Public libraries as an infrastructure for a sustainable public sphere: A comprehensive review of research

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Structured Abstract

Purpose (mandatory)

The purpose of this research is to examine the shaping of public libraries as an infrastructure for a sustainable public sphere through a comprehensive literature review.

Design/methodology/approach (mandatory)

In order to capture the whole picture of this research field, we utilize comprehensive review methodology. The major research questions are: (1) To what extent have research topics regarding libraries as public sphere institutions expanded and diversified? Which theoretical perspectives inform research? (2)Which challenges and topics does the research focus upon, such as a. Social inclusion and equal access to information, b. Digital inequalities, c. Censorship and freedom of expression, and d. Access to places and spaces with a democratic potential and the role of libraries in that respect? (3) What influence has social media exerted on libraries in the context of the expanding digital world?

Findings (mandatory)

We identified mainly four themes regarding the public library and public sphere, such as (1) the importance of public libraries by using Habermas's theory, (2) the function of meeting places within the public library and setting those places in the center of the library in order to enhance and encourage democracy, (3) the relationship between social inclusion and public libraries and its functions in current society such as diminishing the digital divide, (4) the emerging electronic resources and arena of SNS in public libraries and utilizing them to reach citizens.

Originality/value (mandatory)

Capturing the recent history of this research field through comprehensive review is valuable.

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1. Research Background

A functioning public sphere is one of the essential preconditions of any democracy, and the libraries have served as an institution underpinning a sustainable public sphere by a) being providers of knowledge and cultural expressions, b)being agents fostering an enlightened and informed citizenry and c) being arenas for public debate. Due to the continuous development of new technologies and social institutions, more knowledge and information is readily accessible to increasing numbers of citizens. The challenges the public sphere is facing due to technological developments and globalization, e.g. the crisis in traditional media, the explosive growth of social media use, infotainment and the danger of fragmentation, have led to an increased focus on the public sphere in social sciences in general.

Originally, the concept of the public sphere is described by (Habermas 1989; Habermas 1991) as follows:

> By "Public Sphere" we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public.

Librarians and information specialists in libraries, whether public or academic, have been tasked with fostering discussion and debate, upholding intellectual freedom, and safeguarding the freedom of expression, which is all essential for supporting a robust public sphere and, ultimately, maintaining democratic processes. In fact, based on the theoretical frameworks of the public sphere and through activities such as helping immigrants and refugees assimilate in their local societies, libraries, particularly public libraries, have been challenged to solve social problems in local societies by enhancing public debate about public concerns. Public libraries logically and practically function as a public sphere in society.

The social need for research regarding the public sphere is expanding due to the unstable, uncertain, and anxious state of society as a result of political, economic and technological reasons across the globe (Felicetti 2016; Crespy 2013). Although the importance of the public sphere and public libraries has become more significant, it is harder for researchers and practitioners to understand the entire picture of what kind of discussions and outputs have been going on related to the public sphere and public libraries.

In addition, Digitization and globalization create challenges for upholding a public sphere, e.g. challenges related to the traditional channels of communication between civil society and government such as newspapers, radio and television. It also creates challenges related to the role of libraries as public sphere institutions and it might affect the relationship between libraries and society. How are these challenges reflected and thematized in library and information science research? That is the overriding topic of the research presented in this paper.

1.1. Research Questions

Our research team developed the following three research questions:.

R.Q.1. To what extent have research topics regarding libraries as public sphere institutions expanded and diversified. Which theoretical perspectives inform research, e.g. theories of the public sphere, social capital perspectives and institutional theory?

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R.Q.2 .Which challenges and topics do the research focus upon such as

      -a. Social inclusion and equal access to information

      -b. Digital inequalities.

      -c. Censorship and freedom of expression.

      -d. Access to places and spaces with a democratic potential and the role of libraries in that respect?

R.Q.3.What influence has social media exerted on libraries in the context of the expanding digital world?

2. Research Methodologies and Processes to Identify Relevant Literature

Four elements were identified based on the scope of the three core research questions in order to determine databases for the literature review: 1) Institutions (museums, archives, libraries), 2) Function, role: public sphere, 3) Cultural diversity, and 4) Digitizing. The elements were combined to form two different searches in key databases, both interdisciplinary databases and databases covering social sciences and information and library science. The searches were limited to publications in English, German or Scandinavian languages.

The search terms included in each element were intentionally broad to ensure comprehensive results. The identified articles were divided between the members of the research groups. Each researcher was responsible for going through a section of the total of 819 references which the search resulted in and identify those which satisfied our criteria of being research contributions (i.e. published in peer-reviewed research journals or conference proceedings excluding book reviews, letters to the editor, position papers etc.). This process included an element of individual discretion when deciding upon relevant versus non-relevant contributions.

This process resulted in approximately 150 relevant contributions related to public libraries. Based on our knowledge of the field we found that some important authors were either absent or underrepresented. The result of the research, therefore, had to be supplemented based on the research team's subject knowledge to correct for this.

3. Findings

3.1. Perspectives and Approaches – RQ 1

Wiegand (2003) complains that research in LIS has tended to focus upon the provision of information, whereas reading, the social role of libraries and libraries as spaces and places have been neglected. A special issue of the top journals in LIS, JASIST, in 1994 on information and democracy seems to confirm this. Libraries as institutions and places promoting democracy are not dealt with in the articles in this issue. A content analysis of articles in library and information science peer reviewed journals for the period 1965 – 2005 also confirms Wiegand's point (Tuomaala et al. 2014). Democracy and the public sphere are not identified as topics in this article. The authors classify articles according to social level: individual, organizational, societal, multilevel and not applicable. It seem reasonable that articles dealing with the topics we are interested in this paper, should be classified at the societal level. Tuomaala, Järvelin & Vakkari classified 1 per cent of the articles in 1965, 9 per cent in 1985 and 6 per cent in 2005 as belonging to the societal level – very small proportions indeed.

The lack of research into libraries as public sphere institutions are to some extent paradoxical. The very name of the institution public libraries - imply an affiliation the public sphere in two ways: being public in the meaning open to all and being publicly, not privately, financed. Wiegand (2015) has in his historical exposé of American public libraries documented how libraries from very early on satisfied another core criterion of being a public sphere institution: The influence of the public on the

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agenda of their local library, for example collection policies. The library professionals could not – and maybe cannot - impose their preferences and policies on their publics. The outcome tends to be the result of a negotiation. Even though comprehensive literature reviews in LIS such as the one undertaken by Tuomaala, Järvelin & Vakkari (op.cit) indicate that this has been a blind spot in library and information science research.

Our findings, however, indicate that research related to libraries as institutions underpinning the public sphere and democracy has been increasing over the last 20 years and expanding as far as perspectives and topics are concerned. The research, however, seems to be dominated by a relatively few, but highly productive, researches such as John Buschman (2003; 2005) and Paul T. Jaeger (Jaeger & Fleischmann 2007; Jaeger et al. 2012; 2013; 2014).

We do find a varied range of theoretical approaches applied in relevant research. Often reflection dominating theoretical trends in social science outside LIS. In the 1990s and first years after the millennium a number of researchers relied on concepts and approaches developed by Bourdieu. (Vestheim 1994; Hvenegaard Rasmussen & Jochumsen 2000; Hvenegaard Rasmussen & Jochumsen 2007). Some are relying on concepts taken from sociologists of late modernity such as Anthony Giddens (1990) and Zygmunt Bauman (2000) with weight on concepts such as self-reflexivity, openness and liquid modernity (Area & Pessoa 2012; Hvenegaard Rasmussen & Jochumsen 2007). For Braman (1994) in her discussion on the relationship between information, power and democracy the self-regulating or autopoietic state is a key concept, relying very much upon the German sociologists Niklas Luhman and Hans Magnus Enzensberger. Others have been relying on new institutionalism (Audunson 1999; Kann-Christensen 2010; Hansson 2011; Evjen 2015). Since the beginning of the 21st century, much research related to the role of libraries as places with a potential for building communities have utilized social capital theory, a theoretical approach summarized by Vårheim (2008). Others studying libraries as places with a democratic potential seem to be relying, although not necessarily explicitly, on Sennet's perspective on public places as places where one is exposed to strangers and where norms of conduct between strangers guide behavior. Audunson.s concept of low intensive meeting places (Audunson 2005), Aabø and Audunson's qualitative study of the public library as place (Aabø & Audunson 2012) and Alstad and Curry (2003) are examples.

Research based on Habermas' theory and concepts of the public sphere has dominated research on the public sphere, particularly in Europe, since the 1970s. Habermas' perspectives and concepts, however, came into the mainstream library and information science relatively late. One reason for this is probably that library and information science research is very much dominated by researchers from the US and UK and Habermas' seminal work on the public sphere, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, was translated into English as late as 1989-17 years after the first Norwegian translation was published. The American and the U.K. LIS community which represent the dominating research environment - particularly so in the 70s, 80s and 90s when Nordic and European research in the field was relatively weakly developed, had, then, a relatively modest knowledge of Habermas and his work on the public sphere until the 1990s . It is illustrating that among those few writing about public libraries as public sphere institutions in the 70s, 80s and 90 we find for example Trosow and Vodosek (1978) and Schuhböck (1983, 1994) from the relatively weak German research environment, Emerek & Ørom (1996) from the Danish research environment and Vestheim (1996) from the, at that time, very weak Norwegian research environment.

One of the first to introduce a Habermasian perspective on public libraries was John Buschman (2003; 2005). Buschman argues that libraries embody much of what is contained in Habermas' classical definition of the public sphere. He goes on to describe how, according to his analysis, market-oriented ways of thinking – what he calls the new public philosophy, maybe better known as New Public Management – distorts the functioning of public institutions affiliated to the public sphere, libraries included. He has elaborated further on that topic, for instance in a paper where

he investigates the relevance of theorists like Jürgen Habermas, Sheldon Wolin, Amy Gutman, Richard Brosio and Maxine Greene for librarianship. In two recent papers, he contributes to a conceptual discussion of concepts much used in practical LIS: Community, inclusion, participation and justice (Buschman & Warner 2016) and the concept of privacy (Buschman 2016).

One of the most prolific writers on public libraries as tool with a potential of contributing to closing the digital divide and evening out inequalities in access to information is Paul T. Jaeger. Most of his contributions regarding public libraries specifically are relatively practical, but these contributions must be seen in context with contributions where he is discussing basic concepts related to e-government and public deliberation. The basic problem, as Jaeger describes it, can be summarized as follows: will governments be tempted to use e-government to present their viewpoints on the net, a strategy which might result in polarization, or will if e-government be used to promote access to all sides and perspectives of an issue, thereby promoting deliberation between different parties (Jaeger 2006). Jaeger and his colleagues link this challenge to the role of libraries as central access points for e-government and as instrumental in closing digital gaps and promoting digital participation. We will return to some of these contributions below.

In one interesting contribution, Burnett & Jaeger discuss how one theoretical approach from library and information Science, Elfreda Chatman's concept of small worlds and life in the round can contribute in supplementing Habermasian public sphere theory, particularly Habermas' concept of life world. Chatman's concept of small world how the norms and world view of one's immediate social environment affects one's information behaviour and Chatman's approach can, according to Jaeger, create a bridge between the micro environment where people live their lives and the broader life world (Burnett & Jaeger 2008). In another theoretical contribution, Burnett, Jaeger and Thompson (2008) uses the theoretical work of Chatman to lay the foundation for a better conceptual understanding of the central topic of information access.

Audunson is preoccupied with some of the same challenges as Jaeger related to polarization versus deliberation and exposure to other viewpoints and perspectives than one's own when he coins the concept of high intensive versus low intensive meeting places, where low intensive meeting places are arenas where one is exposed to otherness and pluralism, and discusses the potential of public to develop into such low intensive meeting places which a society threatened by fragmentation needs. He draws upon social capital theory, where high intensive meeting places are arenas for bonding and low intensive meeting places arenas for bridging. The concept of low intensive meeting places also seems influenced by Sennets definition of city space as spaces where one is exposed to strangers and Strauss' concept of locale versus location without referring explicitly to these authors.

In 1990 Nancy Fraser problematized Habermas' concept of the public sphere, stating that is has not been open to all. Some groups, e.g. women, sexual minorities, ethnic minorities etc. has in periods been excluded and have created their own sub public spheres (Fraser 1990). Newman (2007) has somewhat of the same perspective, when she describes how public libraries in the first decades after the second world war was built upon a notion of a unified national culture which suppressed the cultural expression of minority groups. Newman describes how the notion of the library serving a unified national culture was dismantled, first by expanding the library's stock with special collections in the languages of minority groups (but still with mainstream history, geography, social science and literature being primarily monocultural), then with what she terms the community turn in the 1970s and 1980.

The perhaps most profound theoretical work on public libraries and the public sphere has been undertaken by Michael Widdersheim and Masanori Koizumi. In a series of articles from 2015 through 2017, they develop and discuss a model of public libraries as public sphere institutions (Widdersheim & Koizumi 2015; Widdersheim 2015; Widdersheim & Koizumi 2016; Widdersheim 2017; Widdersheim & Koizumi 2017) . In developing the model, they use public sphere theory based on

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Habermas and an empirical analysis of annual reports from the public library of Pittsburgh, USA. Their point of departure is a set of core for the public sphere: Openness, rational discourse and common concern. They identify three categories of public discourse in libraries: 1. A discourse related to which services the library should offer, e.g. collection development, services to ethnic minorities etc. 2. A discourse related to the library's legitimacy, e.g. a meeting in a friends of the library association aiming at explaining the value and necessity of the library to local government politicians. 3. A discourse related to social and community issues in the wider society outside the library. Widdersheim and Koizumi identify both public sphere and private sphere communication in the library. Private sphere communications are closed and not characterized by deliberation. Examples are a closed group of friends meeting in the library, a meeting in the board of the local chess club or and contract negotiations between the library and a firm supplying the library with technology. If private discourses are allowed to enter into those discourses which are supposed to be public sphere discourses, the result might be – or rather – will be. If collection development is outsourced to private vendors, a phenomenon which is particularly acute when it comes to e-books, the result will be distortion of category 1 discourses. That challenge is dealt with in one of the identified articles – The battle over public E-libraries (Afori 2013).

In a recent paper, Widdersheim criticizes many or most of those who have dealt with the issue of libraries as public sphere institutions for having a simplified, superficial and partly misunderstood understanding of the public sphere and public libraries as public sphere institutions. One problem he points at is the fact that modern public libraries started to develop in the last decades of the 19th century and first decades of the 20th. Then the liberal public sphere as described by Habermas had changed and become a mediatized public sphere. "Then the following question must be addressed: How can the public sphere describe public libraries when the public sphere began to collapse just as public libraries began to develop?" (Widdersheim, 2017, op.cit). Then the public sphere is usually perceived as that sphere where private citizens congregate and a public opinion is developed. However, libraries are (local) government institutions, financed by local government and state budgets and the staff members are local government employees. That seems to be a contradiction which must be explained: And thirdly: The Habermasian concept of the public sphere is not unidimensional and it is not static, also Habermas himself has developed his views and perspectives since 1963. One has substantive models, e.g. the liberal public sphere versus power-laden public sphere; one has actions-theoretic and functional models versus deliberative democratic models to mention some. When researching public libraries as public sphere institutions one needs, according to Widdersheim, a more nuanced perspective on the public sphere than what we usually find in research up until now. Ashley (2005), writing about museums, are preoccupied with similar reflections when she asks: Can museums simultaneously be hegemonic agents for the state, articulating identity and nationalism, and spaces in the public sphere for the discussion, construction and contestation of ideas? That question is relevant also for libraries.

3.2. Important topics of public library and the public sphere – RQ 2

We determined four important topics in the context of the public sphere and public libraries, specifically, 1) social inclusion, 2) libraries as places, 3) censorship and freedom of access to information, 4) library and social media. There are, however, some developments over time. If we take a long-term perspective from the 1980s until now, articles related to freedom of expression and censorship have ranked high in all the four decades from then until now. That which we can term the community term (Newman, op.cit) together with migration brought in the social inclusion as a central topic, particularly from the late 90s and onwards. Preoccupation with places with a democratic potential and the role of libraries with respect to that belongs very much to the 21st century, which necessarily also is the case with research on social media.

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3.2.1. Social inclusion and equal access to information

Access to information and social inclusion is one of the dominating topics in the identified papers, particularly in papers originating in the American research community. One reason for this might be that the digital gap defined as internet access at home seems to be wider in the US than in Europe. In the US, 67 percent of the adult population had Internet access at home in 2015 (Pew Research Center, 2015), a substantial and increasing proportion relying on access via smartphones. There are relatively large differences according to income, education and age. In Norway, the corresponding figure was 97 per cent in 2016. This situation gives public libraries a more important role as access nodes in the US compared to for example the Scandinavian countries. That is reflected in research, focusing upon the role of libraries in securing access to Internet, evening out digital divides and their role as nodal points related to e-government. This strand of research started in the 90s (Estabrook 1997) and has continued until now (Jaeger & Fleischmann 2007; Bertot et al. 2008; Jaeger et al. 2012; Taylor et al. 2012; Jaeger & Sarin 2016a; Jaeger & Sarin 2016b). Jaeger is, as we see, a prolific researcher within this field of research. Empirically he and his colleagues base their research on public statistics and surveys regarding Internet access and use and public library surveys. Jaeger In his research Jaeger is preoccupied with what he perceives to be the inherently political nature of public librarianship related to promoting social justice (Jaeger, P.T & Sarin, L, op.cit) and he links access to digital resources in libraries explicitly to libraries as public sphere institution, not only in the contemporary e-government context, but also in a historical context (Jaeger et al. 2013).

In line with the community turn described by Newman (op.cit), we find a relatively large amount or research focusing upon the role of libraries when it comes to promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups, particularly immigrants and ethnic minorities (Audunson et al. 2011; Johnston 2016; 2017), but library services directed to the LGBT community are among those topics which have been explored by scholars (Goldthorp 2007),

One of the most important demographic changes today comes with migration – either voluntary or because of war or conflicts. For many people, libraries provide important services when it comes to information access, language training and cultural knowledge. A Spanish study of library services to the multicultural population (García López, F., Caridad Sebastián, M. & Morales García, A.M. 2012) showed that the planning of library services with a multicultural approach had been ignored by the majority of the librarian coordinators at the regional level. A South African case study by Genevieve Hart (2012a) concludes that what is often viewed as "outreach" programs point the way to new models of library and information services, which in turn could benefit many more than the tiny minority of people using library services today. The majority of those working in libraries belong to the majority population. In two British studies, the nature and role of empathy when librarians belonging to the majority population serve minorities. One of the studies consisted of a survey undertaken among 451 librarians from 90 public library authorities, the other was a qualitative case study in a library serving a Chinese community (Birdi et al. 2008; Birdi et al. 2009; Birdi et al. 2012). Some respondents were of the opinion that staff members have sufficient cognitive empathy to serve different communities, whereas other but smaller groups felt minorities would have greater trust in librarians whom they recognize as familiar. A majority felt that staff training related to serving minority groups was inadequate. Brook, Ellenwood & Lazzaro argue for their part that racism is embedded in libraries due to a culture of Whiteness (Brook et al. 2015). A case study undertaken in the city of Perth, Australia, studies library services aiming at integrating immigrants with English as their second language (Chelliah 2014). The study uses both quantitative and qualitative data, and collects data from the target group as well as library staff. It finds that the library is having problems in reaching immigrants from countries without public library traditions which also frequently have a low trust in public institutions and public employees, and that respondents with English as a second

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language revealed an urgent need for English language and computer skills education. Chelliah concludes with proposing a model for sustainable library services in a multicultural context built upon input, actions and outcomes, the most important element being surveying the community profile.

Johnston (Johnston 2016; Johnston 2017) and Johnston & Audunson (2017) studied the effect conversational programming in libraries targeted towards migrants have on the migrants' integration in society. Her research is based on case studies undertaken in one Swedish and three Norwegian libraries. Methodologically she relies upon participative observation combined with a questionnaire distributed to participating migrants as well as Norwegian and Swedish volunteers. Her results indicate that conversational programming contributes to inclusion and integration along several dimensions of integration – economic integration, social integration and integration as citizens. She utilizes a varied theoretical repertoire ranging from a social capital perspective via theoretical perspectives on integration such as for example contact theory to public sphere theory according to Habermas.

3.2.2. Libraries as places promoting community, democracy and social capital

It is difficult drawing a clear line between articles discussing libraries as institutions promoting democracy by underpinning freedom of expression and freedom of access to information. In this paragraph, however, we will focus on contributions with a broader perspective on libraries as democratic spaces and places, not restricting themselves to their role as providers of information.

Black & Pepper (2012) gives a historical overview of the development of libraries as civic places and spaces, drawing on theoretical approaches from Habermas, Foucault and Oldeburg. Research on libraries as places with potential for community building and as a generator of social capital has had a takeoff since the beginning of the 21st century. Söderhom & Nolin (2015) links this to what they call the third wave of community engagement. The first wave, which can be dated till the first decades of the 20th century, focused upon literacy and public education. The second wave, which developed in the 1970s, in the wake of the radical youth movement of that time, was grassroots-oriented and focused upon participation and activity involving the ordinary man and woman, often with a working-class perspective. The third wave took off at the beginning of the 21st century and can be interpreted as a result of digitization: Digitization creates a need for physical spaces opening up for human interaction and community. This third wave, according to Söderstrøm and Nolin, focuses upon community hubs, open social space and diversity.

Alstad and Curry (2003) are preoccupied with the deterioration of places with a potential for promoting democracy when they lament that "the traditional mission of the public library – supporting the self-education of the citizenry in order for them to become full participating members in a democratic society – has been devalued of late in favor of popularizing the library to attract more users" – i.e. adapting to a market-oriented way of thinking. Their major point is that open and accessible urban spaces with a potential for being arenas for free expression of ideas have been "challenged by the steady encroachment of private interests in formerly public arenas and by the desire of the public for controlled and secure spaces". Major urban development projects are privatized, and although these projects result in ostensibly public spaces, they belong to the private realm. The growth of infotainment at the cost of deliberation and public discourse transform the public into an audience. Libraries should counteract these trends by building upon their roots as public sphere institutions, not becoming just another center of information, entertainment and experience[1]. Alstad and Curry (2003)

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[1] To the extent libraries are established in such privatized public spaces, e.g. shopping malls, which might be counterproductive to the libraries role as public sphere institutions. The first author of this paper remembers a study tour to Egypt in the early 1980s. Many of the "public" libraries he visited there were established in private clubs where the general public did not have access. Corporate plazas and shopping malls can turn into places the use of which is a privilege, not a right.

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anchor their arguments partly in a Habermasian context, but they are also influenced by communitarian library ideologists like Ron McCabe.

One strand of research focuses on libraries as places where citizens can be exposed to the diversity of their community regarding values, ethnicity, age, social class, interest etc., i.e. exposing those who visit the library to other values than the ones they cherish. Audunson (2005) has termed that low intensive meeting places. Within this research, social capital theory, particularly the library as a generator of bridging social capital, has a central role. The PLACE-project in a Scandinavian context, Griffis and Johnson (2013) in a Canadian context and Putnam in a US context have documented that the library seems to have a potential when it comes to building trust. The research on libraries and social capital stands out at a strand of research basing itself on empirical research, using quantitative as well as qualitative methods.

A second strand of research focuses on libraries as places promoting democracy. Much of the literature referred to above, discussing libraries and freedom of expression relates to this role, for example Sejersted (op.cit). Alstad and Curry (2003) are preoccupied with developing public libraries as open public spaces to combat the commercialization of other urban spaces. That is also what Lia Frederiksen in a case study of Toronto is preoccupied with from a combined public sphere and feminist perspective. Austerity measures tend to privatize social reproduction. She argues that public libraries are spaces for social reproduction. Privatization of other spaces for social reproduction has affected the role of the library. Cuts in library budgets will, she maintains, hit women and economically marginalized women particularly hard. In a South African context Arko-Cobbah (2005) seems to share the perspective of Alstad & Curry he maintains that South African libraries have abandoned their traditional role of self-education and instead focus on entertainment and marketing to attract users, a fact that is particularly deplorable since "Civic spaces has… been downgraded into a series of venues for leisure and recreation rather than politics. As a result, citizens increasingly rely on profit-driven mass media for their opinion" (Arko-Cobbah 2006, p.349).

Johansson (2004) discusses the role of libraries as democratic institutions in a situation where governments prefer to communicate directly with the citizens. This development changes the role of traditional media, which have been institutions where governments can communicate their decisions to the larger society at the same time traditional media have been arenas for scrutinizing and criticizing those policies. In the new situation, citizens become dependent upon the government's version of its policies. Can public libraries compensate for that, Johansson asks. Based on some Swedish examples, her answer is yes. Jaeger, Gorham, Bertot & Sarin (2013), however, maintains that public libraries have problems in documenting their critical role as institutions underpinning democracy. They relate this partly to the libraries' positioning themselves as democratic institutions simultaneously as they tend to position themselves as neutral and detached from politics, partly by relying on rhetorical or assertions and rhetorical claims, partly by "The new public philosophy" and its insistence upon quantitative and monetary measures.

A number of authors are, in line with Alstad & Curry (op cit) concerned with the effects of commercialization and the entrepreneurial model on the social role of librarianship, for example Buschman(1990), and Blanke (1996). Both Buschman and Lanke contend that the entrepreneurial model will lead to the collapse of the traditional role of librarians as promoters of free and open access to information and democracy.

A model, which has been influential in research as well as in the field of practice, is the four-space model (Jochumsen et al. 2010). In this model the library is visualized as a meeting space, learning space, performative space and an inspirational space empowering citizens.

The third strand of research is preoccupied with the library's role as a tool for urban development or community development (Skot-Hansen et al. 2013; Söderholm & Nolin 2015). Here one might observe an interesting tension: in line with Richard Florida's theories of urban regeneration libraries have a potential for signalling the qualities of the city and attract people from the so-called "creative class to move to the city. Iconic library buildings might be instrumental in this respect. The library, then, signals the qualities of the city to the external world (Skot-Hansen et al. 2013; Carlsson 2015). Blewitt (2014), Cardenas, Lopez & Landeros (2016) can be placed within the same research tradition. Bilandzic and Johnson (2013) discuss hybrid placemaking, planning library spaces where digital technologies are used not only to make library services available digitally but to improve the library as a physical place, thereby enhancing the users' experience.

Söderholm & Nolin (2015) are also preoccupied with the library's role in community development, but not so much its role in signaling the qualities and attractiveness of the community to the external world. Instead, the librarians must have the needs and problems of the community in question under their skin. "From the perspective of empowering the community, this relationship needs to be rerouted from the local library as a service among other in the (national and international – our remark) library system to the local library as a service among others in the community system". (Söderholm & Nolin, op.cit, p. 254).

There are other tensions in our material. Söderholm & Nolin (2015) loosen the affiliation between libraries and "cultural sphere oriented" traditional collections. They cite Rachel Scott, who has written that the most important aspect with public libraries is human interaction, and in their article, they give much space to a discussion of tool lending libraries. Scrogham, on his part, argues that if libraries are to remain relevant and survive, they must retain their role as a place within the public sphere for the intellectual development of a community primarily through books and reading and staffed by professional librarians. Community development yes, but a quite contrary view compared to Söderholm and Nolin as to how that role can be realized.

3.2.3. Social inclusion and equal access to information

How do censorship, the freedom of expression, and access to information impact libraries and society? Libraries are supposed to be institutions where the users can find material eliciting all relevant viewpoints and perspectives related to an issue. The ALA's Library bill of rights which first was adopted in 1939 and which has been revised regularly, states that (i) "Materials should not be excluded because of its origin, background or views of those contributing to their creation", (ii) "libraries should present all points of view on current and historical issues", not proscribe or remove material "because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval" and (iii) "libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment (Anon 2006). UNESCO's public library manifesto states that "Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressure" (Anon 2016). Fighting censorship and supporting freedom of expression and freedom of information, then, seems to be deeply entrenched in the professional ethos of librarianship. External events have challenged this professional ethos. Suffice it to mention the fatwa in the wake of Rushdie's book Satanic verses, the demonstrations, threats and discussions following the publishing of the Muhammed cartoons by the Danish newspaper Jyllandsposten in 2005 and, not the least, the challenge represented by the Patriot act following the 9/11 event in the US. This has also been reflected in our material.

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Darling (1978) reviews attitudes towards censorship in US institutions in a historical context, and concludes that in the library censorship has no role, due to its creed of information access and intellectual freedom for all.

Others, like Fujimoto (1990), draws attention to how librarians have an obligation to create collections in which different viewpoints and values are represented. Ideals of comprehensiveness, balance, and neutrality are challenged. Drobnicki et al. (1995) and Drobnicki (2014) added to this discourse by presenting a study in which public librarians' attitudes and opinions concerning issues of intellectual freedom, collection balance, and controversial materials, and found that librarians in fact would provide access to controversial material. After criticizing its absence, Curry (Curry 1995; Curry 1997a) suggest adding intellectual freedom and censorship issues to the information science curriculum, and presents a survey of 60 public library directors in Britain and Canada, executed to build instructional cases designed for this purpose. Curry's study of censorship-related items published in the British Library Association's monthly professional journal adds to this body of knowledge (Curry 1997b). The US' Patriot Act post 9/11 challenged, as mentioned above, libraries' values and library users implied rights. A nationwide study by Goodrum (2008), showed that this act and other related legislation had had limited or very limited direct impact on academic and public library activities. Most libraries have not changed policies related to the retention of patron information, use of library materials including government information, or removed material from the library.

Sejersted (2005) discusses libraries and freedom of expression as well as freedom of access to information. Sturges (2005), basing himself upon John Stuart Mill and Joel Feinberg, discusses the balance between freedom of expression as a fundamental right and offence which in certain cases can legitimate restrictions on freedom of expression. Librarians must, he maintains, adopt policies which simultaneously defend freedom of expression and respect community sensitivities. Whereas the debate in the wake of the publication of Satanic verses and the publication of the Muhammed cartoons focused mainly upon freedom of expression, the contributions related to the Patriot Act just as much focus upon privacy and surveillance.

A topic closely related to freedom of expression is the collection of personal information regarding books and information approached in a library made salient by the Patriot Act (Jaeger et al. 2004; Klinefelter 2007; Matz 2008; Gressel 2014). Freedom of expression and freedom of access to information are also discussed within the Censoring sexual content is a topic dealt with framework of protecting children against harmful content. Bracy (1995) discuss the censoring of sexual content on a general basis, whereas Burke (2008) is preoccupied with the removing of gay-themed material from public libraries. Jaeger, Bertot & McClure (Jaeger et al. 2004) discusses the possible negative effects for public libraries of the Children's Internet Protection Act adopted in the US in 2000, regarding the libraries' possibility to give its user access to material which people should have legal access to.

The fact that the US has legal regulations such as the Patriot Act and Children's Internet Protection Act has made issues related to libraries and freedom of expression and the users' privacy particularly acute in the US.

Freedom of access to information is usually discussed within the framework of digitization, where the digital divide and (lack of) information literacy are seen as major impediments to access. Three authors from South Africa has a somewhat different perspective (Mostert 1999; Dick 2005; Arko-cobbah 2006; Hart 2012b). They focus more on barriers resulting from political impediments relatively independent from technology, continuing a strengthening differences regarding distribution of power in society. Dick rephrases the slogan Information (or knowledge) is power to Power is information.

3.2.4. Social inclusion and equal access to information

Nicholas (2012) claims that technological developments in general, smartphones and social media in particular, represent a crisis for librarianship because these developments trigger off what he terms disintermediation, i.e. removes the necessity of a librarian as an intermediary between information sources and a the person in need of information,

Carlsson (2015) has in a review article analyzed research on public libraries and social media published in peer-reviewed journals between 2006 and 2012, she identified 44 articles as falling within her selection criteria, and analyzed these to identify themes and topics. She finds that these 44 articles are spread relatively evenly in 29 journals, with the number of articles per journal ranging from 5 to 1 during the six year period. She identifies six topics: The first topic is conceptual research, discussing what library 2.0 essentially means; the second discusses in what ways social media affects institutional roles and missions, whereas the third analyzes professional motivations and attitudes. Topic four and five are preoccupied with social bookmarking and folksonomies and technology and tools respectively, whereas topic six deals with the implication of social media on digital and information literacies. Basically Carlsson identifies as dichotomy between those seeing social media as something which fundamentally changes librarianship and which is inevitable and those who take a more critical stand, also questioning its novelty.

Carlsson (2015) is herself an author of an article where she discusses ways and means for librarians not to be victims of the new technology and its rapid development, arguing that by articulating alternative understandings of technology more clearly, librarians can avoid becoming victims and instead influence and make a difference when it comes to ICT-development.

Jaeger together with a number of colleagues are, as we have seen above, preoccupied with the libraries as institutions instrumental in meeting challenges to inclusion, democracy and access to information resulting from digitization and the uneven access to digital resources in the US. That topic is taken over also to the field of social media (Jaeger & Bertot 2010; Bertot et al. 2012). Together with his colleagues, Jaeger deals with that topic also in relation to social media. When governments to an increasing degree communicate directly with citizens via social media and access to technology is uneven, how can one secure transparency?

In relation to libraries as public sphere institutions, it might be a problem that often taking social media into use is grounded in a market oriented way of thinking. As stated by one respondents in a study undertaken in New Zealand: "We want to be where our customers are" (Neo & Calvert 2012).

4. Conclusions

Returning to our research question, the analysis of the selected articles indicate that research regarding libraries and the public sphere has expanded both quantitatively and with regard to topics and theoretical approaches. Before the turn of the century, topics related to freedom of information dominated. Approaches drawing upon Habermasian public sphere theories were largely absent. Theoretical approaches in the 90s draw primarily on sociologists of late modernity such as Giddens and Bauman and concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu.

Habemasian perspectives are introduced in the first years after the turn of the century, and has been important since then. A relatively limited number of researchers, however, dominates the research, in particular scholars such as John Buschman, Paul T. Jaeger and his co-authors and, since

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2015, Michael Widdersheim and Masanori Koizumi. After the turn of the century we do also find a significant number of contributions relying on a social capital approach.

After the turn of the century topics related to social inclusion and libraries as places with a potential for promoting democratic participation come in as dominating topics in addition to freedom of expression, which still is an important topic.

The identified research can be divided in two: 1. Theoretical and conceptual contributions. Buschman (2003; 2005), Widdersheim (2015; 2017) and Widdersheim & Koizumi (2015; 2016) are examples here. 2. Contributions related to political and social challenges, for example social inclusion, freedom of expression, libraries as places promoting participation and communication across social and cultural belongings and the effect of digitization on democracy and communication between authorities and citizens. A larger number of researchers are active here compared to the primarily theoretical and conceptual contributions.

A large proportion of the contributions tend to be normative and proclaim the democratic role of public libraries without very much empirical evidence. We agree with Jaeger, Gorham, Bertott & Saron, who conclude that "Public libraries continue to rely upon assertions and rhetorical claims when seeking support through the political process rather than bringing forth evidence or data to make the case for their democratic contributions and for the increasing level of support granted to these contributions" (Jaeger et al. 2013, p.369). The goal of the ALMPUB-project, of which this paper is a part, is to contribute in filling that gap.

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