnel, 1997),**

12 conclusions

The *theoretical potential* of libraries to make important contributions to a wide range of social and community issues is clear and is illustrated by the range of examples described. These examples illustrate the ability of local libraries to:

- provide an inclusive, 'safe' and accessible social space, contributing to psychological health and sense of well-being, especially valued by those not in the labour market;

- provide an anonymous, non-stigmatised and non-threatening source of information about a range of welfare, educational, legal and health issues;

- through the refinement and targeting of their traditional lending and information functions, provide support for vulnerable and marginalised groups;

- support, formally and informally, the development of children's and adults' literacy and their educational needs;

- assist in the support, or development of local self-managing community groups;

- assist in the sustaining of local community identities; and

- contribute to the local economy by providing information to small businesses (especially where alternative sources are limited), and providing information about employment opportunities.

However, although the research-based evidence indicates the potential contribution of libraries:

- much remains largely 'output based' (ie the description of the project, volume indicators for inquiries; number of businesses requesting information);

- in most cases outcomes are assumed, or illustrated by limited, qualitative evidence; and

- the limitations of much current knowledge are succinctly summarised by Linley and Usherwood (1998, p23 and 40) who state that:

"…public libraries provided *some* support to *some* adults and young learners and have *some* beneficial effects in *some* circumstances… while it may be an exaggeration to say that the library directly promoted active citizenship there was much evidence to suggest that it built confidence in individuals which *might* [emphasis added] then have an effect on the wider society".

In these circumstances, one might accept Matarasso's (1998a) contention that many of the methodological problems involved in 'proving' cause and effect for the social impact of libraries are impossible to overcome, and that the strength of the theoretical assumptions means that library services can rely on 'the balance of probability' of positive outcomes. However, others (Proctor et al, 1998; Kerslake and Kinnel, 1997) express concern about the lack of quantitative evidence about the social impacts of libraries and an inability to demonstrate more clearly their value. The Department for Culture Media and Sport (1999) is clear that there is a need to demonstrate benefits and outcomes.

Consequently, a number of important research issues need to be addressed.

12.1 The need for adequate output measures

There is a widespread need for robust and relevant *output* measures relating to the use of libraries. Many commentators point to the absence of information such as frequency of type of use by various types of user, the socio-demographic composition of users (an important issue for policies of social inclusion) and the total number of people who use the service. There is clearly an urgent need to improve these most basic of output measures. In addition, Kerslake and Kinnel (1997, p52-3) propose the following additional 'social impact output measures':

- the number of voluntary and community groups formally linked to the library service;

- the proportion of staff time dedicated to contact with the public, other than that for book issues;

- the proportion of hours when library premises are used for organised activities apart from traditional library services;

- the degree of correlation between local demography and library use;

- the number of local businesses which are involved, as users of information services, as supporters of activities or both; and

- the number of formal connections with schools and colleges.

12.2 Processes and provision

It cannot be assumed that the positive outcomes illustrated above will be achieved in all circumstances by all participants. A wide variety of personal and organisational circumstances can intervene to either facilitate or hinder positive outcomes. The way in which needs are identified, provision is organised, publicised, delivered, managed and monitored will all have an impact on outcomes. Proctor et al (1998) suggest that there is a need to understand what motivates people to use a library and keep using it. Others suggest that:

- libraries are not perceived by many of their staff, to be associated with community regeneration or social inclusion (Harris, 1998);

- library professionals often lack the understanding and skills to develop more inclusive service provision (Roach and Morrison,1998);

- there is a need for cultural change within libraries (DCMS, 1999);

- the potential of the library service to contribute to wider social policies depends on the nature of integration with the wider local authority (Linley and Usherwood, 1998); and

- the most effective projects tend to be those which involve volunteering (Matarasso, 1998a).

Consequently, there is a need for more detailed information about the various organisational factors which lead to successful outcomes if such 'social impact' work is to become more widespread within the public library system.

Proctor et al (1998, p90) suggest that more

research is required on the library's role in supporting literacy, formal education and "learning in its widest sense …and the ways in which the public library might deliberately encourage that learning to take place".

More generally, Proctor et al (1998, p90) suggest that "facile arguments and inadequate conclusions will continue to be derived from inadequate data until relationships between different variables can be shown to exist, or to be false".

12.3 Identifying constraints and demand

Related to the issues of management and processes, the Department for Culture Media and Sport (1999), stressing that libraries need to address issues of social inclusion, propose that there is a need to identify the nature and distribution of the socially excluded, the nature of their needs and the perceived institutional, social, personal and environmental constraints to use libraries.

12.4 Outcome definition and impact measurement

Although there are significant difficulties related to the definition and measurement of the outcomes of library services, such issues need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. For understandable reasons - lack of resources, lack of expertise, conceptual and methodological problems, a concentration on service delivery - the issue of outcome measurement has not been widely addressed.

However, Proctor et al (1998, p90) argue that there is a need for "the identification of robust and valid performance indicators". A survey of existing research on libraries in the UK and

research needs concluded that the impact of libraries on their communities and the outcomes for users was widely identified as a priority (Pluse and Prytheroh, 1996).

Intermediate outcomes

There are obvious difficulties in measuring such amorphous concepts as community and personal empowerment and social cohesion and controlling for a range of parallel influences. However, it should be possible to address issues of *intermediate* outcomes - outcomes which might be presumed to be linked to higher level outcomes. For example, Matarasso (1998a) suggests that libraries should collect information on such intermediate outcomes as:

- the numbers of library users who take up training or educational opportunities within the library; and

- the numbers who go on to access other educational providers.

In order to 'make the case for libraries' there is an urgent need to address issues relating to the definition and measurement of both intermediate and final outcomes. It is worth ending with the list of issues for investigation outlined by Pluse and Prytheroh (1998), as they reflect the analysis presented in this report. In addition to suggesting that there is an urgent need for the definition and measurement of performance measures their priorities for impact research (identified in a survey of library authorities) are as follows:

- public awareness of public libraries;

- social and economic impacts;
- educational impacts;

- the role and value of public libraries in community development;

- contribution to economic development and regeneration; and

- contribution and impact of public libraries in literacy and learning.

  They also suggest that there is a need for detailed work on the impact on a range of social groups in each of the above categories.

  The evidence presented in this report illustrates that libraries perform wide-ranging roles and have the potential to contribute to a variety of social issues. However, it is also clear that there is an absence of systematic and robust quantitative evidence about social impacts (Proctor et al, 1998). While there is some substance in Matarasso's (1998a) argument that decision-making in public administration may depend on the balance of probability, there remains a need to undertake more systematic definition and measurement of outcomes to reduce the level of reasonable doubt.

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