METHODS FOR DEMONSTRATING THE VALUE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE UK: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

This paper summarises the findings of a report commissioned by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals' (CILIP) Library and Information Research Group (LIRG) realized in order to produce a comprehensive review of existing quantitative and qualitative evaluation methodologies for demonstrating the value of public libraries in the United Kingdom (UK).

A thorough literature review of existing research was carried out and an investigation into best practices for evaluating impact was conducted. A wide range of journals and books published within the fields of library and information science and social research have been consulted. Relevant White Papers and Reviews; such as those published by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC); the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), the Department of Culture, Sport and Media (DCMS); and the American Library Association (ALA) have been analysed. It is anticipated that the findings of this research will help the sector to develop more appropriate models for demonstrating the value of public libraries in the 21st century. The original report was compiled in June 2010.

Keywords: *public libraries, methods for measuring performance, quantitative methods, qualitative methods, library managers, strategies, the planning.*

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1. Introduction

In today's climate of accountability, a better understanding of the value of public libraries is becoming essential to preserving and encouraging public and private investment. (Imholz and Arns, 2007, p. 12).

Public libraries mean different things to different people and their impact on lives and communities can differ significantly. The public library offers opportunities to experience a world of cultures and imagination; it can inform, inspire and challenge visitors of all ages; offer independent help and advice; present the opportunity to learn new things and meet new people. It can also provide more practical services such as access to photocopiers, fax machines and printers. In other words, «[a]ll visitations do not represent equal consumption of services or equal value to the library customer» (Holt and Elliot, 2003, p. 424).

This view is supported by other commentators who cite changes in personal, educational and professional circumstances as having an impact on perceived value (England and Submission, 1995; Nankivell et al, 1999; Bohme and Spiller, 1999; Morris et al, 2000, p. 3). The value of public libraries also shifts in times of crisis, yet the sector remains ill equipped to measure and communicate the value of public library services during and following a crisis. Often the evidence is anecdotal and provided via word-of-mouth by front line staff or statistics illustrating an increase in use. There have been times, however, when attempts have been made to officially document the impact of libraries in times of war (McColvin 1942, p.5; Shelton, 2003); in times of civil disasters (Dover and Simmons' 1993); in times of natural disasters (New Orleans Public Library Foundation, 2005-2010); and in times of recession (Poole, 1880; Berelson, 1949; James, 1983; Bob, 1985; James, 1986; Getz, 1989, p.4-5; Finch and Warner, 1998, p.5; Lynch 2002; Seavey, 2003, p.378; ALA, 2007; ALA, 2008a; Goulding, 2009; Rooney-Browne, 2009a). However, none of this research has produced a definitive model that public library valuators can apply to measure the impact and value of their services.

There is no litmus test for value because defining value in the context of libraries is complex, individual stakeholders are unique, performance measurement is essentially spatial, and operating in an environment that is neither causal nor predictive creates complications (Cram, 1999, p. 1).

In the UK considerable emphasis is placed on the importance of measuring the performance of public libraries using traditional statistical methods. Often, this means that the more complex direct and indirect benefits of the library can be overlooked. This paper presents an overview of current methods for measuring performance, discusses quantitative and qualitative methods, identifies examples of successful studies; and introduces methods from the non-profit sector which could prove useful in the future. It should be noted that the original report findings have been condensed considerably for the purposes of this paper.

1.1. Defining Value

Regardless of context, defining value is a complex issue with its own philosophical discipline; axiology (Cram, 1999, p.11). Axiology, or Value Theory defines three different dimensions of value; extrinsic value, systematic value and intrinsic value (Hartman, 1969, p. 114). Thus, there are a number of different value types, including personal value, aesthetic value, religious value, spiritual value; and ethical value. For the purpose of this paper the author has focussed on two types of value; economic value and social value. These value types were also identified by Cram (1999, p. 13) in her paper on measuring the value of libraries (Figure 1).

2. Current methods for measuring performance

Performance measurement evaluates whether a library is effective and efficient in delivering its services (Poll and Boekhorst, 2007, p. 31).

In the last decade public libraries in the UK have endured a plethora of performance measurement systems. Examples of which include (but are not limited to) Annual Library Plans (1998), Public Library Standards (2001), Public Library Position Statements (2002), Public Library Service Standards (2004), Cultural and Community Services Indicators (Scotland-only, 2007), Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM) (Scotland-only, 2007); and Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA) (McMenemy, 2009, p. 152). These performance measurement systems typically produce two common measures of performance; outputs and outcomes. Typically, outputs and outcomes are compared against inputs to determine ultimate value. The statistics produced by these systems help to create a snapshot of the achievements of the whole sector and of individual libraries. They enable comparisons to be drawn; help managers to ensure that they are delivering a range of high quality and relevant services; and provide a platform for the library to com-

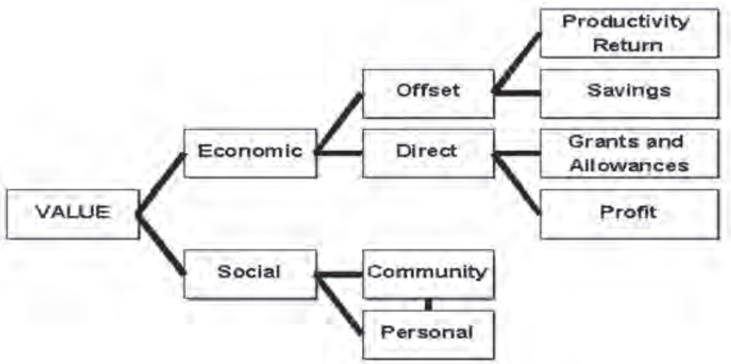


Figure 1: Aspects of Value (Cram, 1999, p. 13).

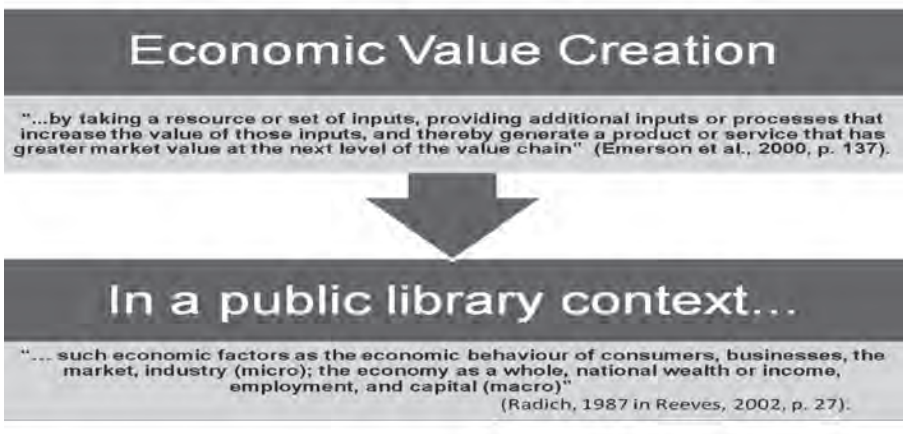


Figure 2: What is economic value?

Figure 3: What is social value?

municate directly with users to identify areas for improvement. They also provide opportunities to communicate the extent to which libraries can help their parent organisation (e.g. the local authority) to meet its wider economic and social goals (Chowdhury et al., 2008, p. 243).

The majority of these tools are quantitative and a selection of these will be discussed in more depth in the section that follows.

2.1. Quantitative Methodologies

Quantitative evaluation methodologies involve the application of mathematical models to surveys and experiments (Schutt, 2006, p. 17). They are viewed with "...an aura of respectability... [and] conveys a sense of solid, objective research" (Denscombe, 2005, p. 237). Quantitative methods produce outputs, typically in the form of statistics which can be transferred easily into attractive tables and graphs. These outputs are often considered more desirable in a culture focussed on profit and loss. Their popularity in the public library sector has been evident for some time now. Favret (2000, p. 341) found that the official use of quantitative methods for measuring the performance of public libraries could be traced back to 1961 with the introduction of a definitive method by The Municipal Treasurers and Society of County Treasurers. Today, this method is referred to as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Public Library Statistics reports.

This paper will take a closer look at Audits, Return on Investment Studies, The Library Use Valuation Calculator; and The Optimisation Model.

2.1.1. The Audit

The number of Audits within the sector has grown exponentially since 1961 in order to assess performance, best value, benchmarking and accountability. Since 1983, the Audit Commission has been involved in the process of assessing the performance of local councils using a variety of national indicator tools, such as the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) and the Performance Assessment Framework (PAF). In April 2008 a new National Indicator Set was introduced by six Inspectorates (Audit Commission, Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation and Ofsted) to "measure citizens' views and perspectives" (Audit Commission, 2010b). The set of 198 National Indicators for the period 2010-2011 are sorted into four themes;

- Stronger and Safer Communities (NI1 – NI 48)
- Children and Young People (NI 50 – NI 118)
- Adult Health and Well-being and Tackling Exclusion and Promoting Equality (NI 119 NI150)
- Local Economy and Environmental Sustainability (NI 151-198) (Audit Commission, 2010d).

National Indicator 9 measures the adult use of public libraries by assessing:

The percentage of the adult population in a local area who say they have used a public library service at least once in the last 12 months.

These measurements are obtained from the Active People survey, conducted by Sport England (Sport England, 2010). This survey asks respondents to consider if they have visited or used library resources over the past 12 months (physical building, mobile library, online library and/or outreach services). National Indicators are assessed every two years under the single Place Survey which local authorities administer. The results of these assessments are published as part of the wider Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAAs), which collate findings from external watchdogs that monitor the performance of local services, such as schools and police forces. The findings inform stakeholders of how well their public services are performing; if they provide value for money and where improvements need to be made. This information is then presented as one definitive overview of how public services are performing in specific communities (Audit Commission, 2010c). This report is published annually and the results are available via the Oneplace website (Oneplace, 2010).

There has been much controversy surrounding the fact that only the number of visits to public libraries is measured as it fails to recognise all of the other indicators that public libraries have the potential to impact on. This has been discussed in depth by the current author at the Society of Chief Librarians Conference in June 2009 and was highlighted recently as an area for concern by the DCMS in their policy statement, The Modernisation Review of Public Libraries (Rooney-Browne, 2009b; DCMS, 2010, p. 49). The DCMS has called for the government to recommend that local authorities consider the many other ways that they can feed into the other 197 indicators. The DCMS have also produced a new Model of Impact which should help local authorities to determine the immediate personal benefits, intermediate outcomes and long term outcomes of public library activities and resources and how these benefits and outcomes can feed into a range of additional National Indicators (DCMS, 2010, p. 52-53). They have also requested that the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) work in consultation with the DCMS in the future to develop more appropriate measures that better reflect the impact that public libraries can have on communities (DCMS, 2010, p. 49). DCMS will also use the world's largest Panel Study (Understanding Society) to determine the long term socio-economic impact of public libraries on the lives of 100,000 individuals (DCMS, 2010, p. 12).

Another type of Audit is the annual Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Public Library Statistic Actuals report. This report requires public library managers to complete a questionnaire about their expenditure and income, staff levels, service points, stock levels, issues, enquiries and visits; and inter-library loans. The Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU), based at Loughborough University, summarises key statistics from this report in their Libraries, Archives, Museums, Publishing, Online Statistics Table (LAMPOST) (LISU, 2009).

Pros and Cons

> ...quantity of use and quality of performance do not yet prove that users benefitted from their interaction with a library. Measuring impact or outcome means going a step further and trying to assess the affect of services on users and on society (Poll and Boekhorst, 2007, p. 31).

Audits enable stakeholders to observe how well their libraries are performing statistically because their methods focus on outputs rather than outcomes. These statistics can be invaluable in helping library managers plan their budgets and strategies; and to identify how a specific library is performing on a local and national level. However, these Performance Indicators fail to acknowledge the different funding levels that public libraries are allocated by their parent organisation. They also fail to take into consideration the geographical location of different authorities and overlook the libraries' contribution to the local community and economy (Linley and Usherwood, 1998, p. 49). In addition, no credit is given to the value that users gain from interacting with the library and its resources (Toyne and Usherwood, 1999, p. 149). In other words, quantitative methods such as Audits tend to "measure what is measurable and consequently miss what is important" (Toyne and Usherwood, 1999, p. 149). Therefore, such methods should be viewed with a degree of scepticism and not perceived as the 'absolute truth' (Chambers, 1997, p. 42). It is worth noting, however, that The MLA, DCMS AND CIPFA have made a commitment to develop existing methodologies, such as the Taking Part Survey, PLUS and the CASE Programme to gather evidence that more appropriately reflects the impact and value of public libraries.

2.1.2. Return on investment

> "...if we can demonstrate our worth, with numbers, our budget numbers will be all the more justifiable" (Finch and Warner, 1998, p. 158).

Another popular quantitative method for determining the value of public library services is the Return on Investment Study (ROI). This presents greater opportunities for public libraries to communicate their value, not only in the form of usage statistics but also in economic terms. Over the last decade ROI studies have grown in popularity (Aabo and Audunson, 2002; Barron et al., 2005; British Library, 2004; Finch and Warner, 1998; Griffiths et al., 2004; Holt et al., 1999; Jura Consultants, 2005, 2005; Morris et al, 2000). Traditionally used in the private sector this type of cost-benefit analysis (CBA) enables quantifiable values, such as a cost or a purchase price, to be applied to variables that are difficult to measure, such as goods and services that do not have a specific '£' price. This cost is then compared to the value that a specific service or resource has for an individual or the community. This is better known as the benefit-to-cost ratio which measures the taxpayers return on every £1 invested. If this ratio exceeds £1 then it is agreed that the benefits exceed the costs. This method is typically used to measure direct benefits.

The CBA methodology is becoming increasingly popular as it "...appears to be the most effective language for conveying the efficiency of investment of tax dollars in public libraries to public constituents" (Imholz and Arns, 2007, p. 15). Four other economic concepts have also grown in popularity;

1. ***Consumer Surplus*** is accepted as the value that consumers place on the consumption of a good or service in excess of what they must pay to get it; i.e. the library user perceives the value of being a member of their library to be worth more than they have to pay for the service via their taxes.
2. ***Cost of Time and Effort*** challenges the belief that the public library is a completely 'free' service, citing time and effort expended by users. It is believed that the cost to the user must be met with a return greater than the investment to ensure satisfaction.
3. ***Contingent Valuation (CV)*** measures the value of both the use and non-use of non-priced goods and services, such as public libraries. Two approaches exist, the first of which, Willingness to Pay (WTP) asks users (hypothetically) how much they would be willing to pay to enjoy the services of a service that they presently enjoy for free, for example, a public library. The second approach is the Willingness to Accept (WTA) model which asks how much users would accept to give up these library privileges or how much of a tax cut they would be happy to accept in exchange for the closure of a public library. CV has enjoyed high profile support from two Nobel Prize winning Laureates (Arrow and Solow, 1993), the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

4. ***Input-Output Models (IOMs)*** are methods for evaluating indirect benefits such as the impact that the library can have on the local economy by helping residents to acquire jobs and local businesses to prosper. These indirect benefits are measured using mathematical software models (available to purchase) such as the Regional Input-Output Modelling System II and the Regional Economic Models, Inc (REMI) which looks at cause and effect relationships. These models have been used in the past to measure the value of beaches and parks.

A selection of important public library ROI studies have been selected for further discussion.

2.1.3. St Louis Public Library: Services Valuation Study

The aim of this study was to identify the way in which taxpayers profit from investing in urban public libraries. This is widely regarded as a seminal study which has influenced numerous other public library valuation studies over the last decade (Imholz and Arns, 2007). Adapting a framework that Holt et al. proposed in 1996 the researchers implemented CBA methodology. The researchers believed CBA to be the best available economic methodology because it:

> ...matches the way public libraries deliver services and the way benefits flow from library services... [it] also tends to fit the way that citizens think about taxes that they elect to invest in such public-service organizations (Holt et al., 1999).

CBA made it possible for the researchers to estimate both the direct and indirect benefits of the service. For example, neighbourhoods experience an indirect benefit from the mere presence of the library in the community; and the local economy can prosper from the library's positive impact on employability in the area. Upon reflection, however, the researchers opted not to measure indirect benefits because of the difficulty in stating with absolute confidence their value to individuals and communities. So, in the end the study only focussed on direct benefits.

The Methodology

A Service / User Matrix was produced to identify three different User Types (General, Teachers and Business) and to determine the benefits that each of these users derived from library resources/services. Seven focus groups were then established using heavy library users and library friends to identify areas for improvement in the proposed methodology. This included refining the language used so that questions were clearer and the potential for receiving better answers was improved. Focus groups also validated the proposed $ value that researchers had placed on the 15 services that would be investigated in the survey; children's books, adult books, videos/films, audio/music, magazines, newspapers, toys, parent-teacher materials, reference and research services, special events, craft & activity programs, social skills/etiquette training, computer skills training, encyclopaedias, and, finally, dictionaries and almanacs. The focus groups were facilitated by marketing students not directly involved in the study in order to ensure that the researchers did not influence the feedback from participants.

In the end the researchers chose to implement multiple measures to ensure a range of direct benefits were produced. Thus, values were determined using Consumer Surplus, Contingent Valuation (including WTP and WTA) and Cost of Time.

The Sample

Using the SLPL Automation System 72,000 active cardholders were identified at 39,444 unique addresses. The technology services team reduced this number to a potential random sample of 2,350 general users, 400 teachers and 100 businesses (2,850 in total). A letter was sent to these cardholders explaining the aim of the survey, benefits of participation and incentives. 16 % of general users, 83 % teachers and 86 % business users agreed to participate. Trained interviewers from the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville conducted the telephone interviews.

Telephone Survey

In order to determine the Consumer Surplus value the interviewers conducted telephone surveys, asking SLPL users about their borrowing habits and enquiring hypothetically about perceived value to determine WTP and WTA values.

Chi-square tests were used to demonstrate the statistical validity of the survey. Discrepancies related to the race, income and social status of respondents and results were weighted accordingly. The goal throughout was to be as conservative as possible during the process of calculating prices and values.

The Calculations

- A comparison was then made between the numbers of books borrowed and the number of books the user has/would have purchased from a retailer
- The resultant number is the value that users place on borrowing books in excess of the cost of time and effort to do so.
- This value is translated into the $ measure of net benefits provided by borrowing from the library.
- A sum of all of these individual values is then calculated to estimate the total direct $ benefits that the library delivers in a year.

Outputs / Outcomes

For every $1 invested in public libraries the direct benefit to users is $4 (SLPL, 1999).

The SLPL study has influenced a number of other library valuation studies throughout the last ten years; Seattle Central Public Library (2005), Suffolk County (2005), Mastic-Moriches-Shirley Community Library (2006), Port Jefferson Free Library (2006); and Northport Public Library (2006). An excellent overview of each of these studies is provided by Imholz and Arns (p. 37-68).

2.1.4. Developing the methodology

The next step for library evaluators was to improve the methodology used in the SLPL study to include the measurement of indirect benefits. Thus, a multiple methods approach to service evaluation was born, combining CBA and IOMs. This approach was applied successfully in 2004 by Suffolk Cooperative Library System in the United States, to determine the CBA of their 42 libraries. The following simple formula was used to determine the benefit-to-cost ratio of the public library system:

Number of key service item uses x **Market value of each service

= ***Total Value of Library

*Circulation, reference transactions, programming, electronic resources multiplied by frequency of use (statistics derived from the New York State Annual Reports for Public and Association Libraries)

**$ value that users would have been willing to pay for these services in the marketplace

***Number of items multiplied by estimated market value.

Using this formula the researchers found that the total value of the existing library collections was **$338,668,897**

Total Value of library services ÷ Tax dollars supporting service

$509,415,038 ÷ $131,647,566 = $3.87 : 1 benefit / cost ratio

(Imholz and Arns, 2007, p. 19).

This methodology revealed that for every \$1 invested in library services residents received \$3.87 of benefits.

Using the IOM called RIMS II Kramer then attempted to measure the impact that SCLS had on employment and local economies (indirect benefits). The operating and capital expenditures for SCLS (for 2003) were entered into RIMS II to determine how this money flowed within the regional economy. For example, the number of jobs created, value of goods and services that SCLS generates; and the impact on spending.

Outputs / outcomes

RIMS II revealed that SCLS produced the following indirect benefits:

- \$26 million in goods and services
- earnings in the area increased by more than \$50 million
- 1,200 jobs for the local economy
- Total multiplier effect of SCLS spending = \$232 million.

Overall, this mixed method approach enabled the library authority to raise its profile significantly and receive the highest amount of funding in its history.

In the UK, the British Library (BL) adopted an almost identical evaluation methodology in order to «obtain a quantitative holistic measure to reflect the total value of the BL to the UK economy» (Pung et al., 2004, p. 10). A three month investigation into the direct and indirect benefits that UK citizens receive from investment in the BL revealed that:

- Total annual value of the BL is £363 million
  - £304 million is indirect value
  - £59 million is direct value
- The benefit / cost ratio is £4.40 : £1. For every £1 invested citizens received £4.40 in benefits
- The annual existence value of the BL is £280 million
- The BL represents value for money for the UK taxpayer (The British Library, 2004, p. 5).

The popularity of this style of evaluation continues to increase with similar studies (reporting comparable results) being carried out across the USA (ALA, 2007, p. 6; Barron et al, 2005; Carnegie Mellon University, 2006; Levin, Driscoll & Fleeter, 2006). Trends are also evident in the UK with economic evaluations becoming more common across the arts (Morris et al, 2000; Reeves, 2002; Jura Consultants, 2005).

2.1.5. The Optimisation Model

In 2000 Morris et al. introduced a new performance indicator for use in assessing the amount of 'reads' that a book will enjoy (Morris et al, 2000 p. 64). This would become known as The Optimisation Model (or the Benefits Generated Model). After calculating the amount of 'reads' and applying a monetary value to each read, the researchers subtracted all costs associated with making the book available to borrow. The resultant figure is the net gain of that one book. The mathematical formula can be observed below:

V = (0.75 I) x (0.2 P) or V = 0.15 x I x PV = value
I = book loan issues
P = average price of book acquisitions
0.75 = ratio of book loans to book reads
0.2 = average value of a read as % of purchase price
(Morris et al, 2000 p. 64).

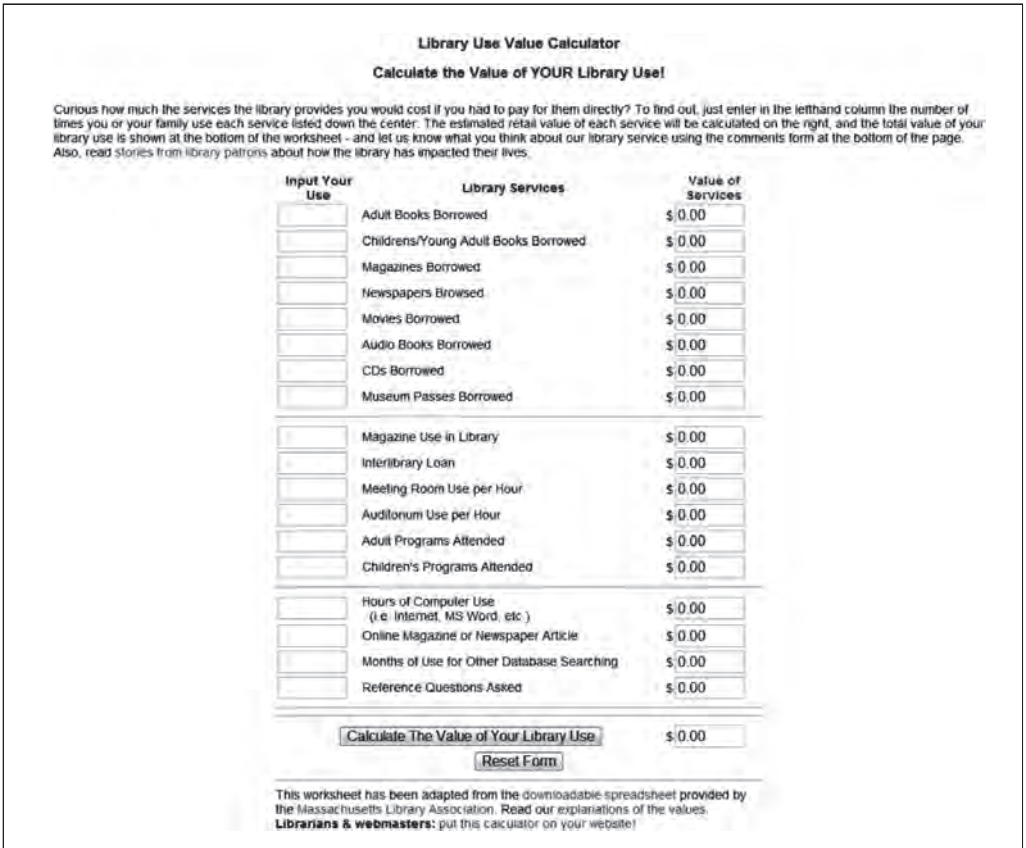
2.1.6. Library Use Valuation Calculator

The Library Use Valuation Calculator (LUVC) is a simpler approach to calculating the value of services for individual library users (Figure 4). It was introduced by the Massachusetts Library Association and further developed by a librarian at Chelmsford Public Library. It is available free of charge to any library authority that wishes to implement it. It works as a downloadable online tool which can be modified to reflect local costs and services etcetera. An underlying Excel spreadsheet automatically calculates monetary values when the library user inputs data related to 'how many books they have borrowed' or 'hours of computer use' to find out the total value of their library use. The LUVC has been adopted by numerous library authorities across the world (Imholz and Arns, 2007, p. 24).

2.2. Summary

> The big problem is what the numbers won't tell you. They won't interpret. They won't inspire and they won't tell you what causes what... (Boyle, 2000 in Bryson et al, 2002, p. 9).

Unquestionably, ROI style methodologies are very good at producing results that show public libraries in a good light but the flaws in the methodology cannot be ignored. Although referred to as a 'scientific' method, CBA is not an exact science. Many questions are hypothetical and the resultant values based on estimations. CVs also lack flexibility and insight.



Library Use Value Calculator

Calculate the Value of YOUR Library Use!

Curious how much the services the library provides you would cost if you had to pay for them directly? To find out, just enter in the lefthand column the number of times you or your family use each service listed down the center. The estimated retail value of each service will be calculated on the right, and the total value of your library use is shown at the bottom of the worksheet - and let us know what you think about our library service using the comments form at the bottom of the page. Also, read stories from library patrons about how the library has impacted their lives.

Input Your Use	Library Services	Value of Services
	Adult Books Borrowed	$ 0.00
	Childrens/Young Adult Books Borrowed	$ 0.00
	Magazines Borrowed	$ 0.00
	Newspapers Browsed	$ 0.00
	Movies Borrowed	$ 0.00
	Audio Books Borrowed	$ 0.00
	CDs Borrowed	$ 0.00
	Museum Passes Borrowed	$ 0.00
	Magazine Use in Library	$ 0.00
	Interlibrary Loan	$ 0.00
	Meeting Room Use per Hour	$ 0.00
	Auditorium Use per Hour	$ 0.00
	Adult Programs Attended	$ 0.00
	Children's Programs Attended	$ 0.00
	Hours of Computer Use (i.e. Internet, MS Word, etc.)	$ 0.00
	Online Magazine or Newspaper Article	$ 0.00
	Months of Use for Other Database Searching	$ 0.00
	Reference Questions Asked	$ 0.00
	Calculate The Value of Your Library Use	$ 0.00

Reset Form

This worksheet has been adapted from the downloadable spreadsheet provided by the Massachusetts Library Association. Read our explanations of the values.
Librarians & webmasters: put this calculator on your website!

Figure 4: Library Use Valuation Calculator (LUCV) (Chelmsford Public Library, 2010)

They do not allow for an open conversation between the service and its stakeholders. Surveys tend to focus on producing results illustrating only the things that the public library is doing well thus failing to highlight areas for improvement. The cost of time theory can also be perceived as weak as the results only present the value that individuals place on 'time' at the moment of the survey. This value is likely to be highly subjective and could be influenced by innumerable external factors on a daily basis. As Dickens implied:

"...you can define something precisely, count every attribute and measure it in every way...and still not know much about it" (Dickens, quoted in Boyle, 2000, p. 82).

2.3. Qualitative Methodologies

Qualitative methodologies offer a possible solution to the problems associated with measuring the social value of public libraries as they can provide outcomes that communicate:

- Why citizens visit public libraries
- What visitors do during these visits
- How visitors interact with library staff
- Impact that a visit, or the mere presence of a public library, can have on the lives of individuals and the community.

Qualitative methods incorporate "a variety of styles of social research, drawing on a variety of disciplines such as sociology, social anthropology and social psychology" (Denscombe 2006, p. 267). Rather than produce statistical values they are "...designed to capture social life as participants experience it rather than in categories predetermined by the researcher" (Schutt, 2006, p. 17). Even at its simplest level qualitative evaluations produce data that is "rich, full and real" (Smith, 1975, p. 135). In a public library context qualitative methods focus on service outcomes and enable a greater understanding of cause and effect; and the overall user experience. As we will see in the sections that follow, qualitative methods make it possible to measure the social value of the library service through identifying service outcomes and long term impact (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Measuring the Social Value of Public Libraries: Potential Outcomes and Impacts (Rooney-Browne, 2009b)

Many of these outcomes are intangible which makes identifying and measuring them a challenge because their value is often intrinsic (Bryson, 1999, p. 401; Emerson et al., 2000, p. 137; Holden, 2004; Usherwood, 2008, p. 127). Traditionally qualitative tools used to measure these intangible values include open ended questionnaires, participant observation, and focus groups. Poll provides an excellent bibliography of research projects that have been conducted throughout the world to assess the outcomes of library services (Poll, 2007). A selection of qualitative studies have been selected for further discussion in the sections that follow; Social Impact Audits, Ethnography, Tracker Surveys and Profiling.

2.3.1. Social Auditing

In the public sector, social auditing investigates the effects that policy has on the public (Percy-Smith, 1992 in Bryson et al, 2002, p. 12). The Social Process Audit is a form of social auditing and it was introduced as a methodology by Blake et al in 1976. In the late 1990s it was revisited and developed as the Social Impact Audit (SIA) by Linley and Usherwood to assess the social impact of Newcastle and Somerset library services (Usherwood & Linley, 98, p6). It was further developed in 2002 on behalf of the Southwest Museums & Libraries Archives Council to assess the social impact of its museums, libraries and archives (Bryson et al, 2002, p. 5). Although the results are heavily focussed on social impacts the SIA also incorporates elements of quantitative methods to help identify economic impacts.

Social Impact Audit

The SIA carried out by Linley and Usherwood in 1998 (funded by the British Library) represented a desire to move away from an over reliance on quantitative evaluations in the public library sector. It aimed to develop a novel measuring tool, investigate social and economic impact; and the library's role in contributing towards wider social objectives (Linley and Usherwood, 1998, p. 6).

Methodology

Questionnaires, focus groups and one-to-one interviews were used to determine service outcomes, identify areas for improvement, improve communication, and to measure whether the service was meeting user expectations and demands.

Outputs / Outcomes

The data gathered for this study was predominantly qualitative and often anecdotal. To surmise; following content analysis, the results provided invaluable insight into the library's impact on personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment and self determination, local image and identity; and health & well-being (Linley and Usherwood, p. 95).

Pros and Cons

This study is of particular importance to the field of library valuation because it attempts to measure intangible benefits. It has also been cited as an inspiration for other studies in the public library and arts sectors (Bryson et al., 2002; Rooney-Browne, 2011, forthcoming).

That said, the SIA is not without its flaws and these too must be considered before embarking on similar experiments. The methodology requires a certain level of skill and confidence in conducting qualitative research and the resultant success of the experiment relies heavily on long-term participation and enthusiasm from the library service being assessed (Linley and Usherwood, 1998, p.86). That said, Bryson et al (2002) had a positive experience when attempting to train public service members in using the SIA, reporting that the methodology was flexible and easily transferable.

It should also be noted that as with quantitative evaluations it is not possible to measure everything, therefore the results will still be incomplete and partisan (Smith, 1996, p. 13 in Linley & Usherwood, 1998, p. 86). Although the methodology attempted to measure the economic impact of the libraries, the researchers admit that the results were "tentative and somewhat inconclusive" (Linley and Usherwood, 1998, p. 57). For example, although it was clear through anecdotal evidence that the libraries benefitted small businesses, improved local employment, contributed to economic regeneration and tourism, no hard facts were produced. Despite its flaws, the SIA offers public libraries a comprehensive, objective, inexpensive and valuable tool for long term evaluation of the social value of public libraries (Bryson et al, 2002, p. 41).

2.3.2. Ethnography

> Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture the ethnographer is both storyteller and scientist; the closer the reader of an ethnography comes to understanding the native's point of view, the better the story and the better the science (Fetterman, 1998, pp. 1-2).

In response to an increasing desire to implement methodologies that "...takes people seriously by taking into account issues that are either too complex to be represented by a statistic or too sensitive to be treated as a number" (Bryson et al, 2002, p. 41), there has been a trend within the sector towards revisiting and improving upon methodologies inspired by ethnography.

Often, ethnographies are compared to case studies but they are by no means the same. As Pickard (2007, p. 111) points out, "it is the extent to which the researcher is immersed in the context that is the real and most obvious difference". The two differ significantly in terms of focus. For example, with a case study the researcher attempts to analyse one specific case, whereas with ethnography the researcher is dedicated to describing and interpreting groups from a social and/or cultural perspective. The timescale of these studies varies too, with the case study approach requiring the researcher to regularly visit the case study location to collect sets of predefined data. In contrast, the researcher conducting ethnography must be prepared to observe actors and groups over a prolonged period of time; often without a set of predefined themes to look out for (Creswell, 1998; Pickard, 2007, p. 111).

Ethnography and libraries: Ethnography was a much more popular research method in the field of library and information science (LIS) in the 1970s and 1980s (Bryant 2007, p. 10; Brophy, 2007). Apart from an ethnography carried out by Bryant in 2007 at the University of Loughborough (in partial fulfilment of an MSc in Library and Information Science) this author has found very little in the way of recent ethnographies in the UK LIS community; and in particular, the public library community. That said, Bryant uncovered a number of academic LIS ethnography studies in Canada, including one carried out at Toronto Reference Library and Vancouver Public library in 2003 (Given and Leckie, 2003, quoted in Bryant, 2007, p. 11); various ethnographies carried out in Western Ontario by McKechnie (2000) and McKechnie et al (2004).

Three studies have been highlighted for further discussion in this area. Although neither of them could be considered pure ethnographies, they each represent a trend towards a more ethnography based approach to measuring value.

2.3.3. Tracking Value

The Engaged Library

In 2006 the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) commissioned a report called The Engaged Library which investigated the positive impact that a selection of Chicago's public libraries have on communities. This research project builds on observations made by Putnam and Feldstein (2003) which presented examples of 'community building' across America.

Methodology

Adopting a short-term 'tracker' approach, the researchers "followed the 'people' train to see how social networks are discovered, nurtured and expanded in different public library scenarios (new, renovated and established) and diverse community settings" (ULC, 2006, p. 2). A toolkit was developed throughout the research project to Identify and connect the library's assets to the community; and to assess and strengthen the library's connections with and use of community assets (ULC, 2006, p. 31). It includes lists, activities and mapping tools to help public libraries to perform an inventory of their services, to identify areas for future improvement and to highlight the library's contribution to the community's wider social, educational, cultural and economic goals.

Outputs / Outcomes

The outcomes of The Engaged Library toolkit are predominantly qualitative. An ethnography and tracker methodology enabled the researchers to focus on specific users, staff, services, communities; and cultures. The outcome is a range of stories offering rich data related to the value of public libraries in the featured communities. The stories that have been published in the report recognise the Chicago Public Library's contribution to urban regeneration; celebrate their potential to transform communities; acknowledge the library's capacity to bridge the gap between different user groups; and to build social capital within communities.

UK Online Centres: Tracking Surveys

In 2008 Online Centres (UKOC) published an invaluable piece of research investigating the effect of their projects on digital inclusion and social impact.

This research consisted of Social Impact Demonstrator Reports for 20 projects that had received funding from the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The aims of these projects were to collaborate with other community organisations in order to connect with socially marginalised and disadvantaged individuals and to create access to ICT. UKOC aimed to capture data that would enable them to state with confidence the 'ripple effect' of their projects; to turn "soft outcomes" into "hard facts":

- To explore the correlation between digital inclusion and social inclusion
- To capture and measure the size, shape and ultimately the value of the social impacts ICT can enable (UKOC, 2008, p. 4).
- To quantify "soft outcomes" and apply an evaluation structure to a qualitative study. (UKOC, 2008, p. 5).

Methodology

Using a research structure created by Ipsos MORI the researchers spent one year evaluating twenty projects that ran over a fifteen month period. Types of projects being evaluated included outreach initiatives, home access pilots, group sessions and one-to-one tuition (UKOC, p. 6). These projects targeted individuals from specific 'hard to reach' groups, such as families living in poverty, the elderly, children in care, teenage parents and adults with mental health problems. Figure 7 demonstrates a framework for measuring the social impact of digital inclusion.

In total, three questionnaires were issued to participants. The first, a new user questionnaire was distributed to 1,727 at the start of the project. It elicited information about personal circumstances and users' opinions. The second aimed to track opinions and achievements and comprised four parts. Participants were asked to complete each section bi-monthly until the eighth month of participation. Response rates varied over this period, between 29 % – 11 %. A final questionnaire was distributed to 780 participants at the end of the projects. This had a 25% response rate (UKOC, 2008, p. 49). A series of four focus groups took place, each involving between 5-9 participants. Eight one-to-one interviews were also carried out. The data gathered in these sessions was purely qualitative and enabled a greater understanding on the participants' experience and the degree to which participation had led to positive outcomes.

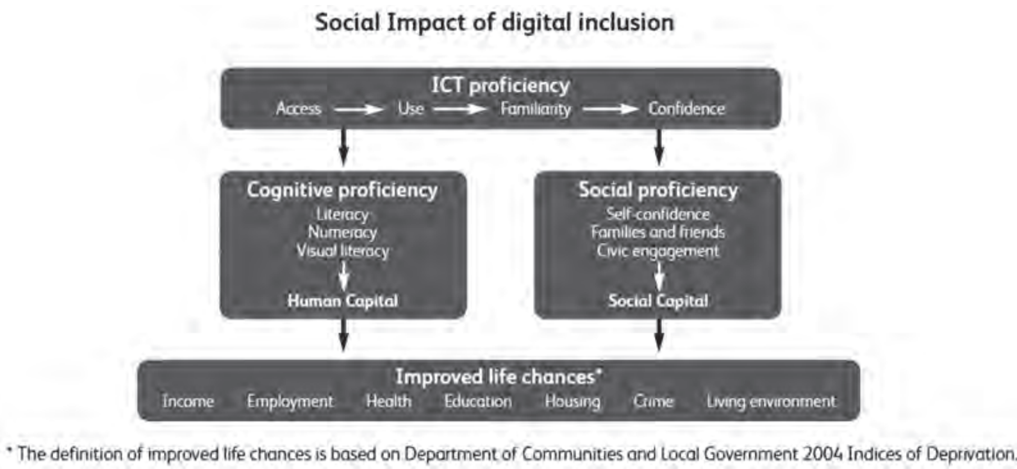


Figure 7: UKOK: The Social Impact of Digital Inclusion. (UKOC, 2008, p. 48)

Outputs / Outcomes

Quantitative and qualitative findings were displayed side by side in order to help demonstrate cause and effect. The researchers were able to condense these findings to demonstrate that "ICT social impacts" lead to value creation in three key areas; social proficiency/social capital, cognitive proficiency and improved life chances (UKOC, 2008, p. 63). Another important output included the creation of a tested methodology for measuring and communicating social value; and methods for transforming soft outcomes into hard facts.

In addition to their tracker surveys UKOC conducted an explorative study in 2010, looking at Profiling as a possible method for improving their approach to measuring value. An overview of this method is provided in the section that follows.

UKOC: Customer Profiling

Profiling demographic segments humanises quantitative data, and can create new insights into audience groups (UK Online Centres, 2010, p. 8).

In 2010 UKOC expanded their research into the impact of digital inclusion by conducting a profiling study; inspired by customer insight studies typically used in the commercial sector. Published in February, this was a proactive approach by UKOC to equip themselves with rich data to help them combat the tough times ahead following the General Election. The aim was to build on previous studies (UKOC, 2007; UKOC, 2008; UKOC, 2009) to carry out explorative research in order to gain as much knowledge as possible about "the people behind the numbers" (UKOC, 2010, pp. 4-5). In addition to a number of important findings for the sector, this method enabled a profile to be created for Audiences and Influencers, thus making the results more 'human'. For example, by translating traditional demographic user types from 'C2DE female to a person; 'Janet', with hobbies and interests, a family, a disposable income etcetera (Figure 8).

Profiling has enabled UKOC to translate faceless data into outcomes that are "tangible, practicable and workable" (UKOC, 2010, p. 5).

By adopting a profiling approach and changing their approach to user studies, public libraries would be in a better posi-

Figure 8: The People behind the Numbers: Janet

tion to enhance their qualitative evidence and communicate value. Stakeholders and funders might be able to relate easier and have empathy for 'Janet' rather than a 'C2DE female'. (UKOC, 2010, p. 38).

2.4. Multiple Method Approaches

Next we will look at a trend towards combining quantitative and qualitative methods to create Multiple Methods aimed at measuring both the economic and social value of services. The Scottish Library and Information Council's (SLIC) Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix, the Seattle Central Library Benefits Valuation Assessment and a selection of Social Return on Investment studies have been chosen for discussion.

2.4.1. Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix

In the late 1990s many library services were keen to adopt evaluation tools that offered flexibility and the potential to produce results that would demonstrate value and identify areas for improvement. Thus there was growing interest in self-assessment tools that encouraged regular evaluation and benchmarking.

In 2000 Jones et al. attempted to develop a toolkit that would fulfil the needs of public library managers in providing data that would help them communicate value. The researchers consulted the Business Excellence Model (BEM), The Quality Framework, and Pfeffer and Coote's Democratic Approach for inspiration in developing the toolkit. Following an extensive consultation process involving three participating authorities and associated organisations, the first Public Library Improvement Matrix (PLIM) was created (Jones et al, 2000, p. 120-123). The PLIM toolkit comprised a self assessment questionnaire, a management and improvement matrix and a pro-forma to aid with improvements, communication and future service objectives. Although this toolkit was a welcome alternative to static quantitative evaluation tools, the researchers stressed that it would require ongoing monitoring and improvements if it was to evolve with changes in politics and user demands (Jones et al, 2000, p. 134-135).

Seven years later, with funding from the Scottish Executive, the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) produced its own self-assessment toolkit; The Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM). The PLQIM would succeed the standards developed in 1986 (updated in 1995) by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). The COSLA standards focused on inputs rather than impacts whereas PLQIM concentrated on evaluating the effect that public library services in Scotland had on individuals and communities (SLIC, 2010). The PLQIM also aimed to emphasise the potential impact that public library services could have on the wider health, social, education and economic goals of parent organisations, thus underscoring their value as essential services.

Methodology

The overall aim of this toolkit was to "provide a robust method for defining standards, developing evaluation criteria and a planning tool to ensure services meet public demand" (Ferguson, 2007 in SLIC, 2007, p. 6). The framework is heavily influenced by the HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) which is used to judge the performance of schools. Seven Quality Indicators (QI's) were defined as a benchmark for public libraries to measure their success against:

1. Access to information
2. Community and personal participation
3. Meeting readers' needs
4. Learners' experiences
5. Ethos and values
6. Organisation and use of resources and space
   Leadership (SLIC, 2007)

Services must grade themselves (on a success scale between 1 & 6; where 1 equals 'unsatisfactory' and 6 equals 'excellent'. Service managers are also encouraged to conduct stakeholder consultations and observations prior to defining outcomes. Each QI is supported by a set of guidelines and a Mapping Tool which provide a range of themes and examples to help library managers make judgements and identify best practice. Also provided by the toolkit is a Range of Evidence document offering examples of how and where evidence can be located. A spreadsheet providing Links to Other Quality Evaluation Frameworks helps reduce replication of work for evaluators. A sample Questionnaire can be downloaded and distributed to library users. An introductory Presentation and Guidance Notes are also provided to help train library staff to use the PLQIM. All of these resources can be downloaded for free via the SLIC website (SLIC, 2010).

Outputs / Outcomes

In 2006 the PLQIM was successfully used to analyse the economic and social impact of eight library projects that had received funding from the Scottish Executive's Public Library Quality Improvement Fund (PLQIF). Overall, the PLQIM revealed that the projects being evaluated produced a range of benefits; direct, indirect, capital expenditure, induced and generated. Although no definitive monetary value is provided for each of these benefits a full explanation is discussed in the Impact Study produced by the evaluations (SLIC, 2008, p. 7). Brief case studies for each funded project are also provided but represent more of an overview of activities and user statistics rather than any additional insight into qualitative outcomes.

Pros and Cons

The PLQIM is definitely a step in the right direction in terms of attempting to acknowledge the importance of outputs and outcomes and it seems to have been welcomed within the Scottish sector. However, it could be argued that the PLQIM is more similar to traditional quantitative evaluations than qualitative evaluations as its final outputs focus more on financial benefits and less on social benefits. Perhaps this is reflective of the current financial climate and therefore meets the current needs of library managers in Scotland.

Another mixed method study carried out in Seattle in 2005 produced much more balanced results for the library service. This will be discussed in more depth in the next section.

2.4.2. Seattle Central Library: Economic Benefits Assessment

Inspired by positive anecdotal evidence about the positive impact that their new library building was having on users, local businesses and tourism, The Seattle Public Library Foundation and the City of Seattle's Office for Development produced its own Economic Benefits Assessment in 2005. The aim of this study was to determine the extent to which:

- local businesses experienced a positive economic impact due to increased visitation to the Central Library
- the new library affected the economic and cultural vitality of Downtown Seattle
- the library shaped Seattle's image (SCL, 2005, p. 1).

A more in-depth overview of the framework developed to evaluate impact can be observed in Figure 9.

Methodology

The researchers incorporated aspects of Holt and Elliott's (1998) method for evaluating the economic impact of SLPL and expanded the model to incorporate a combination of additional quantitative and qualitative methods.

The resultant methodology involved:

- CBA methods to estimate economic impact
- a literature review to understand the best way to measure the value of public libraries
- a case study approach to establish the history of the SCL
- visitor and user surveys – 189 in total (random sample)
- interviews with local businesses, developers and representatives from tourism – 30 in total
- analysis of visitor and usage statistics.

Outputs / Outcomes

- SCL generated $16 million in net new economic activity in its first year of operation
- Projections for new economic activity over the next twenty years: $80 million for 5 years, $155 million for 10 years, or $310 million for a 20-year period
- SCL is attracting greater footfall to the Seattle Downtown area
- SCL improves the desirability of Seattle as a tourist destination and as a location for related industries and knowledge workers
- SCL represents an icon and identity for Seattle's residents
- Findings used as an advocacy tool

Pros and Cons

The SCL study was successful in producing evidence of direct and indirect benefits and communicating the economic and social value of the library service. In their review of valuation studies in 2007 Imholz and Arns (p. 20) highlighted this research project as "an exemplary study", citing its use of mixed methods as a key reason for its success. However, although they praise the surveys methodology they draw attention to the small sample size when discussing the impressive benefits revealed by the research. Despite the small survey size and the limited time period over which the research was conducted this author believes that the SCL Benefits Valuation Assessment methodology used could act as a model for future library valuation studies.

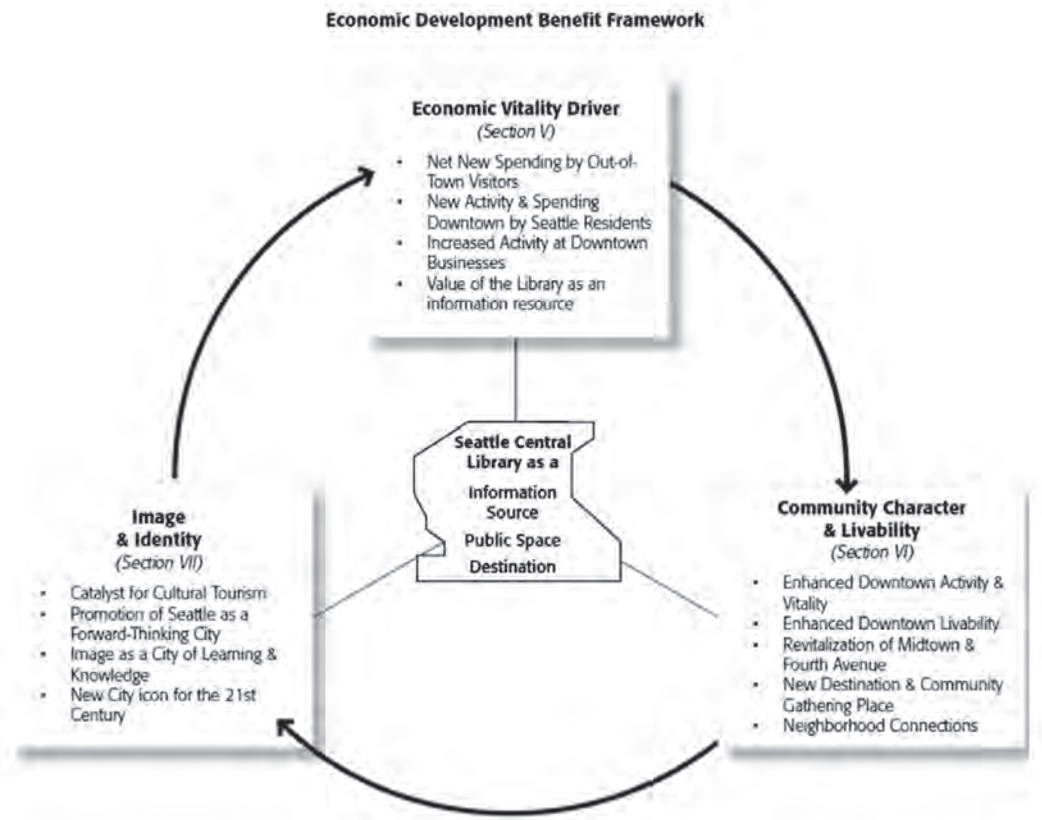


Figure 9: Economic Development Benefit Framework. (SCL, 2005, p. 10)

2.5. Social Return on Investment Methods: the future?

In March 2010 the DCMS published The Modernisation review of public libraries, a policy statement offering a vision for the future (DCMS, 2010). Proposal number 19 (of 54) recommended that "[t]he strategic body for libraries will explore the opportunities for developing philanthropic giving to the public library service" (DCMS, 2010, p.34). The aim being to seek out the Andrew Carnegie's of today by communicating the value of supporting public libraries in the 21st century. Therefore, methods used to measure value in the non-profit sector are worthy of further investigation as they could potentially help libraries to develop more appropriate models for measuring value in the future. A number of these methods are discussed in great depth in a research paper funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation which investigated how social value creation is measured and/or estimated (Tuan, 2008). Tuan presents eight integrated approaches; two of which are have already been discussed in this paper; and six new approaches developed within the non-profit sector that offer some hope for those interested in measuring or estimating social value:

- Cost-effectiveness analysis
- Cost-benefit analysis
- REDF Social Return on Investment (SROI) Model

- Robin Hood Foundation Benefit-Cost Ratio
- Acumen Fund BACO Ratio
- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Hewlett) Expected Return
- Center for High Impact Philanthropy (CHIP) Cost per Impact

Foundation Investment Bubble Chart Tuan, 2008, pp. 10-12).

The REDF SROIModel has been selected for further discussion in this paper as its methods could offer new opportunities for public libraries to secure ongoing investment through philanthropy. A brief overview of SROI is provided below along with an outline of models currently being developed to help evaluate the benefits of philanthropy.

REDF SROI Model

The REDF (formerly known as the Roberts Enterprise Development Fund) are venture philanthropists based in California, working with nonprofits to create job opportunities for the most disenfranchised in society. They conduct rigorous impact studies to ensure that their investments deliver high social and financial returns. Since 1998 they have been instrumental in the creation of the SROI concept and on the development of models for measuring SROI. Their models are now taught at universities throughout the USA and have been adopted by nonprofits around the world (Javits, 2008, p. 1).

In 2000 the REDF recognised the frustration felt by many philanthropists over the lack of a suitable model for measuring the value of non-profit organisations; and the benefits that their investments were delivering for individuals and society. Thus, a model was created to measure socio-economic value:

Socio-economic value builds on economic value and incorporates certain elements of social value. [It] refers to decreased public expenditures and/or increased public sector revenues (i.e. taxes) that result from a nonprofits work and the impact of the lives of it's clients (Emerson and Cabaj, 2000, p. 11).

This model aimed to produce answers to a number of key questions posed by practitioners, philanthropists and investors:

- How can we measure the success of our efforts?
- How do we know whether we are accomplishing what we set out to do?
- How can we make informed decisions about the ongoing use of our resources?
- How can REDF test and convince others of what we believe to be true: that for each dollar invested in our portfolio agencies' efforts, there are impressive, quantifiable resulting benefits to individuals and to society? (Javitis, 2008, p. 1).

The REDF SROI model enables these benefits to be measured by comparing the net benefits of a project to the investment required to deliver those benefits over a certain time period. Two performance measures are then used in order to compare socio-economic value with the value of the original investment. The first, the Social Return Ratio (SRR) is revealed by combining the net social benefits with the cash flow of the business then dividing them by the total value of the philanthropic investment. The second, the SROI Rate is revealed by carrying out an Internal Rate of Return (IRR) derived from total socio-economic value and total costs (Emerson and Cabaj, 2000, p. 11). The REDF provide free access to their SROI Excel Model via their website. A thorough list of instructions for completion is also provided (REDF, 2000a).

In order to help non-profits in the UK to explore SROI, The New Economics Foundation, in collaboration with the London Business School and the Small Business Service produced an invaluable SROI Primer in 2004. This Primer aims to help organisations identify and measure social outputs, outcomes and impacts and to use the SROI Model to translate these impacts into financial values. This web based tool comprising a web tour, downloadable transcripts and slides plus a list of helpful resources and a glossary of terms (NEF, 2004).

Pros and Cons

Although the original REDF SROI model was used successfully to produce values for the social and financial return of six non-profits in the REDF portfolio (REDF, 2000b) (and other SROI projects throughout the world), the methodology was revisited in 2008 to address a number of flaws. REDF realised that although the SROI methods were capable of communicating important cost savings to society (such as the financial value of a reduced jail time for offenders), it failed to acknowledge the value of impacts that were difficult to quantify, such as enhanced family relationships and mental health. In other words, the methodology failed to communicate the relationship between cause and effect (Javitis, 2008, p. 2). So, in order to develop a greater understanding of the impact that investment had on the lives of those benefitting from investment, the REDF decided to re-evaluate their focus, concentrating more on a couple of smaller elements in the SROI model; the Social Impact Reports and the Ongoing Assessment of Social Impacts (OASIS). This work is ongoing and therefore incomplete, but a series of White Papers are being produced by the REDF to ensure regular updates on their progress for developing a more appropriate method for evaluating outcomes that are difficult to measure. One paper in particular discusses Next Generation SROI Models. The methods explored in this paper offer some hope for libraries unable to communicate the social value of their services (Gair, 2010). All of these White Papers can be accessed via the REDF website (REDF, 2010).

3. Conclusion

We are never going to measure value precisely or perfectly. The information we gather is going to be incomplete, biased by the organisation's focus, and by self interest of stakeholders (Cram, 1999, p. 15).

In the UK competition for public funding has always been fierce and it looks set to become even fiercer over the next few years. The newly elected coalition government, made up of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat Party have made it clear that cuts in public spending over the next few years are inevitable. The government will not be making this decision alone and have called for a public consultation to ask citizens which services should be cut. Public libraries, therefore, will be re-evaluated alongside services provided by health, education, defence, transport, broadcasting, culture and the arts sectors. There is an urgent need to adopt methods that enable the sector to appropriately communicate its value to a variety of audiences; politicians, citizens, accountants, economists, the media etcetera.

It is a concern, therefore that this author found a lack of progressive library valuations studies carried out in the UK over the last few years. That said, it appears that this might change following the publication of The Modernisation Review of Public Libraries and the commitments made by CILIP, the MLA and the DCMS to establish and feed into more appropriate models for measuring value (DCMS, 2010).

However, a number of challenges still exist that make it extremely difficult for public libraries to prove their value. For example:

- public libraries exist to serve the public good rather than deliver financial profits
- public libraries produce both direct and indirect benefits
- their perceived and actual value can be subjective and subject to bias
- no general consensus exists within the sector as to the ideal model for measuring value.

This paper has attempted to address some of these challenges by presenting a thorough review of appropriate quantitative and qualitative methodologies currently available for demonstrating value. An attempt has also been made to define the two most common types of value that the public library produces; economic value and social value.

Although not exhaustive, the research is extensive and has introduced a range of methodologies from the UK, Europe, USA, Australia and Canada. The author also branched out beyond the public library sector to identify potential methodologies currently used in the non-profit, environmental and commercial sector. A range of appropriate quantitative, qualitative and multiple methodologies have been discussed in depth and examples demonstrating successful use of these methods have been examined.

This research has revealed that quantitative evaluations produce valuable statistical data and can effectively estimate the financial outputs of public libraries, thus enabling a greater understanding of economic value. Yet their scope is limited as they fail to recognise service outcomes such as the impact that the public library has on the lives of individuals and communities. Therefore, in order to gain a greater understanding of the social value of public libraries we must consider adopting qualitative evaluation methodologies. However, Tuan stresses that it is unrealistic to expect to be able to measure social value with as much confidence as we do economic value because as a methodology it is still underdeveloped. She points out that methods for evaluating economic value have been around for centuries, whereas methods for measuring social value have only been around for three or so decades (Tuan, 2008, p. 7). Also, as there is no official 'social auditing body' that promotes uniformity in social value creation methodologies and no defined infrastructure for assessing social value, "measuring and/or estimating social value will continue to be practiced more like an isolated art form than widespread science" (Tuan, 2008, p. 7). This is of relevance to the public library sector where our ability to produce social value is considered by some to be one of our greatest commodities.

Although this paper has revealed that there is no perfect methodology for measuring the value of public libraries, there are many possibilities. As the examples have shown, methodologies exist to evaluate the full range of services that public libraries deliver and we are seeing a number of emerging methodologies for assessing the impact of digital services and access to ICT. The challenge for those tasked with evaluating outputs and outcomes, therefore, is to find the methodology that best fits their project and the objectives of their research. This author also recommends that the public library sector work together to create a comprehensive methodology which encourages use of common measures, language and practices for collecting and analysing data. Implementation of a standard methodology could enable the sector to communicate the true value of public libraries to the UK economy and society as a whole.

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