# 2. The Argument for Better Libraries: Expect Impact

Cushing Academy is an elite prep school about 70 miles west of Boston. On its lush wooded campus, 445 students from 28 states and 28 countries work through high school. It is also, if you believe the Boston Globe[8], the end of libraries as we know them.

In 2009, Cushing invested hundreds of thousands of dollars renovating its library. A large part of that investment was getting rid of all physical books and replacing them with eReaders and digital resources. At least, that's what the Globe reported. The truth is more complex. Cushing did indeed get rid of a large number of printed books, mostly out-of-date research texts. It did this in order to actually expand the collection of materials available to students through digital means. It also increased the library staff and allowed students to access the resources of the library 24/7[9].

The interesting part of this story is not that a school eliminated its print collection (it didn't), or even the changing nature of the library's collection (increasingly digital). No, the interesting part of this story is the press reaction to the changes at a small boarding school. In headlines like "Digital School

[8] http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2009/09/04/a_library_without_the_books/ (accessed January 5, 2016)

[9] http://roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/02/10/do-school-libraries-need-books/# (accessed January 5, 2016)

Library Leaves Book Stacks Behind," and "Welcome to the library. Say goodbye to the books.," reporters seemed to push past the nuance of a school expanding its library and looked for the end of libraries.

The central argument of this book is that we need better libraries. This presupposes that we need libraries in the first place. There are plenty of voices that question the need for any library. Before we jump into what you should expect from your library, it is worth reviewing the arguments for libraries in the first place.

The core arguments for libraries throughout time and today cluster around a few key themes:

- Collective Buying Agent
- Economic Stimulus
- Center of Learning
- Safety Net
- Steward of Cultural Heritage
- Third Space
- Cradle of Democracy
- Symbol of Community Aspirations

In truth, these cases for libraries are rarely made in isolation and many of them have fuzzy boundaries, but it is worth looking at them one at a time and showing how we must expect more in how these cases are made.

## Collective Buying Agent

Stewart Brand famously said, "information wants to be free." At least, that is what everyone quotes him as saying. The full quote is:

*"On the one hand information wants to be expensive, because it's so valuable. The right information in the right place just changes your life. On the other hand, information wants to be free, because the cost of getting it out is getting lower and lower all the time. So you have these two fighting against each other."*[10]

We see the results of this fight all over the place. Books and music are cheaper because distribution and production costs have been greatly diminished through digital networks. Academics are increasingly putting their papers online, and sites like YouTube show there is a healthy community willing to share video and content of all sorts for free. However, take a deeper look and you see that "free" isn't as cheap as it is cracked up to be. YouTube videos are free to watch—as long as you also watch a few commercials, just like broadcast TV.

[10] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_wants_to_be_free (accessed January 5, 2016)

Have you seen your cable bill recently? Not free. Movie ticket prices are rising and, if you want to get medical advice beyond WebMD, you better have health insurance. Business models are changing, but quality information or personalized information still costs real money.

To that end, libraries have always been one way in which communities pool resources to make big purchases. In universities, these purchases are things like academic journal subscriptions. In public libraries, pooled resources means shared popular reading material. In schools, it is article database subscriptions and media. In law offices, this includes LexisNexis and legal resource databases like Westlaw. The point is that if a resource is too expensive for one person and that resource has general utility, then pooling community assets (taxes, tuition, and departmental budgets) makes sense. In fact, when libraries find materials have become too expensive, they even team up into consortia.

To give you a small sense of how much money we are talking about, let me show you two quick examples. The first is a table put together by the University of Iowa that shows how much it costs for the University to provide academic journal titles electronically to faculty and staff:[11]

| Publisher | Cost | # of Titles |
|---|---|---|
| Elsevier | $ 1,641,530 | 2095 |
| Wiley/Blackwell | $ 868,031 | 1304 |
| Springer | $ 607,540 | 400 |
| Sage | $ 243,647 | 608 |
| JSTOR | $ 97,602 | 2319 |
| Cambridge UP | $ 43,940 | 145 |
| Project Muse | $ 33,210 | 500 |
| Oxford UP | $ 21,313 | 250 |

You read that right. It costs over $3.5 million a year for 7,621 journal titles. And Iowa is hardly alone. In 2012 Harvard that their costs for these journal subscriptions have gone up 145% from 2006-2012 and indicated that such increases will soon put materials out of reach for the richest university in the world[12]. Oh, and by the way, those figures are all per year. The library never owns those articles. We'll come back to that when talking about libraries as "of the community" in Chapter 5.

Of course, you may consider that cheap when you see what the state of Texas found. The state runs a service called TexShare through its State Library and Archive Commission (TSLAC). TexShare provides large

[11] http://blog.lib.uiowa.edu/transitions/?p=720&utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter (accessed January 5, 2016)

[12] http://www.theguardian.com/science/2012/apr/24/harvard-university-journal-publishers-prices

databases of research information to the citizens of Texas through participating libraries.

Here's what Texas found in terms of cost:

*"It would have cost the 645 libraries participating in the TexShare database program $84,158,212 to purchase the database subscriptions that were purchased by the TSLAC for $7,286,620[13]."*

Almost $76 million in savings—that's the power of collective purchasing.

There are two factors that sometimes get lost when talking about libraries as collective buying agents: purchased items need organization, and using common funds should contribute to the common good. Let's start with items needing organization.

For my son's fifth birthday, my wife and I bought him 10 pounds of Legos from eBay. It turns out, when kids move out of the house and leave behind a drawer full of Legos, some parents box them up, weigh them, and sell them. This works great for a 5-year-old with an imagination, but not if he or she wants to build a particular model. Lego is about imagination, but it is also about instructions and putting together sets around particular themes (vehicles, Star Wars, etc.). Simply buying Legos by the pound doesn't serve this purpose. The situation is the same with books or databases in a library. You need to invest in people who can organize these purchased (or more often these days, licensed) materials. (We'll come back to this in Chapter 7 when we talk about librarians.)

The second concept that can get lost in the discussion of libraries as purchasing agents is the notion of the common good. That is, if a community (a school, a city, a college) pools its money to acquire things, those things should benefit the community as a whole. That may seem obvious, but libraries and communities can miss this point. Let's take a service called Freegal.[14]

Libraries subscribe to Freegal to allow library card holders to download music as MP3 files. Libraries purchase blocks of downloads (for example, 500 downloads for the community). This sounds like a great service, except that the library (and therefore the community) is paying to allow one library member to download one song for that member's personal use. If another library member wants that song, it will require another download. The libraries (read "the community") paying for the service cannot collect these songs and lend them out or archive them.

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[13] Texas State Library and Archives Commission, "Facts at a Glance," last modified on June 24, 2015, https://www.tsl.texas.gov/texshare/facts_ataglance.html

[14] http://www.freegalmusic.com/homes/aboutus (accessed November 30, 2015)—Check out the Librarian in Black for a perspective on the service http://librarianinblack.net/librarianinblack/just-say-no-to-freegal/ (accessed November 30, 2015)

Imagine walking into a library, asking for a book, and having the librarian go over to a bookstore to purchase it and then hand it to you to keep. Is this a wise use of community resources? Now imagine using tax funds to build a private road that only one citizen can use. It builds no common resource, brings no economy of scale, and ultimately uses the community pool to enrich individuals.

Freegal is an example of wealth redistribution at its worst. The mission of libraries is not about wealth redistribution. You must expect it to build a commons—a common infrastructure for the whole community to use.

## Economic Stimulus

Ultimately the utility of a library as a collective buying agent is an economic argument. Libraries save money. A related argument is that libraries can generate money in a community by stimulating the local economy. Researchers in Indiana, for example, found that:

*"Libraries are a good value. The direct economic benefits that communities receive from libraries are significantly greater than the cost to operate the libraries."*

Specifically:

- Indiana communities received $2.38 in direct economic benefits for each dollar of cost.
- Public library salaries and expenditures generate an additional $216 million in economic activity in Indiana.
- Academic library salaries and expenditures generate an additional $112 million in economic activity in Indiana.[15]

In Wisconsin they are apparently even better at getting value for their dollar, finding that:

*"The total economic contribution of Wisconsin public libraries to the Wisconsin economy is $753,699,545. The return on investment in library services is $4.06 for each dollar of taxpayer investment."*[16]

[15] Indiana State Library. (2007). The economic impact of libraries in Indiana. Retrieved from http://www.ibrc.indiana.edu/studies/EconomicImpactofLibraries_2007.pdf

[16] NorthStar Economics, Inc. (2008). The economic contribution of Wisconsin public libraries to the economy of Wisconsin. Retrieved from http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/pdf/wilibraryimpact.pdf

These results are found again and again across U.S. States and cities:

| State | Return on $1 of Investment | Year of Study |
|---|---|---|
| Colorado | $5 | 2009[17] |
| Florida | $6.54 | 2004[18] |
| Wisconsin | $4.06 | 2008[19] |
| Indiana | $2.38 | 2007[20] |
| Pennsylvania | $5.50 | 2007[21] |
| South Carolina | $4.48 | 2005[22] |
| Vermont | $5.36 | 2006–2007[23] |
| Region | Return on $1 of Investment | Year of Study |
| Charlotte, NC | $3.15–$4.57 | 2008–2009[24] |
| Saint Louis, MO | $4 | 1999[25] |
| Southwestern Ohio | $3.81 | 2006[26] |
| Suffolk County NY | $3.93 | 2005[27] |
| Pittsburgh, PA | $3.05 | 2006[28] |

This is not limited to the States. A study by the University of Toronto's Martin Prosperity Institute found "For every dollar invested in Toronto

[17] Steffen, N., Lietzau, Z., Curry Lance, K., Rybin, A. & Molliconi, C. (2009). Public Libraries—A wise investment: A return on investment study of Colorado libraries. Retrieved from http://www.lrs.org/documents/closer_look/roi.pdf

[18] Griffiths, J., King, D. W., Lynch, T. (2004). Taxpayer return on investment in Florida public libraries: Summary report. Retrieved from http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/bld/roi/pdfs/ROISummaryReport.pdf

[19] NorthStar Economics, Inc. (2008). The economic contribution of Wisconsin public libraries to the economy of Wisconsin. Retrieved from http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/pdf/wilibraryimpact.pdf

[20] Indiana State Library. (2007). The economic impact of libraries in Indiana. Retrieved from http://www.ibrc.indiana.edu/studies/EconomicImpactofLibraries_2007.pdf

[21] Griffiths, J., King, D. W., Aerni, S. E. (2007). Taxpayer return-on-investment (ROI) in Pennsylvania public libraries. Retrieved from http://www.palibraries.org/associations/9291/files/FullReport.pdf

[22] The School of Library and Information Science, University of South Carolina. (2005). The economic impact of public libraries on South Carolina. Retrieved from http://www.libsci.sc.edu/SCEIS/exsummary.pdf

[23] State of Vermont Public Libraries. (2006-2007). The economic value of Vermont's public libraries. Retrieved from http://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/misc/plvalue06-07.pdf

[24] The University of North Carolina at Charlotte Urban Institute. A return on investment strategy of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. (2010). Retrieved from http://ui.uncc.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/Library_ROI_Study_2010_Final_FullReport.pdf

[25] Holt, G. E., Elliott, D. & Moore, A. (1999). Placing a value on public library services. Retrieved from http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/libsrc/resresul.htm

[26] Levin, Driscoll & Fleeter. (2006). Value for money: Southwestern Ohio's return from investment in public libraries. Retrieved from http://9libraries.info/docs/EconomicBenefitsStudy.pdf

[27] Kamer, P. M. (2005). Placing an economic value on the services of public libraries in Suffolk County, New York. Retrieved from http://scls.suffolk.lib.ny.us/pdf/librarystudy.pdf

[28] Carnegie Mellon University Center for Economic Development. (2006). Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh: Community impact and benefits. Retrieved from http://www.clpgh.org/about/economicimpact/CLPCommunityImpactFinalReport.pdf

Public Library (TPL), Torontonians receive $5.63." The study goes on to show that the "Toronto Public Library creates over $1 billion in total economic impact[29]."

Where does all the economic boosting come from? Well, in part it is from the collective buying power of libraries that was previously discussed. If you don't have to buy a book or rent a movie because you can use library resources, that's a boost. In part, it comes from the fact that libraries are employers with employees who pay taxes (and contribute to the local economy). But this goes beyond saving money. For example, recent studies show libraries actually lead to more book buying.[30] In higher education, "libraries are an important consideration when students select a university or college, and, as a result, academic libraries can help institutional admissions boost enrollment.[31]"

The economic impact of libraries also comes from intangibles like creating a civic environment to attract businesses and workforce development. More recently, during the economic downturn starting in 2008, libraries have taken on an important role in helping job seekers. In some libraries, this is simply providing out-of-work folks with access to computers and résumé workshops. In other libraries, however, we see what happens when communities and librarians expect more.

For example, the Transform U.[32] project of several public libraries in Illinois recognized that when people are looking for a job, they are often looking for a bigger change in life. Maybe they would be better suited to going back to school. Maybe they need social services to help them feed their families. They definitely need to feel a sense of respect and self-worth. To meet these needs, the librarians created partnerships with local colleges, social service agencies, and economic development agencies. Now, when job seekers go to their local library, they have a whole support network that helps them identify their long terms goals and navigate sometimes confusing application sites at colleges and government agencies. They are provided with simple web tools for job seeking or creating businesses from scratch. These librarians went beyond the resources that they collected directly to meeting the needs of the community.

A small library in rural Eureka, Illinois, shows another way in which libraries can contribute to economic development—entrepreneurship. When a woman approached the Eureka Public Library about starting a catering business, something wonderful happened. The woman had seen that there

[29] http://martinprosperity.org/media/TPL%20Economic%20Impact_Dec2013_LR_FINAL.pdf
[30] http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publishing-and-marketing/article/49316-survey-says-library-users-are-your-best-customers.html (accessed May 8, 2012)
[31] Oakleaf, M. for the Association of College and Research Libraries. (2010). The value of academic libraries: A comprehensive research review and report. Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/issues/value/val_summary.pdf
[32] http://www.transformuportal.org (accessed May 8, 2012)

was a need for more lunch spots in town. She was a trained commercial chef and had an idea to start a new restaurant, but didn't know how to proceed. Rather than simply point her to some resources on starting a business, the library gave her a corner of its property where once a week (at first) the woman could set up a lunch spot. Over time it became a regular spot. "Chef Katie" was able to create a successful catering business and the whole town benefited.[33]

Both the Toronto Public Library and the Cuyahoga County Public Library offer extensive support to entrepreneurs. Both Toronto's "Business Inc."[34] and Cuyahoga's "Encore Entrepreneurs"[35] offer community member business classes and mentoring from the local business community. Toronto even has an "entrepreneur-in-residence" to meet with budding businesses one on one. These programs have been particularly effective in empowering immigrants and new citizens in creating jobs and opportunities.

The Washington DC Dream Lab takes this one step further. Here not only does the Lab provide members "shared space for small organizations, groups and individuals using technologies to develop and sustain new ventures," the entrepreneurs using the lab are expected to share their expertise and knowledge in 1-hour public programs each month. The library not only helps an individual member, they help that member help others in the community[36].

This start-up spirit is not limited to public libraries. Syracuse University's School of Information Studies has a strong emphasis on start-ups, often forming undergraduate students from around the campus into idea- and business-generating teams. Librarians sit down with these teams to do competitive analysis and research the novelty of the ideas. In corporations around the country, corporate libraries are breaking patents, sizing up the competition, and providing ongoing training to lawyers, doctors, and computer manufacturers to help grow businesses.

Libraries as we know them already provide economic benefits to their communities. However, as we move forward we can expect more of them in this regard. We should expect libraries of all types to save communities money, and help spark whole new industries.

## Center of Learning

This argument for libraries rests on the widely held belief that the best learning happens in the richest information environment. In academic

[33] http://chronicleillinois.com/news/local-news/chef-katie-cooks-for-eureka/ (accessed December 8, 2015)

[34] http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/programs-and-classes/featured/business-inc-series.jsp (accessed December 8, 2015)

[35] http://ccplencore.org (accessed December 8, 2015)

[36] http://dclibrary.org/labs/dreamlab (accessed December 8, 2015)

institutions, this has translated into libraries that seek to comprehensively collect scholarly works and journals. In public libraries, this has meant collecting materials on a wide variety of subjects, not just popular fiction. It is the reason that school libraries exist.

Literacy, learning, and scholarship have always been associated with libraries. In fact, most directors of libraries in the Middle Ages were scholars who also maintained the collection. In the 1900's, this argument—that libraries are places of learning—drove the work of public libraries as the "people's university." Melvil Dewey, father of the Dewey Decimal System, believed public libraries and public schools were "coequal" education institutions. In fact, public libraries did not collect fiction or any popular material because folks at the time did not connect general literacy, or "the love of reading" as we talk about it today, with learning.[37]

Today, libraries still have the concept of learning within their missions. One of the most successful national marketing campaigns in any industry is the American Library Association's "Read" posters that feature celebrities to encourage everyone to pick up a book and read. Summer reading programs encourage a habit of reading, a necessary skill for lifelong learning. School libraries are deeply engaged in literacy instruction, moving from basic reading skills, to research skills, to critical thinking exercises with the curriculum. Even academic and corporate libraries engage in literacy instruction, though focused on media and social literacy (like deciphering trends in social media, or understanding data visualizations).

However, while I assert that this argument for libraries is increasingly important, it is often a vague justification. For example, is it enough to create a resource-rich environment to facilitate learning? If I were to drop off a two-year-old in the middle of a well-stocked library, could I expect to come back in two days and have the child reading? Of course not.

Part of expecting more from your library and librarians is to force them to move past common-sense sounding arguments and into measurable activities. For example, does your public library work directly with K–12 school districts? How does an academic library's collection match the degree programs being offered at a college? What courses, curriculum, and services are being offered, by whom, to whom, and with what outcome? Simply stockpiling resources is not enhancing education. It is hoarding.

We will return to these themes throughout the rest of this book, but for now let us move on to libraries and the social safety net.

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[37] Kruk, M. (1998). Death of the public library: From 'people's university' to 'public-sector leisure centre'. The Australian Library Journal. 47(2), 157. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ572213&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ572213

## Safety Net

When you think of the social safety net, you probably think about the poor. To be sure, some libraries provide access to a world of resources and services to those least able to afford it. However, the safety net that libraries extend goes far beyond one socioeconomic stratum. Very few individuals can afford the hundreds of thousands of dollars libraries pay for searchable databases. But the safety net argument goes beyond simply paying for resources, as well.

Public libraries have long brought information to those otherwise unable to acquire it. This is in part the buying agent mission we talked about before, but today's safety net also includes bringing Internet access to rural America. Libraries are bringing Internet access to small village libraries and bookmobiles as a way of serving people in rural locations. A 2014 survey found that 98% of U.S. public libraries provide free public Wi-Fi access[38]. In Vermont, the state government help build a gigabit fiber optic network that connects rural libraries across the state, making each library an access point for village businesses and homes[39].

In these days of digital networks, libraries of all types have extended the social safety net beyond access, to bridge the new growing digital divide—knowledge. While there is still a significant challenge in getting people connected to the Internet, and while digital tools are becoming increasingly necessary to life and work, the challenge is now helping people take advantage of these new tools. For example, after Christmas 2011, public libraries were flooded with people who had received iPads and Kindle Fires for the holiday. Many had bought or received the tablets unaware that you needed a wireless network to use them. So librarians helped set up the devices and showed folks how they could use the library's wireless network to get books, music, and video. In fact 90% of public libraries offer "basic digital literacy training, and a significant majority support training related to new technology devices (62 percent), safe online practices (57 percent) and social media use (56 percent)[40]."

If you think that using a tablet is or knowing how to surf the web is nice, but not a necessity, know that in 2014 the IRS stopped providing printed forms and instruction booklets for U.S. taxes leading to "76 percent of libraries assist patrons in using online government programs and services." Increasing local, state, and national government agencies are closing in-person help centers and discontinuing print means of interacting. To be a citizen, to pay your taxes, to apply for jobs, to keep up with local events you need to be connected, and you need to know how to use that connection.

[38] http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2015/10/new-research-highlights-libraries-expanded-roles
[39] http://www.telecomvt.org/fiberconnect_libraries
[40] http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2015/10/new-research-highlights-libraries-expanded-roles

If you extend this idea of filling the knowledge gap you see that it is not just public libraries that are filling holes in safety nets. School libraries are now loaning out books not only to students, but to their parents as well. In every academic library, librarians are providing the students basic research skills that are not covered in classes. Law librarians are adding vital information literacy to the legal skills of lawyers and judges alike. In the U.S. Department of Justice, some librarians are now part of prosecutorial teams; their main job is researching expert witnesses to debunk their testimony in court.

Here we again come to a point where we must expect more of libraries as we move forward. Increasingly governments at all levels are looking to technology to withdraw direct support to the public. Tax services, job services, and social services are all shrinking their footprint leaving libraries to pick up the slack as public contact points. As résumés go online, as business with the government goes online, and as literature and music go online, we need libraries and librarians prepared to go beyond handing out forms and pointing to computers. We need librarians to teach, solve problems, and ultimately advocate on behalf of the community.

## Steward of Cultural Heritage

On the third floor of the Philadelphia Free Library's Central Library, you will find a library—yes, another library inside the Free Library. It is the library of William McIntyre Elkins, a rich investment banker of Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century and noted collector of books.[41] This is not a re-creation made to look like the original; it was moved in its entirety from Elkins' house to the Free Library. Not just the books, but the desk, the globe, the wood-paneled walls, the carpet—the whole library of Elkins. It is, frankly, a bit disconcerting to walk into. However, it is not unusual for larger libraries to have these special collections.

The importance of libraries to the preservation of our cultural heritage is not an argument you hear that often these days. The emphasis over the past 30 years has been on information and resources that have direct and immediate impact on scholarship, learning, and recreation. However, over the centuries and in many other countries, the preservation of the cultural record (art work, manuscripts, and such) was the primary reason behind libraries. It's why you will find an original folio of Shakespeare's works in the Dallas Public Library, and a Gutenberg Bible at the University of Texas' Ransom Center.

In the Nordic countries, libraries are often collocated with museums and theaters. And, to this day, if you go to Italy and look for a public library, you will be hard pressed to find one. That is because for the most part they are

[41] Shaffer, E. (1956). *Portrait of a Philadelphia collector: William McIntire Elkins (1882*–1947). Retrieved from http://libwww.freelibrary.org/dickens/Elkins_Portrait_Essay.pdf

not there for the casual user; they are there for the scholar or the student. As one Italian librarian put it to me, "In Italy we don't ask the library for a recipe for sauce; we ask our mothers." In other words, the library is not for daily tasks.

Many U.S. libraries, particularly academic libraries, still build amazing collections of art and historical treasures. But the language of cultural heritage in libraries is also changing. Today, in addition to preserving cultural artifacts of the past, librarians are working with neighborhoods to capture the culture of the now. Today librarians are working with volunteers and students to go into the neighborhoods and work with residents to capture stories, digitize shoeboxes full of photos, and create oral histories so the residents can pass their heritage down to future generations. This can be seen on a grand scale with the Library of Congress' archiving the 60,000 interviews of every day Americans[42] of StoryCorp[43] and in the Digital Public Library of America[44]. The Digital Public Library of America is a partnership of more than 1,300 libraries, museums, and cultural heritage institutions across the U.S. to provide, among other things, access to seven million digital items (pictures, maps, photos, art work, etc.) and a suite of tools to capture and share the heritage of a nation to classrooms and homes.[45]

Our history and how we saw ourselves in the past are vital parts of how we move forward. However, we should now expect our libraries to not simply act as a storehouse of the works of great men of the past, but to also capture our story as it is unfolding today. Take the Elkins Library in Philadelphia. If you want to see it, you take an elevator to the third floor and ring a buzzer. Within about 20 minutes someone will let you in to see it. We need our history at our fingertips so we can weave it into our future.

## Third Space

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg noted that vibrant communities had three distinctive "spaces": a home space, a work space, and a community—or "third"—space. The main point here is that, to thrive, communities need accessible spaces for their members to come together away from family, away from work.

Almost all types of libraries serve as third spaces. Public libraries, in particular, are one of the few remaining community-wide spaces for all residents. University libraries have made room for cafés and other gathering places for undergraduates to escape the dorms and classrooms. And school

[42] https://storycorps.org/about/press-room-news/
[43] http://www.loc.gov/folklife/storycorpsfaq.html
[44] http://dp.la
[45] http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/04/22/digital-public-library-of-america-marks-a-year-of-rapid-growth/?_r=0

libraries are often seen as safe places for students who don't fit into the world of cliques.

As the use of more and more common spaces is restricted or made to meet other community needs (economic development most notably), library spaces (whether physical or virtual) are becoming increasingly important in bringing community members together.

One library serving as the third space is in Pistoia Italy, right outside of Florence. The San Giorgio Library was constructed literally as a new piazza (public square) for the citizens of this ancient Tuscan town. Aside from ample meeting spaces collections the library has an active café, a movie theater, and hosts a huge number of programs put on by community members. From iron workers to psychologists allies, as the librarians refer to the volunteer community members, host workshops and demonstrations.

In the Bloor Reference Library of the Toronto Public Library citizens can work in custom built glass "study pods" or attend lectures in a massive multilevel atrium. For years, the Cuyahoga Public Library outside of Cleveland marketed itself as the "agora," a Greek word for commons. The Fairfield Public Library in Connecticut has constructed a sort of tree house for children to read, learn and play within the library.

What Toronto, Pistoia, Cuyahoga County, and Fairfield have in common is that they serve as third spaces that reflect the culture and needs of the communities they serve – not each other. You must expect your library to reflect the community. There is no template, there is no master plan for the spaces communities build into their libraries. The days of a sort of MacDonald's approach to library architecture, where all libraries look alike no matter whom they serve, are over. The third space of a library should be as distinctive and original as the people who use it.

## Cradle of Democracy

To be clear, you can have libraries without democracy and democracy without libraries—one need only look through history. However, I would argue that in order to have a true liberal democracy, libraries are a requirement.

The United States is a liberal democracy. Canada is a liberal democracy. France, Germany, India, and Israel are liberal democracies, too. The "liberal" part of liberal democracy has nothing to do with a political party, or even how socially progressive a country is; it refers to the belief that democracy is more than voting. A liberal democracy also includes protections of civil liberties and a constitutional protection from intrusive governmental power. It is an important modifier. Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, was nominally a democracy. Hussein was elected president with 99% of the vote. However, few would consider this a truly liberal democracy.

Why are libraries so important for a liberal democracy? The short answer is that a true democracy requires the participation of an informed citizenry. The core mission of libraries, public, school, and otherwise, is creating a nation of informed and active citizens.

When library supporters make this argument, they will often use one or more of these three quotes:

*"The people are the only censors of their governors and even their errors will tend to keep these to the true principles of their institution. To punish these errors too severely would be to suppress the only safeguard of the public liberty. The way to prevent these [errors] is to give them full information of their affairs thro' the channel of the public papers, & to contrive that those papers should penetrate the whole mass of the people. The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers, and be capable of reading them.—" – Thomas Jefferson*

*"There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration." – Andrew Carnegie*

*"A popular government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives." – James Madison*

All three of these quotes share a common message: an informed citizen is necessary to sustain a democracy. However, each of these quotes emphasizes a different facet of maintaining and participating in a democracy. Jefferson is talking about transparency, Carnegie access, and Madison education. Good libraries take on all three of these. Let's start with transparency.

**Democracy and Transparency**

In the preceding quote, Jefferson is clearly talking about newspapers and the press, not libraries. Yet he is also emphasizing the necessity of transparency, which is a goal that librarians and journalists share. A functioning representative government of the people is not a "fire and forget" thing. You don't simply vote politicians into office and wait for the next election. There must be oversight of the actions of elected officials to prevent abuse and to shape civic discourse and policy. Watergate was not resolved

through an election, but through the emergence of documents and evidence of corrupt actions on the part of the elected government.

Libraries further the goal of transparency in a number of ways. They work from within the government to document, archive, and disseminate the work of agencies. For example, if you want to know every law passed by the U.S. Congress, you can go to the Library of Congress' website and search the THOMAS Database.[46] If you would like access to research funded by the National Institutes of Health, click over to the National Library of Medicine and search the PubMed database.[47]

Libraries also further transparency outside of the federal government. Nearly 1,250 academic and public libraries around the country house government documents as part of the Federal Depository Library Program. If a government agency prints a report, brochure, form, or regulation, it is deposited at these libraries, which must ensure public access to these materials.

Beyond the federal level, every state has a publicly accessible law library that houses the laws, regulations, and judicial decisions of that state. Many local libraries store the proceedings of town councils and county legislatures. The idea is that citizens can observe the work of their governments and participate in decision making.

There are enormous challenges that libraries and all citizens face in terms of transparency (like archiving documents on ever-shifting websites, classification of documents, and more), but we'll return to those later.

**Democracy and Access**

What Carnegie talks about in the previous quote is equal access to the work of the state. Of course, he did more than just talk about it; he is considered a sort of patron saint of libraries after he built over 2,500 of them around the world[48].

In Carnegie's day, access meant access to the printed record of thoughts—books. Today, libraries of all sorts have extended that idea into many other channels. This is most clearly seen in the provision of the Internet and public access computers in the public libraries. However, it is also seen in policies of all libraries that give out library cards to all citizens in a community, free of charge. In many other countries you must pay a fee for a card or to use the computers. For example, in the Amsterdam, Netherlands a library card costs 20 Euros per year or 35 Euros if you want to borrow books. If you would like to reserve books to borrow? 55 Euros.[49]

[46] http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php (accessed May 8, 2012)
[47] http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed (accessed May 8, 2012)
[48] http://carnegie.org/about-us/foundation-history (accessed May 8, 2012)
[49] http://www.oba.nl/oba/english/memberships-and-rates.html (accessed December 1, 2015)

The importance of access is also seen in academic libraries that allow for public access instead of restricting access to the faculty and students of a given college or university. The importance of access is seen in the millions of dollars state libraries are spending on statewide database licenses, giving equal access to these resources to urban, suburban, and rural communities alike[50].

Of course, all the access in the world is useless if you don't know what to do with the information you are accessing. That was Madison's point.

**Democracy and Education**

Madison said, "A people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives." What I absolutely love about this quote is the use of the active verb "arm." Simply having access to the information generated by a working democracy is not enough. Being able to look up a law online is useless if you can't read. Of course, even if you can read, can we also assume you know how to actually use a computer and get online in the first place?

A functioning democracy must actively develop (or in Madison's words "arm") an educated population. This argument is central to the idea of public education in this country. Yet the public education sector is struggling with an increasingly codified curriculum and an 7% high school drop-out rate (12% in the Latino community and 7.8% of Canadians).[51] The public elementary and secondary education system doesn't even touch the "36 million [US] adults who can't read better than the average 3rd grader,[52]" or the "42% of Canadian adults between the ages of 16 and 65 have low literacy skills[53]."

Public libraries, school libraries, and academic libraries are all a part of educating the citizenry for democratic participation. It is an expansion of the safety net argument, but rather than a safety net for economic participation or well-being, it is the safety net for how we govern ourselves.

**Democracy and Higher Expectations**

Democracy is not an easy thing. Democracy is not a neat and tidy. In our daily lives, few of us take the time from our commutes, e-mail, and daily struggles to think about where we fit in the democratic scheme of things. What's more is that in your library you can find the books and the computers, but where is the democracy? Is there an active effort by your library to prepare you to be an active citizen?

Let me be clear, this is not about being political and ideological. The point is not asking whether your library is lined up with a party or a candidate. Rather, it is asking what difference the library has made in the governance of

[50] An example is NOVELNY run by the New York State Library.
[51] http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=16 (accessed December 1, 2015)
[52] http://www.proliteracy.org/the-crisis/the-us-crisis (accessed December 1, 2015)
[53] http://www.literacy.ca/literacy/literacy-sub/

your community (be it a town, a university, a school, or a corporation). Did you know that half of the Library of Congress' budget is devoted to something called the Congressional Research Service? The Congressional Research Service (CRS):

> *…works exclusively for the United States Congress, providing policy and legal analysis to committees and Members of both the House and Senate, regardless of party affiliation. As a legislative branch agency within the Library of Congress, CRS has been a valued and respected resource on Capitol Hill for nearly a century.*[54]

Does your library have a similar service to inform your local politicians, chancellor, president, CEO, or principal? Shouldn't having a good school library mean that you have a well-informed principal? Part of raising expectations for our libraries is to move past rhetorical loose connections between democracy, informed community, and libraries, or else risk making one of the most important arguments for libraries ring hollow.

## Symbol of Community Aspirations

Libraries have always been about the ideas, aspirations, and dreams of the individual. Librarians can tell you amazing stories of people they have helped. From saving a woman from an abusive relationship, to lifting a homeless man from poverty, to saving the life of a cancer patient, to inspiring wonder in a child, libraries have had an impact on people's lives.

Frankly, what I wish librarians would talk more about are the hopes and aspirations of communities. Communities have dreams. They long to be world-class scholarly institutions or economic hubs. Communities dream about living comfortably or being market leaders. Sure, these dreams aren't as well-defined as those of individual community members, but they represent a sort of holistic desire that sets policy, assigns resources, and changes messages to the outside world.

Libraries have become aspirational institutions. At the most basic, the building itself serves as a symbol for the community and the community's desire to be associated with knowledge. San Francisco, Seattle, Salt Lake City, and Vancouver all used new library buildings to revitalize their downtowns. The inspiring architecture of libraries has become the new cathedral—a concrete way for a community to make a statement of its importance.

The power of architecture, and the statements we seek to make with library buildings in particular, cannot be denied. Donors at universities are naming libraries, and architects take great pride in academic libraries, sometimes celebrating the building over the library function itself.

[54] http://www.loc.gov/crsinfo (accessed May 8, 2012)

When it comes to expecting more, however, we must look at the power of a building versus the power of the services housed within (and, more and more, outside). Barbara Quint, a reporter at Information Today's *Searcher* magazine, once said that a library after hours is like a coral reef without the fish—it is beautiful and serene but devoid of life. It is a remnant that can only remind us of a point in time.

Likewise, if you take away the librarians and the staff, but leave the books, the computers, and the architecture, you will have a fine sculpture of a library that will become a snapshot of the community's past. But, if you threw out the books and the buildings and left a dedicated group of library professionals, you could invite the public in and they would construct the future.

Now more than ever, the future of any community is not in the riches we pull from the ground or the glass we send streaming into the sky, but in the decisions and talents of the community members. They are not passive consumers of libraries or content, or an audience to democracy, but the very reason we are all here. They deserve a new librarianship, a new library that enables radical positive change. The reasons I have just covered support why we have libraries in general. Frankly, you will hear these arguments from good and bad libraries alike. The real question is how these themes and justifications become reality in your community and how they must transform for libraries to continue to be relevant in the future.