Public libraries – challenges and opportunities for the future

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Figure: http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip/blog/future-public-libraries-importance-innovation
Presentation Outline

- Introduction
- Our story
- Our future
- Our time
- Conclusion
Introduction

Our Story, our Time, our Future
Our Story

- The Romans
- Development of printing press, moveable type, paper, ink, publishing industry
- Institutional libraries, private libraries, circulating libraries
- Public libraries

Our Time

USESCO Public Library Manifesto:

- The library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.
Our Time

- Watson (2014) goes further:
- A showroom for culture and learning … a place that celebrates creativity, encourages exploration and discovery, helps people to work productively, and provides community engagement and empowerment.

Our Time: Major challenges

- Technological advances
- Increased competition
- Demographic and social trends
- Financial constraints
Our Time: Technological advances

- Huge changes in the way we consume, interact and communicate
- Huge quantity, range, and availability of instantaneous information
- Just-in-time – by-passing libraries
- Novel linking – social media
Percentage of individuals using the internet

www.google.com/publicdata/explore
Mobile-cellular subscriptions per 100 inhabitants

www.google.com/publicdata/explore
Smartphone ownership by income/age grouping

% within each age/income grouping who own a smartphone (example: 77% of 18-29 year olds with an annual household income of less than $30,000 are smartphone owners)

USA data

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, April 17-May 19, 2013 Tracking Survey. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. Margin of error is +/-2.3 percentage points based on all adults (n=2,252).
Social Media Landscape

Our Time: Technological advances

- New technologies
- New devices
- New personalised functionality
- Storage faster, smaller in size, cheaper, greater capacity
- Communication faster
- Ubiquitous systems
Our Time: Increase competition

- In many areas such as e-books, paper books, magazines, audio books, and multi-media
- Over 3 million e-books available from Amazon
- Over 12 million hard copy books on Amazon
- Selection advice, reviews
Our Time: Increase competition

Google Books Library Project:
- To make it easier for people to find relevant books.... Goal is to work with publishers and libraries to create a comprehensive, searchable, virtual card catalog of all books in all languages that helps user discover new books.
Our Time: Increase competition

- Audio books
- Audible.co.uk and digitalaudiobooks.co.uk each have 100,000 titles
- Netflix – millions of TV programmes and films
- Rhapsody and iTunes – digital music
Tablet ownership over time

% of American adults ages 18+ who own a tablet

- May-10: 3%
- May-11: 8%
- Dec-11: 10%
- Nov-12: 24%
- Sep-13: 34%
- Jan-14: 42%

E-reader ownership over time

% of American adults ages 18+ who own an e-reader

- May-10: 4%
- May-11: 12%
- Dec-11: 10%
- Nov-12: 19%
- Sep-13: 24%
- Jan-14: 32%

Source: Pew Research Center surveys, May 2010-January 2014. Interviews were conducted on landlines and cell phones, in English and Spanish.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Our Time: Increase competition

- Advantage of public libraries:
  - Provide personal unbiased advice, help and support
  - Loans and services are largely free
  - Collections are specifically selected for local communities
  - Books can be sampled without being purchased
  - Immediately available unless on loan
  - Own e-books collections
Our Time: Demographic and social trends

- Population growth
- Populations more racially and ethnically diverse
- Populations are aging
- Differences in the way people live – much greater reliance on technology
Population size

www.google.com/publicdata/explore
Our Time: Financial constraints

- Public debt, low economic growth, market uncertainty
- Public spending cuts
- Library budgets cut, closures, opening times reduced, greater reliance on volunteers
Public Library Expenditure in UK

£(000s)

CIPFA Public Library Actuals

Years

9-10 10-11 11-12 12-13
Number of Public libraries in UK

Source: CIPFA public library actuals
Number of book issues in UK

No. of books

Source: CIPFA public library actuals
Our future: Addressing challenges

- Arts Council England
- Agreed relevance of core purpose –
  - the provision of access to reading, information, and resources which support learning and knowledge for all
- The way that this is achieved will be different in the future
Our future: Addressing challenges

- Librarians will need to:
  - Be more proactive, reaching out to engage communities and individuals
  - Provide face-to-face and 24/7 virtual support for self-learning, self-learning and information literacy development
  - Promote the use, access, sharing and the creation of online information
  - Be more innovative and creative
Our future: Addressing challenges

- Arts Council England – 4 priorities for a 21st century public library service
  - Placing the library as the hub of the community
  - Making the most of digital technology and creative media
  - Ensuring that libraries are resilient and sustainable
  - Delivering the right skills for those who work for libraries
Our future: Addressing challenges

- Totally Physical (facilities and media)
- Individual Focus
- Collection Library (physical or virtual)
- Portal

- Totally Virtual (facilities and media)
- Community Focus
- Creation Library
- Archive

ALA: Confronting the future
Our future: Innovative examples

- Flagship libraries: Canada Water Library, the Library of Birmingham, Delf Concept Library (DOK)
- Digital Bazaar: Lambeth Libraries
- Fab Labs: Creative use of equipment
- Reading Gloves: interactive story telling
- Interactive exhibitions, digitisation projects, bibliotherapy groups, online book groups, self-publishing groups, interactive games
Seattle Public Library, Main Branch. Courtesy of Bobak Ha’Eri via Creative Commons license.
New Library of Birmingham
Fab labs

Exeter Public Library
A low-cost digital workshop:
- laser-cutters,
- 3D printers and scanners
- computer controlled routers
- 3D milling machines
- programming and design tools

Make almost anything
Innovative ideas

- Reading Gloves
- Interactive exhibitions
Orange County Library System's "Shake It" app for mobile devices. In 2011, OITP formally recognized Shake It as a cutting-edge technology service in libraries. For more information, see http://www.ocls.info/downloadables/mobileapps.asp.
Conclusions

- Libraries of the future are likely to be focussed on:
  - Being more community based
  - Connecting communities and individuals
  - Better out-reach services to disadvantaged groups
  - Creating more flexible physical and virtual 24/7 functionalities
Conclusions

- Libraries of the future are likely to be focused on:
  - Offering more digital resources
  - Having more seamless integration of new technologies
  - Being more innovative in terms of income generation
  - Having more highly trained staff
Conclusions

- Particularly important will be the aspirations of libraries:
  - Serving individuals or communities
  - Providing physical or virtual services
  - Providing collections or advocating creation of information
  - Owning or providing access to materials held elsewhere
Conclusions

Public Libraries:

- This is our story, our time and our future
It was the best of times...

Libraries of the Future

Multi-dimensional fiction

Bookpills
- 50 Shades of Grey
- Jamie's 15-Minute Meals
- Finnegans Wake

Robot librarians

Holographic audiobooks

Nanobooks

Nanolibrarian

Sentient books

I'm overdue. Please take me back to the library.

Tom Gauld