## The Value of Libraries

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**Introduction**

Over recent decades there has been mounting deliberation in the professional and research literature about the role and value of public libraries in the digital age. Public libraries are described as open, impartial and trusted institutions, community hubs, places of learning and developers of social capital. Paradoxically they are seen as important gateways to knowledge and inclusion at a time when there is a diminution in their information role.

This review identifies a selection of evidence highlighting both the value and the valuing of public libraries. Six value areas emerge from largely university-based, or university-library collaborated internationally published research. Social value was the dominant area identified in selected literature, followed by the library’s educative value and importance as an equitable public institution. Emerging to a lesser extent were public libraries’ economic value, community ownership and finally institutional culture and public sphere value.

Although the evaluation and social impact of public libraries is highly topical, many papers acknowledge the lack of an accepted methodology for providing evidence on the value of public libraries, or a consensus about how that value is defined.

**What does recent evidence tell us about the value of libraries?**

Literature searches were conducted covering the period 2009 to 2019 using key search terms. A summary of this process is provided in Appendix B. In total 19 papers form part of the analysis of the value of libraries. These included: four quantitative, eight qualitative and three mixed method studies and four literature reviews or critiques. Of the empirical studies, five were conducted in Australia, four in the US, three in the UK, two in Europe and one in Canada.

Usherwood (2002) argues that a social audit approach has merit in demonstrating the value of public libraries due to a range of commonly occurring factors. The review of literature summarised in Appendix A is synthesised using Usherwood’s factors (2002, p. 118) as an explanatory framework. These include:

* the educational role of the library
* the social role of the library
* community ownership
* the economic impact of the library
* equity in service delivery
* cultural centres and public spaces

1. **The educational role of the library**

A combination of mixed method studies and review articles examined the educational value of the library in providing information and knowledge generally, and specifically examining early literacy programs as well as critiquing the library’s role in digital literacy. While lifelong learning was discussed in a number of papers, there was no study that empirically investigated this aspect.

***Providing information and knowledge*:** A UK longitudinal qualitative study of the advantage and disadvantage of library usage found that regular users regarded the primary function of the library as a source of access to knowledge and information supported by staff. Identified was a preference for printed material despite study participants being computer literate (Appleton, Hall, Duff & Raeside, 2018).

***Beginning with early literacy:*** Two studies from Western Australia, one involving longitudinal qualitative research and the other a mixed methods approach, investigated early literacy programs of the Better Beginnings suite (Barratt-Pugh, Anderson & North 2013; Barratt-Pugh & Maloney 2015). The first was an in-depth qualitative study, and investigated librarians’ perceptions of the *Better Beginnings* program across a four year period (Barratt-Pugh, Anderson & North 2013). This study found that librarians involved in the program developed a greater understanding of the way that cooperation between parents and library staff impacted positively on infant learning and literacy. The second study, implementation of the early literacy program *Growing Better Beginnings* designed for 4-5 year olds, included a parent survey and interviews with kindergarten and pre-primary teachers as well as SLWA librarian coordinators. The program was positively received by parents and its central coordination valued by both teachers and librarians at the local level.

***Supporting digital literacy:*** According to Jaeger, Bertot, Thompson, Katz and Decoster’s (2012) literature critique, libraries and library staff are well placed to lead the way in digital literacy. The article discusses digital inclusion as a policy to close the digital divide and promote digital literacy. Indeed they argue that access to technologies is an important part of social and digital inclusion in the 21st century. The public library has value in meeting gaps between the digital haves and have-nots. They note that as digital participation becomes more central to education, employment and social services, librarians will need to take the lead in advocating for digital inclusion.

1. **The social role of the library**

Qualitative and quantitative studies investigated public libraries’ social role in generating and promoting social connection, social inclusion and social capital. According to Woolcock (2010, p.469) ‘social capital refers to the norms and networks embedded in social structures that enable people to act collectively’. Putnam (1993) claims that social capital provides a connecting mechanism between collective action, economic development, democracy and governance. Most studies in this systematic review propose that growing social capital is an important function of public libraries although they acknowledge that this is difficult to measure.

***Generating social capital*:** A quantitative study by Johnson (2010) from the US was able to determine that there was a relationship between social capital formation and community involvement, however she concluded that a more nuanced approach to understanding the circumstances that create social capital was necessary. In a subsequent study, Johnson (2012) tested whether social capital was generated through relationships and interactions between library staff and users. While Johnson concluded that library staff fundamentally consider that they are providing access to information resources and leisure materials, while overlooking the value of developing social relationships with users. Themes that emerged from this study included: ‘establishing relationships and building trust between library workers and patrons; library workers linking patrons to resources both inside and outside the library; the special help provided by library workers to patrons; using the library as an informal meeting place; regarding the library as a safe place to go; visiting the library to connect with others and reduce social isolation; and ﬁnally, the importance of the physical place of the library’ (2012, p. 56). The study established that trust, a key element of social capital, is built within libraries by connecting people to both community and information resources, providing social support, reducing social isolation, helping users to learn online skills and by creating a positive community space.

Appleton, Hall, Duff & Raeside (2018) in their UK-based longitudinal qualitative study found that where public libraries facilitate social interaction through group or meeting processes this generates social capital across diverse groups. This two-year study confirmed that active users value public libraries for ‘access to information and knowledge (and a range of other supplementary functions) in physically safe, community-owned spaces staffed by experts’ (2018, p. 282).

Ferguson (2012) argues in his review of the literature that libraries need to gather better evidence to demonstrate their contribution to social capital. As public institutions, libraries are providers of universal services; therefore they need to be proactive in reaching out to community groups that are under-represented in the library. While Ferguson acknowledges that the public library contribute to ‘the stock of social capital’ (2020, p. 31), to further generate social capital, libraries need to work with voluntary associations, develop their capacity as neutral/informal meeting spaces, be more accessible to marginalized or ‘at risk’ groups within the community, and engage with these groups to better understand their existing social capital.

***Facilitating social connections:*** In order to understand how libraries facilitate social connections, a Norwegian quantitative study was conducted investigating how library meeting places are utilised. This study by Aabø, Audunson and Vårheim (2010) found that library users with lower education tended to use the library as a low intensity meeting place involved in casual interactions, often with strangers. Also indicated was greater participation by lower income library users in informal group gatherings. Study participants with higher education were more likely to attend public sphere meetings in libraries (e.g. voluntary association events) indicating that they may already be socially connected. When looking at the connection between low income and low education, this study concluded that ‘the library as a meeting place plays a substantial role in equalizing […] social and economic circumstances (2010, p. 25)’.

***Connecting physically and digitally:*** A qualitative study from NSW was informed by 20 interviews that found links or connections were predominantly made within the library context (Houghton, Foth & Miller 2013). The study found that the library served as a physical meeting place, a community hub and for some their main access to the networked world, albeit peripherally. Evident was the need to create links to the online world for non-technology users. In addition, the study found that the use of social media was low or absent within this group, largely due to their preference for using the library as an informal ‘third place’, separate from home or work. Houghton et al conclude that libraries hold a strong value as repositories for local communities and ‘by providing local places and local information have the potential to be catalysts for local knowledge and technological growth within a digital society’ (2013, p. 38).

***Creating a therapeutic landscape:*** Library users with self-identified mental health issues confirmed in a UK qualitative study that libraries had value as a ‘therapeutic landscape’. Dominant themes included that the library was perceived as a familiar, non-challenging and welcoming space where interaction was optional. It had a quiet and calming atmosphere and was empowering due to access to learning resources (Brewster 2014). The study surfaces the previously hidden beneﬁts of public library that may assist with ‘everyday recovery work of mental health, providing a sanctuary in the face of stress’ (2014, p. 99).

1. **Community ownership**

Aspects of community ownership of libraries and their information was identified in three studies, albeit with very different orientations.

***Protecting ‘the commons’:*** A literature critique of the growing technology-centered virtual focus of libraries offers a warning that ‘the commons’ or free unfettered access to information is at risk due to the rapid transformation of the Internet into a commercial advertising platform and market place. This could effectively remove free access to information and possibly render the physical library obsolete (van de Pas 2014).

***Fostering ownership:*** Looking at a different aspect of ownership, a small number of studies identified a strong sense of community ownership of public library services, which is heightened when there are threats of funding cuts or library closures (Johnson 2012; Appleton, Hall, Duff & Raeside, 2018).

1. **The economic impact of the library**

Determining the economic impact of the library was first undertaken in separate landmark studies in Queensland and Victoria. These resulted in the development of a national picture of the economic impact of libraries. One qualitative study briefly addresses the economic benefits of assisting users to achieve job outcomes.

***Multiplying return on investment:*** In 2013, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) commissioned SGS Economics and Planning (SGS) to value the contributions that public libraries make to Australian community welfare and economic activity. Nationally, the study estimated that the total annual benefit provided by public libraries in Australia was $3 billion and the total associated annual cost was $1.03 billion (SGS 2013, p. 5). This equated to a net annual benefit of $1.97 billion, translated as a benefit cost factor ratio of 2.9 which according to SGS indicates ‘a sound return on investment’ (2013, p. 6). Further, SGS argues a multiplier effect with ‘the greater the investment, the larger the benefits derived by respective communities’ (2013, p 6). The study also calculates the economic stimulus associated with public libraries and estimated recurrent economic impact. Included in the SGS report are state-by-state figures enabling the extrapolation of a Western Australian profile (ALIA 2013).

In establishing the net worth of Western Australian public libraries, the estimated total annual benefit was $294.1million less recurrent operating costs of $111.9 million, resulting in a net benefit of $182.2 million (SGS 2013, p. 8). Indicated is a benefit cost factor of 2.6, comparable with the national figure. Further, SGS argues that the economy of public libraries triggers expenditure in other associated areas (e.g. retail industry) estimated at $227.8 million annually for Western Australia outweighing the public costs of providing library services ($111.9 million). When estimating the recurrent economic impact of public libraries including employment and associated value add, this is valued at $361.5 million annually for Western Australia. While SGS argues that collectively the findings establish a strong basis for increased funding to public libraries, the figures also confirm the value add of libraries to local and state economies.

***Enhancing employability***: A UK qualitative study found economic benefits via the dividend received by individuals finding employment or being supported and equipped with job-seeking skills through library support services (Halpin, Rankin, Chapman & Walker 2015).

1. **Equity in service delivery**

An identified value of public libraries was equity in service delivery through providing a place and support for disadvantaged groups. Across the searched literature, disadvantaged or marginalized groups in relation to libraries were identified as: the poor, homeless, ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, the aged and people with mental health, physical and learning challenges.

***Integrating immigrants:*** A qualitative study of immigrant women in Norway found that the public library represented a place to meet and interact socially while integrating into the new country. The library offered a bridge to the new culture as well as a connection to their culture of origin, assisting immigrants to transition from initially distant to more active participation (Audunson, Essmat & Aabø 2011).

Findings from a mixed methods study in Australia including surveying and interviewing 170 Asian immigrants show that the major reasons for visiting public libraries were to source materials in collections, attend library activities, use the library space for studying or reading and to meet friends (Khoir, Du, Davidson & Koronios 2017). Study respondents with children used public libraries as a means of both entertaining and educating their children. It was also an opportunity to meet other parents and engage in natural interactions. Findings indicated that study participants were interested in building their own capacity through library resources. Immigrants in the study were confident that using library services would enhance their English language skills and digital capability as well as preserve their first language and relationship with their home country through access to resources in their original language. (Similar findings were made in Norway by Audunson, Essmat & Aabø (2011)). The study also found that there were high, and largely unmet, expectations that public libraries would support migrants to obtain training skills related to employment. Study participants expected to form new friendships and to have the opportunity to mix with locals (Australians) through social interaction in library programs in order to build linkages that are important for successful settlement (Khoir, Du, Davidson & Koronios 2017).

***Highlighting homelessness:*** A qualitative study from Canada involving library staff and management examines the introduction of a library policy preventing homeless people from dossing in the library. Neoliberal policy shifts and economic downturns have led to a homelessness crisis which has impacted upon the library as a public institution in an urban environment. The paper highlights the complex role of state agents (librarians/library boards) in navigating private behaviour occurring in a public space (Freeman & Bromley 2018).

***Embracing multiculturalism:*** In a qualitative study from the UK, it was found that patrons considered the libraries as safe and highly valued for their inclusivity and diversity, allowing for interaction among a broad mix of users (Appleton, Hall, Duff & Raeside, 2018).

***Addressing digital exclusion***: Libraries serve as a major public outlet for free Internet and assistance for people with no access, insufficient access or insufficient digital literacy. Online experiences of participants in a small Australian qualitative study highlight the ‘digital vicious circle’, where individuals experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and in need of assistance from government and non-government institutions have the least knowledge and access. Information professionals such as library staff with an understanding of the complexities of socioeconomic disadvantage can improve the online experience of library users (Smeaton, Bruce, Hughes & Davis 2017).

1. **Cultural centres and public spaces**

A small number of contributions discuss the cultural uses of libraries as public space or public institutions, however there is little addressing the valuing of National or State libraries specifically.

***Valuing libraries as unique public spaces:*** Barclay (2017) examines the social worth of library space, particularly its under-examined contribution to the public sphere. His review concludes that ‘public libraries are perhaps one of the last remaining indoor public spaces where an individual can remain from opening until closing without needing any reason to be there and without having to spend any money’ (2017, p. 271). Van de Pas (2014) also identifies the public library as one of the last true public areas, ‘open to all for the benefit of the community’. These contributors conclude that public libraries need to preserve and promote this uniqueness while continuing to make these spaces publicly available.

***Valuing National and State libraries:*** There are few published analytical studies that explore the specific value or contributions of National or State libraries, in Australia or elsewhere. Hallam, Hiskens and Ong (2015) outline the conceptualisation of a ‘mature framework’ for learning organisations aimed at measuring the value of National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) literacy and learning programs. There are as yet no published studies or critiques of associated framework outcomes. However, the implementation of the Western Australian State Library’s early literacy programs *Better Beginnings* and *Growing Better Beginnings* are assessed in two peer-reviewed papers (Barrett-Pugh, Anderson & North 2013; Barratt-Pugh & Maloney 2015). These studies investigate both programs through interviewing librarians and teachers and surveying parents. Both papers acknowledged the important central role of SLWA in facilitating strong coordination and management of the *Better Beginnings* suite of programs.

**Contextual factors**

**Potential future impacts on the State Library**

Similar to other Australian cities, inner city living is increasingly popular, creating demand for housing in close proximity to employment centres, entertainment and tertiary education institutions. Efforts by the State Government and local universities to attract international student numbers are likely to see an increase in student accommodation in the Perth CBD. Combined, these population increases will no doubt impact upon the extant facilities in the Perth city precinct, including SLWA. It is projected that by 2050, 50,000 people will live in Perth CBD – the primary commercial, cultural and transport centre for the greater Perth metropolitan area (ABS 2016). Demographic profiling for this forecast include that an estimated 50 per cent will be overseas born, 32 per cent will speak a language other than English and 60 per cent will get around without a car. By 2050, the predicted household composition in Perth CBD will be single person (40%), couples without dependents (34%) and couples with dependents (10%). These calculations assume development saturation by 2036, with the number of dwelling increasing from 10,621 in 2016 to 25,467 by 2050 (City of Perth 2019). The movement of young adults in and out of the Perth city dominates this projected migration profile.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, libraries are in general positively valued across the literature, particularly in studies which sought engagement with libraries users. Findings from a qualitative study by Halpin, Rankin, Chapman and Walker (2015, p. 35) sum up library users’ feedback about the value and valuing of public libraries across the review of literature:

Libraries provide a free social space for the community … a safe and accessible place … unbiased and non-judgmental. They provide a place and support for disadvantaged groups, the poor, ethnic minorities, LGBT, and for people with disabilities. Libraries provide entertainment and self-improvement.

This systemic review has confirmed that the multidimensional valuing of libraries is a growing research area. Predominantly identified were educational and social values and the valuing of equity in library service provision. While some progress has been demonstrated in measuring value, there remains a call to provide more comprehensive evidence where uniformity in methods, finding and scope are established and the meaning of value is defined.

**Appendix A: Summary of the Studies Reviewed**

| Study | Aim | Methodology/sample | Findings | Value type | Recommendations/ conclusions |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Aabø, Audunson & Vårheim 2010 | Determines how libraries are used as meeting places through identified categories such as a: ‘square’, place for meeting diverse people (strangers), public sphere, place for joint activities, and/or place for virtual meetings. | Self-completed survey administered to 1000 randomly selected participants in four towns in Norway (250 per location). The sample was weighted by gender and age. | Strong evidence of lower educated people using the library as a square or low intensity meeting place. Those with lower education also more likely to use the library for joint and virtual ICT meetings (e.g. students). Higher educated attend more public sphere meetings. | Social connection | Need to develop more in-depth understanding of the nature and scope of meetings in libraries and how these facilitate social connection. |
| Appleton, Hall, Duff & Raeside, 2018 | Explores the advantages and disadvantages accrued by individuals through public library use, and the impact of this on public spirit at individual and community levels. | Two phase longitudinal focus groups in eight locations in the UK involving  53 participants described as avid users. | Findings reveal that active library users regard the primary function of the library as a source of access to knowledge and information with library staff assistance. There was a preference for printed material despite computer literacy. Public libraries were considered safe and highly valued for their inclusivity and diversity, allowing for interaction among a broad mix of people. Community ownership of public library services was another key finding. | Social inclusion | The impact of public libraries on citizenship has previously been difficult to identify. The evidence from this study shows that public library use supports participation in, and the fulfilment of, individual and community obligations. The benefits of library usage were summed up as: priorities of place, print, people and professionals. |
| Audunson, Essmat & Aabø 2011 | Explores the role that a public library plays in the lives of immigrant women | Nine in-depth interviews of female immigrants to Norway. | For the sample of immigrant women, the public library represented a complex meeting place supporting their integration into Norwegian society. For the sample, the library was described as the first friend in the new country. The library offered a bridge to the new culture as well as connection to their culture of origin, assisting them to transition from an initially distance to active participation. | Equity | Migration means an upheaval in social capital due to leaving social networks, language and cultural codes. Library usage related to a number of life spheres for immigrant women, from friendships through to education and employment. However, the role of the library differed according to the phases of participants’ tenure as immigrants with greater usage in the initial phases as a source of solace for their homesickness and less so as they integrated into the wider society. |
| Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) 2013 | Investigates and assesses contributions that public libraries make to Australian community welfare and economic activity. | Two measurement frameworks were used to determine: first the net contribution of public libraries to community welfare; and second, the economic stimulus by public library operations | This Australia-wide study provided data on the contribution made by public libraries with a state by state breakdown. Western Australia’s figures indicate that libraries contribute around $2 billion to community welfare. Further, economic stimulus generated by library operations in WA was estimated at $3.5 billion annually. | Economic | The study concluded that collectively findings establish a strong basis for increased funding to public library with figures confirming the value add of libraries to communities as well as local and state economies. |
| Barclay 2017 | Examines the uniqueness of library space and its social worth. | Literature review | Despite the growth in digital information, usage data indicates a continued increase in library visitors. Libraries promote their access to information, educational resources, technology and other valuable services however they infrequently promote the library space itself. It remains an under-examined contribution. | Institutional (Public space) | Review concludes that libraries are one of the last remaining public spaces where a citizen can stay all day without providing a reason and not spend any money. Public libraries should preserve and promote this uniqueness while continuing to make these spaces publically available. |
| Barratt-Pugh, Anderson & North 2013 | Investigates family literacy programs conducted by librarians, specifically *Better Beginnings* a program developed by SLWA. | Longitudinal study undertaken in four diverse locations across four years including 27 librarians’ perspectives of the program. The study was conducted in Western Australia. | Key findings included librarians altered perspective over time about the aim of the program from supporting parents to a cooperative relationship with parents. The pack’s contents evolved over time to include different family compositions, culture and language. Stronger links were forged between librarians and child health nurses who mostly delivered the packs. The packs were strongly linked with other library early literacy activities, such as Rhyme time and Story time activities. | Educational (Early literacy) | *Better Beginning* was considered a successful program with libraries developing a strong sense of ownership. Identified was the importance of the central coordination and mentoring role of the SLWA. Librarians reported a greater understanding of the impact of cooperation on infants’ learning and literacy development and its place in lifelong learning. |
| Barratt-Pugh & Maloney 2015 | Investigates the implementation of SLWA’s *Growing Better Beginnings* Program: an early literacy program for four and five year olds. | Survey of 144 parents who received a *Better Beginnings* Reading Pack and interviews conducted with 21 kindergarten or pre-primary teachers and five SLWA librarian coordinators. | In general, parents welcomed the reading pack and the majority confirmed its usefulness in supporting home literacy practices. Most teachers reported the program as consistent with classroom early literacy activities with links to curriculum outcomes. Librarians in general while very supportive of the program also reported a positive connections to participating schools. However, librarians noted some logistical and communication challenges between schools and libraries. | Educational (Early literacy) | The program was positively received by identified stakeholders. Central coordination by SLWA of the *Better Beginning* (0-3 years) program had enabled the development and management of *Growing Better Beginnings*. This coordination enabled consistent aims and ensured that the program remained appropriate. The project fostered better relationships between the school and library personnel at state and local levels. |
| Brewster 2014 | Explores the role of the public library for service users with mental health issues and questions whether the public library forms part of a ‘therapeutic landscape’. | Qualitative study conducted with 16 people who self-identified mental health issues. The study was conducted in the UK. | Three common themes emerged. The library was assessed as: familiar, open and welcoming; comforting and calming; and empowering. The therapeutic value of library was as a safe space during acute stress. | Social (health and wellbeing) | More research required on the beneficial impacts of libraries as a safe space for everyday management of stress (mental health). |
| Ferguson 2012 | Questions the claims that public libraries are generators of social capital through civic engagement and social networks. | Literature review | Libraries build social capital by providing meeting places, access to equipment, information, internet and ICT as well as a range of literacy skills and opportunities for lifelong learning. Libraries also play an important role in developing and supporting information literate communities, particularly for those who are marginalized or ‘at risk’. | Social (social capital) | There are indications that public libraries contribute to the stock of social capital due to being universal and impartial public institutions. If libraries are to build social capital they need to work with voluntary association, develop their capacity as impartial /informal meeting places, be more accessible to new user groups particularly those marginalized or ‘at risk’ within the community and engage with ethnic groups to understand the groups’ existing social capital. |
| Freeman & Bromley 2018 | Provides a new perspective on the interplay between public institutions, their management, and the deﬁnition and performance of ‘the public’ that the library serves through analysis of its sleeping policy. | Semi-structured interviews (library staff and board members of Edmonton Pubic Library in Alberta, Canada). | Allowing people to sleep in the library was a response to deficiencies in the social welfare state. Questioned was whether this was a private or public space behaviour. A ‘no sleeping’ policy was enforced to construct rules and parameters around the normative use of public space. | Institutional (public space) | Libraries are evolving public institutions, while neo-liberal shifts have led to crises such as homelessness. The library is an essential enactment site of public property in an urban environment. Policies regulating whether homeless people can doss in the library highlight the complex role of state agents (e.g. librarians) in navigating these tensions. |
| Halpin, Rankin, Chapman & Walker 2015 | Investigates the valuing and values underpinning the public library service. | Nineteen key library stakeholders using a group Delphi technique involving a number of questionnaires using multiple iterations. The study was conducted in the UK. | The value of libraries was considered to be more than monetary, as participants considered that libraries value-added to the wider community. The general view was that libraries play a crucial part in the fabric of communities and in the lives of many people. Benefits were seen as social, economic and educational. Libraries were assessed as playing a crucial role in many communities as free, accessible (unbiased and non-judgmental), safe, neutral spaces providing a physical place and support for disadvantaged groups and well as providing entertainment and self-improvement. | Social/economic educational | Overall, the study identified three broad benefits from library usage: social value that the users derive from the services across a broad level; economic value from the dividend received by individuals finding work or being supported and equipped with skills through library services; educational value through support provided by libraries to children and adults in accessing books and learning. The paper calls for further investigation into new ways of measuring library services and more effective use of the existing evidence base. |
| Houghton, Foth & Miller 2013 | Considers how libraries support the development of community networks both physically and digitally. | A qualitative study informed by 20 in-depth interviews of library users (Concord Library, Canada Bay, NSW) | The study identified that links were predominantly made within the library context. The library was a physical meeting place, a community hub, and for some their main link to the networked world, albeit peripherally. Evident was the need to create links to the online world for non-technology users. | Institutional (public space) | The use of social media for connection was largely absent for this cohort. However users had connections to the physical space which strongly served a third place role. Public libraries have a critical role in supporting the digital-knowledge economy for both users and non-users of technology. |
| Jaeger, Bertot, Thompson, Katz, & Decoster 2012 | Examines the gap between concepts and policies as public libraries organize to provide Internet education, access, and assistance. | Literature review | Access to technologies has become an important part of social inclusion, and specifically digital inclusion. The article discusses digital inclusion as a policy to close the divide and promote digital literacy. Gaps between the digital haves and digital have-nots will become more evident as digital participation becomes more central to education, employment, government and other areas. | Societal (inclusion) | In the US, libraries continue to lead the way in digital inclusion, although this is not necessarily recognised in library funding models. Libraries need to continue to take more initiative in terms of advocacy or their current role in promoting digital literacy and digital inclusion will not be sustainable. |
| Johnson 2010 | Investigates the extent to which the public library contributes to community and  individual social capital of its users. | Survey administered to 132 library patrons across three libraries in a large US Midwest city. | Results were initially benchmarked against findings of a prior general population social capital study in the same city. When compared, library users showed higher levels of trust and community involvement. However, results from the library users’ study revealed that the only significant aspect was community involvement. There was no association between individual social capital and library use. | Social (social capital) | A causal link between social capital and library usage was inconclusive. There was however a relationship between library use and community involvement (voluntary associations). Further investigation was identified, specifically to gain a more nuanced understanding of the circumstances that create social capital. |
| Johnson 2012 | Explores social interactions between library staff and patrons in relation to the creation of social capital. | Interviews involving 15 library staff in a large US Midwest city. | Both individual and community-level social capital building were identified in this qualitative study. Interactions between staff and patrons beyond functional exchange included establishing relationships and building trust; linking patrons to resources (inside and outside of the library); and providing individualized help. | Social (social capital) | The study concluded that the library serves as a constructive, safe public space where people make connections thereby reducing their social isolation. While public libraries are offering more services online the importance of physical space and face-to-face interactions with patrons was emphasised. The internet’s contribution to patrons’ social capital was questioned. |
| Khoir, Du, Davidson & Koronios 2017 | Explores Asian migrants’ expectations of the ways library services can generate social capital. | Surveys and in-depth interviews of 170 Asian migrants in South Australia. | Immigrants were confident that using library services would enhance their English language skills and digital expertise while providing a bridge to preserve their first language and relationship with their home country. There were high expectations of study participants that public libraries would support them with training skills related to employment. New friendships through engagement in library programs rated highly among expectations of study respondents. | Social (social capital) | Enhancing social capital is considered an important contributor to immigrants' settlement in a multicultural society. Although it was noted that a direct causal link between immigrants' use of public libraries and social capital was not established in the study, many aspects of library services have the potential to trigger its formation. The study concluded that while intangible assets such as opportunities to develop social networks were evident, the library has a social constructionist role in encouraging communality in fostering the values and norms of the new country. |
| Smeaton, Bruce, Hughes & Davis 2017 | Explores online information experiences of individuals experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage in Australia and whether these are exclusionary. | Small pilot study capturing the lived experience of low socio-economic status interviewees with intermittent access to the internet using smart phone devices and pre-paid plans from an Australian perspective. | Experiences of study participants found four common online experiences: endless information journey (both + and -), uncontrolled information space (cyber safety), inadequate and complex information and increasing necessity to engage with digital space. | Social (digital inclusion) | The study highlights the ‘digital vicious circle’, where individuals experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and in need of assistance from government and non-government sources have the least knowledge and access. Information professionals including libraries need greater awareness of complexities of socioeconomic disadvantage in order to enhance support. |
| Taylor, Jaeger, McDermott, Kodama & Bertot 2012 | Examines the Internet-related responses of public libraries to the sustained economic downturn of recent times in the US. | Analysis of various data sources including US public library survey, site visits and interviews at various libraries and desktop analysis of impacts of the economic downturn. | Public libraries serve as the major public outlet for free Internet access and assistance for people with no access, insufﬁcient access, or insufﬁcient digital literacy. US libraries evidenced a spike in usage during economic downturns. Increased workload for librarians assisting patrons needs to be counted as an expansion upon previous library services associated with the digital age. | Economic impact | This study recommends that library funding increase during economic downturns. Libraries need to be considered as part of larger economic development including contribution to employment and education infrastructure in supporting 21st century skill development, particularly for disadvantaged citizens. Ensure libraries have high quality public-access technology and accompanying backbone support. |
| van de Pas 2014 | Discusses the cultural uses of the library as public space compared to a technology-centered virtual focus. | Literature review | By following a predominantly technological path towards the virtual library, the risk is that multinational commercial information aggregators will make the physical library obsolete and remove free access to information. However if libraries take the cultural path as an institution instrumental to ‘the commons’, technology will become a means to an end. | Cultural | The article offers a warning call against embracing technological determinism that may bring about closure of ‘the commons’ central to the provision of library services. The case is made that free unfettered access to information is at odds with actual developments on the Internet, as it rapidly transforms into a commercial advertising platform/market place. |

**Appendix B: Systematic Review Selection Process**

## Included

## Eligibility

## Identification

## Screening

**25** papers/articles retrieved through SLWA links and hand-searching reference details

**19** articles met the inclusion criteria

(Quantitative =4; qualitative = 8; mixed methods 3; literature review = 4)

Electronic Database Search (n = **261**)  
(LISA = 99, LISTA = 73, ERIC = 35,

Google Scholar = 54)

**35** full-text articles excluded

**54** full-text articles assessed for eligibility

**188** papers excluded as not relevant

**242** papers screened (title + abstract)

**44** duplicates removed

Inclusion criteria: published 2009-2019; including a research study or critique of research studies.

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