

Public libraries and adult non-users: a comparison between England and Italy

Abstract

In challenging times, public libraries need to be proactive about understanding and attracting non-users. This paper presents the findings of a study conducted with librarians from two major metropolitan areas, Greater Manchester in the England and Rome and its province in Italy. The study aims to assess and compare practices, activities and policies adopted to attract non-users and to promote reading in adults. In England, libraries are more function and task orientated, offering access points for citizen services, whereas in Italy the focus is more on entertainment, leisure, and social events. The non-user profiles differ between countries, with non-users being mostly older teenagers and young people in England and mostly younger teenagers and pensioners in Italy. Reading groups, a key service for encouraging reading, are much more established in England, with 90% of the libraries in Manchester having one or more group, as against only 50% of the libraries in Rome. In addition, Manchester libraries often have a range of reading groups to suit

different reading tastes. Libraries in both countries are aware of the need for proactive marketing and management of their web presence. All libraries use their official websites to promote and advertise their products and events, alongside traditional marketing tools such as leaflets, and posters. Librarians are also all aware of the importance of word-of-mouth, and supported this through maintaining a presence in social networking sites.

Key words

Public libraries, non-users, comparative study, England, Italy.

Introduction

Whilst some policy makers and commentators appreciate the value and social significance of public libraries, (Galluzzi, 2012; Galston et al., 2012; Norman 2012), there is no doubt that their future is precarious, in the wake of significant public expenditure cuts, and the growing dominance of digital media. Not long ago, reading and learning, whether done for pleasure or study, used to be closely related to attendance and use of public libraries. However, this is no

longer the case as the widespread use of information technologies has eroded the centrality of libraries as providers of knowledge and culture (Ross et al., 2006). In addition, in today's fast-moving world, convenience is a main criterion in people's information seeking choices (Connaway et al., 2011). Easy access to information through digital channels can prevent people from physically going to the library and can lead to the belief that traditional information skills have become irrelevant (Shenton, 2011). Recognising the challenges that these changes present, libraries have worked even harder at integrating themselves as a core community service and promoting community engagement (Goulding, 2009). Nevertheless, although regular users may be aware of such developments, too often non-users have a more conservative view of what a public library represents (Evjen and Audunson, 2009).

In the face of these changes, the role of public libraries has become less certain and clear and there is a risk that the number of non-users will grow. Hence, it is important for libraries to concern themselves not only with users, but also with those non-users who are potential users. Unfortunately, one of the difficulties associated with any initiatives that seek to address the non-user issue is that library non-

users are often extremely hard to identify but can be defined in terms of non-traditional potential users (Katsirikou and Matalliotakis, 2010). According to May (2009) they may be adult males who are too busy to visit the library, teenagers who think that libraries are not 'cool' places, mothers who take their toddlers to rhyme time but do not use any service for themselves or people who believe that libraries are simply outdated.

The research reported in this article explores and compares the approaches that public libraries from two major metropolitan areas in England and Italy adopt to seeking to engage non-users through organising and promoting activities and events that are particularly designed to attract new users. This introduction is followed by a literature review that profiles and compares public library use in the UK and Italy, and summarises previous research on non-use and non-users. Next, the Methodology section outlines the mixed methods approach adopted to capture perceptions and information from public library managers. The Findings section makes comparisons between England and Italy. It first summarises data on perceptions of the profiles of users and non-users, and library use, and then discusses the approaches used to target non-users, and promotion and

marketing strategies. The Discussion section compares findings from this study with findings from earlier studies. Finally, the Conclusion summarises the contribution of this research and makes recommendations for practice and further research.

Literature review

According to the latest statistics, there were 12,400 public libraries and library services outlets in Italy in 2009 (ICCU, 2010) and 4,517 public libraries in England at the same time (CIPFA, 2011). Studies demonstrate that libraries have changed dramatically over the last few years (IFLL, 2009) but are still seen as places for reading and studying where literacy is encouraged at all levels (Jaeger et al., 2012) and which support equality and racial integration (Picco, 2008). Public libraries seek to facilitate information access to all and to provide services in demand in the community that they serve. Therefore, understanding the identity of users and non-users is crucial for the libraries' strategic planning.

Recent studies at national level in England and Italy offer various insights into levels of use and the characteristics of non-users. For

example, Pateman (2011), using data from Fuegi and Jennings's report (2004) suggests that, at present, 56% of the UK population are library members, compared to only 28% of the Italians. However, when comparing the actual library visits per head of population, the number is very similar, being 5.28 for the UK and 5.27 for Italy. This implies that in the UK many library members are not library users and that, according to the same study, only 12.8% of the UK population attend libraries regularly, going at least once a month. In 2009, 56% of the entire UK population (61,380,700 *people*) held a library card (*LAMPOST, 2010*). The figures presented in Matty (2007) as part of *Taking Part*, the national household survey on participation in the cultural sector, which includes libraries, show that 46% of all adults in England visited the library at least once in 2006-2007; this corresponds to more than 18 million adults, with 60% of them visiting a library at least once a month. From the same study it emerged that a very high 72% of 11-15 year old people visited the library during the same time compared to only 47% of 16-24 year olds. This negative trend is not reversed as people get older, as only 44% of 45-64 year olds went to a library that year and an even lower 37% of 75+ year olds did.

Italian studies reveal a similar distribution in terms of use and non-use, with the strongest users being children between 11 and 17 years of age, followed by adults with young children and with highest levels of education (ISTAT, 2011). In general, in Italy there is a well-recognised trend at abandoning the library as age progresses. In a recent study, Parise (2011) pointed out that the Italians need to be made aware of what public libraries are, as people are becoming numb to the benefits and services offered. This issue is equally felt and addressed in the UK literature (Pulmann, 2012; Kelly et al., 2009).

Various reasons have been identified as contributing to the non-use of public libraries. There is evidence that convenience is a critical factor and electronic resources are a popular alternative to the physical libraries (Shenton, 2011). In addition, distance from the library and the quiet and comfort of home can play a role in keeping potential users away from libraries (Vondracek, 2007). Further, a study conducted in 2006 by Define Research & Insight showed that library non-users between the age of 14 and 35 viewed library users as the sort of people they did not want to associate with and that the services offered by public libraries had no advantage or were worse than other 'information' resources (i.e. internet and social networks).

A survey conducted recently by Ipsos MORI for the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2010) shows that the two main reasons for not using public libraries are “I prefer to buy book a from a shop/online” and “I’m too busy” (respectively, 25% and 24% of interviewed people).

It is important to recognise the hazards of classifying people into users and non-users. Very few people make continuous use of the library throughout their lives, but most use libraries occasionally, depending on their needs and circumstances at a specific moment in time. In this respect, Hawkins et al. (2001, p. 260) state that “the purpose of library use varies throughout life. Use for recreational purposes increases with age, while information seeking is more important to younger people, and declines with age”.

Various commentators have suggested that in order to limit the spread of disinterest in public libraries, librarians and information professionals in general must take measures to maintain a visible presence and role and constantly work towards customer satisfaction (Bowlby, 2012). Marquez (2012) argues for the importance of marketing strategies that attract new users. Only by addressing why

people do not use libraries, can library services be effectively promoted. In addition, public libraries need to ensure that their services are tailored to provide for different groups of users (Nagata and Klopfer, 2011).

In summary, whilst there is widespread recognition of the importance of cultivating a high level of use of public libraries, and understanding what drives use or non-use, no previous studies have compared approaches in two countries.

Methodology

THE AIM OF THIS RESEARCH IS TO ASSESS AND COMPARE THE PRACTICES, POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES PROPOSED BY PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN ENGLAND AND ITALY TO ATTRACT NON-USERS, WITH A PARTICULAR FOCUS ON THE PERCEPTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS THAT LIBRARIANS HAVE ABOUT THE NON-USERS' ISSUE. MORE SPECIFICALLY, THIS RESEARCH INTENDS:

- **TO PROFILE PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF NON-USERS;**

- **TO ANALYSE** the nature of the activities proposed by libraries to attract the public and to better understand the library users' demographics;
- to evaluate how and to what degree such activities and promotions vary between England and Italy and to find out whether potential differences could be due to different concepts of customer care or to cultural signatures;
- to compare marketing strategies, both traditional and digital, when it comes to publicising library's events and activities.

TWO MAJOR METROPOLITAN AREAS WERE SELECTED AS THE BASIS FOR THIS STUDY. IN ENGLAND, THE RESEARCH CONCENTRATED ON THE AREA OF GREATER MANCHESTER, WHILE IN ITALY THE AREA OF ROME AND ITS PROVINCE WAS SELECTED.

Due to the limited previous comparative research on the issue of understanding and engaging non-users, this study adopted an exploratory approach. Further, a mixed-methods approach, using both interviews and an anonymous questionnaire-based survey, was chosen in order to both gather data for the development of

descriptive profiles and to generate deeper insights (Sarantakos, 2007).

All the potential respondents to the questionnaire were contacted via email. Each email was personally addressed to the manager of the library in question to stimulate a higher response rate. The questionnaire, first composed in English and subsequently translated into Italian, was distributed online and contained twenty closed questions plus one final open question inviting additional comments. For this research, the questionnaire was separated into four subsequent sections, each focusing on a specific theme related to the research objectives, as follows:

- Part 1. Profile of library users
- Part 2. The non-users' issue
- Part 3. Activities and events at the library
- Part 4. Promotion and marketing

Participants were selected for the interviews on the basis of needing to interview people who can offer knowledge and insights that are relevant to the research questions posed (Bryman, 2008). Due to the nature of this study, in both countries the sample comprised library

managers, who have a broad and deep knowledge of the issues regarding their own library. Contact was made directly with the managers of the selected libraries via email to explain the nature of the research conducted and to establish a date and time for the interview.

The data collection was carried out simultaneously in England and Italy and most of the librarians surveyed were willing to participate in the research. At the end of the data collection exercise, 39 libraries from Manchester and 33 libraries from Rome completed the online questionnaire, four interviews were conducted in Manchester and three were conducted in Rome, all with library managers serving a variety of communities within the two metropolitan areas. To guarantee anonymity, the public libraries where the interviews were conducted are named M1, M2, M3 and M4 for Manchester and R1, R2 and R3 for Rome, throughout the paper.

The qualitative data gathered from the interviews and the open questions of the questionnaire were subjected to content analysis. Current applications of content analysis show three distinct approaches: conventional, directed and summative (Hsieh and

Shannon, 2005). Usually, all three approaches are used to interpret meaning from the content of text data. Content analysis was applied in two different stages: the identification of significant elements in the text and the division of these elements in main themes. Due to the relatively large amount of qualitative data collected for this research, it was recognised that relying on memory might have been disadvantageous if not completely inaccurate. For this reason, each interview conducted for this study has been fully transcribed.

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaires was analysed through the application of the appropriate statistical tools (Healey, 2011) using Microsoft Excel.

Findings

Public libraries' users and non-users

Figure 1 summarises the percentile distributions of library users and non-users in England and Italy according to the librarians' perceptions. Children seem to be very strong library users in countries, respectively 73% for England and 67% for Italy (Figure 1a),

together with mature adults (around 70% in both countries) and, to a lesser extent, adults between 26 and 45 years of age (respectively 43% for England and 49% for Italy). An interesting discrepancy comes from the percentages of young adults, who are poorly represented in England (14%), but rather more numerous in Italy (49%). In England, pensioners over 66 years of age are the third most numerous demographic group to attend libraries (68%), as opposed to Italy where this group is the least represented, only accounting for 9% of the total library attendees. In both countries, the presence of teenagers in libraries is very low, although in Italy they appear to go more regularly than in England, especially older teenagers (8% for England and 24% for Italy). The challenge for the surveyed librarians is to identify an approach to lure more teenagers into the library. The manager at library R1 suggested one way forward: "To engage with teenagers we need to have some kind of connection with the schools in the local area, especially secondary schools". At library M4, which is taking a very active approach in trying to connect with local schools, the philosophy is as follows: "Some local schools used the library quite a lot but some didn't. So we started visiting the schools

to promote our services and now three of the schools come to the library, so that clearly worked!”.

As expected, the data about the age groups of the non-users complements the data about the library users (Figure 1b). For both countries, the librarians’ opinion is that people between 13 and 19 years of age are the main non-users. However, examining the data in more detail reveals that there are significant differences in the non-user demographics of the two countries. The view that Italian public libraries are lacking younger teens (70%) more than older ones (67%), is shared among the surveyed librarians, this is due to the common practice of using the library space as a study area during the later years of secondary school and all throughout the undergraduate studies. In England, the absence of younger people is even more prevalent, particularly when considering older teens (81%) and young adults (68%). In Italy, libraries also suffer from the lack of pensioners compared to England (37% compared to only 16% respectively).

In terms of gender distribution, the surveyed librarians believe that females are definitely more assiduous library users than males in both

countries with values of 24% and 42% of female users against 8% and 3% of male users respectively in England and Italy.

Further questions to the library managers on the use and non-use of the library helped to identify the types of library services most popular among customers. The results, summarised in Figure 2 and expressed according to the rating averages, show that the traditional action of taking out books is still seen as the main function of libraries in both countries (around the 3.8 for both England and Italy), together with the practice of attending story time for pre-school children (3.8 for England and 3.7 for Italy). Free magazines and newspapers are also a good incentive for library use (around 3.5 for both countries). The use of library computers is seen to be more extensive in England (4.4 of England against 3.8 of Italy), compared with taking out DVDs, which is the most used service in Italian libraries (4.1 of Italy against 2.7 of England). The use of the library as a place to carry out homework seems to be equally popular in both countries (2.8 for both England and Italy). However, from the interviews it emerged that in Italy this is extremely common practice among older students (17 years of age and above) and undergraduate students, while in

England it is mostly younger pupils, up to 16 years of age, who tend to go to the library to work on projects and assignments.

Taking out music CDs and audiobooks appear to be the least used library services everywhere (between 1.8 and 2.8 for both countries). Council and community services are unique to the British public library system (3.3), those offer people benefits validation, job seeking support and health information points. According to the English library managers, such service is particularly used by communities with lower incomes and education levels, where people tend to use the library more as a community centre than a cultural hub.

Libraries' activities targeting non-users

When asked to identify what kinds of activities were specifically being created at the moment to attract non-users to the libraries, librarians provided an interesting range of responses. Most of the activities are strategically centred on reader development programmes, especially in England, where the target audiences are usually people with poor literacy levels. In Italy, the approach is different, as they tend to

attract people through cultural events or hands-on activities, not necessarily related to the immediate action of reading. The common trend throughout all libraries is to propose a selection of activities, which have the potential of attracting different groups of people, more than focusing on one particular category. When faced with the question about why the events public libraries are proposing should attract non-users, librarians answered in a variety of ways, but library R1 proposed an interesting philosophy on this point: “All events have the potential of attracting non-users, for the simple reason that there’s always something for everybody. Sometimes we are proposing unusual things that could interest people from outside the regular library’s community. So that we can increase our prospective market penetration”.

Overall, English libraries seem more proactive in addressing the non-users’ issue, considering that all outlets have something on offer while 17% of the Italian respondents answered that there are no specific activities in this sense at their library (Figure 3).

Respondents also listed a number of additional activities, more specific to the individual libraries. Among the English librarians,

author visits are frequent and a few libraries offer coffee mornings once a month. Other libraries offer creative courses such as knitting, Tai Chi and rolling programmes of workshops, although not on a regular basis. Some of the libraries concentrate on social welfare. One of the libraries offers a course on English conversation and basic language skills for foreign people and another runs a Job Club. Many libraries also offer their meeting rooms and interview rooms for hire to the public and this seems to attract many non-users, who then become familiar with the library environment and eventually turn into members.

In Italy, additional activities include language courses for foreigners and groups of conversation practice in Italian. Many libraries organise themed events such as 'The Reading Boat' in which book presentations are organised on boats for short cruises on rivers and canals, or 'Fairytale in the Woods' in which families are invited in local parks and green areas to listen to stories for all ages. Very popular in most libraries are film groups and movie projections, particularly during the summer months, art exhibitions and theatre workshops. To engage with teenagers, some libraries organise events such as author visits and book presentations directly at the local

schools. The manager at library R1 stated that: “we are trying to satisfy as many customers as possible, this is why we always come up with highly varied programmes every month”.

The most pervasive and successful initiative undertaken by the public libraries surveyed in the context of increasing the customer pool is that of reading groups. The majority of English libraries host a reading group (89%), against 44% of the Italian libraries. All the libraries where interviews were conducted have one or more permanent reading groups in place, which are run independently by the group members. In Rome, there is typically an underlying theme, as reading groups usually read books shortlisted for a major city prize, such as the Premio Biblioteche di Roma. This highlights the role played by public libraries in selecting and promoting quality new writers and their manuscripts.

The audience attending reading groups is homogeneous in both countries. In Italy, R2 library manager described the reading group at her library as follows: “We have one [reading] group associated with a prize [Premio Biblioteche di Roma]. It is all females, about 30 of them and all around 50 years of age or above”. This was similar to the

description given by R1 library manager: “We host one [reading] group, mainly females, between 40 and 55 years old. It has about 18 to 20 people meeting twice a month, but this will soon be changed to once a month to avoid people getting bored”. Library R3 is also running a reading group, with exclusively older female members, but it is not as well attended as the others including only 6-8 members.

In Manchester, the reading group tradition is much more developed and deep-rooted. Nevertheless, members here are also mostly older women. All the libraries investigated in Manchester have already more than one reading group established and some of them are in the process of organising even more; for example, at library M1 “there are already three reading groups, one for fiction, one for plays and one for classics. We will soon propose another one on Shakespeare”. Computer-oriented activities are popular in Manchester libraries, particularly in areas with high immigration and low income levels. On the other hand, craft courses (Figure 3) are much more common in Italy (61%) than England (29%). Most libraries offer rich entertainment programmes, such as movie nights, concerts and outdoors activities. Much public support also comes from the numerous workshops organised on different themes, from foreign

languages to knitting and stitching. Family history and genealogy research is an activity particularly well appreciated in England (34%) but absent in Italy. This could be due to the fact that in Italy these kinds of searches are conducted through the local registry rather than in public libraries, but the interest in the subject is just the same.

Libraries marketing strategies

In terms of marketing strategies, libraries nowadays take advantage of all online forms of communication (Figure 4). The most popular mode of online promotion in both countries is the library website (100% for England and 89% for Italy), followed by the Local Authority website and Facebook. In addition, most Italian libraries have an online mailing list through which they: “inform the members about the forthcoming events and blogs and [mailing lists] becoming more popular everywhere and every day. Emails are also a powerful tool to simply remind people that we are here, all the time” (Library R2). More traditional marketing strategies are still very much used by libraries and involve leaflets (100% in England and 90% in Italy), word of mouth, which is still largely used in both countries (77% in England

and 83% in Italy) and posters, which are much more common in England (97%) than in Italy (41%). For many professionals the way forward is also through sponsorship and collaboration with local businesses, cultural centres, schools and people from the community. All libraries have engaged in some form of effective collaboration with other institutions. Library M4, for example, established a fruitful, long term collaboration with the local art gallery, which has proven to be very well received by the public: "It's very successful [the relationship with the gallery], they come in and offer the time and the resources, all we have to do is give the space and the opportunity to work with members of the community. So I see that as something that hopefully will continue in the future". Libraries also tend to organise events in collaboration with other local institutions, such as children centres, heritage groups and city councils.

Discussion

Significantly, the non-users issue is relevant to all information professionals but it appears that non-users have different demographics in the two countries. In England, there is a serious

'users vacuum' among young adults and older teenagers in particular, while in Italy the main non-users are identified as younger teenagers and retired people. The high percentage of young adults regularly attending libraries in Italy is explained through the use of the services that are made by this specific age group; they are mostly undergraduate students who attend the library to find an adequate space to study, either alone or together with their friends and other fellow students. This result is well in line with other findings from a study conducted by the Rome Council on public libraries customer satisfaction (Comune di Roma, 2009). Usually, students go to the library with their own books and laptops and sometimes make use of the library's reference books and of the free Wi-Fi and internet service; they may also use the paid printing services. All surveyed librarians agree that public libraries offer a quiet, welcoming setting as opposed to academic libraries, which are usually overcrowded and have less individual space.

In England, the figures presented in Matty's study (2007) according to which older children and younger teenagers, up to GCSE level, are keener than their Italian counter parts in using libraries, are in agreement with the findings of this research. This is also in line with a

recent survey conducted by Clark and Hawkins (2011) for the National Literacy Trust on pupils aged eight to 16 which shows that nearly half of young people (48%) do not use libraries at all and that pupils from a white background use them the least (41%). The same research also shows a steady decline in library usage with age, with 63% of KS2, 42% of KS3 and only 25% of KS4 students ever entering a library. The main two reasons listed for not going to the library were respectively that “their families did not go” (52%) and that “their friends did not go” (40%).

In Italy, secondary school pupils tend to use the library’s space to study, as already observed with young adults, and this habit becomes stronger with age; however, there is no such custom in England. Older teenagers and young adults in England consider going to the library a choice that would make them unpopular among their peers (Define Research & Insight, 2006).

At the opposite end of the age spectrum, social inclusion drives pensioners in England to attend libraries, following a trend typical of northern European countries (Aabø and Audunson, 2012), while in Italy the librarians interviewed confirmed that a pensioner’s life is

mainly conducted within the family and the domestic walls. Again according to Comune di Roma (2009), the percentage of library attendees drops dramatically among pensioners (66 years and over). The findings from this research, although based on librarians' perceptions, are in line with the low percentage (10.3%) of pensioner members found by Comune di Roma (2009).

The literature also shows that white, disadvantaged people with low levels of education are another prominent group of non-users that should be more engaged with the library activities (Matti, 2007; Stanziola, 2008). However, this trend has not been recognised in full in this research as, for example, at library R2 the main non-users are: "People with higher levels of education, usually people with degrees". A similar picture emerges from library M4, where the non-users are: "People who have an affluent background. It's easy to define the people who use the library and people who don't. The people who tend to use the library are families, unemployed, students who really need those resources".

Most likely, the reason behind the lack of interest towards libraries shown by educated, affluent people is well summarised by the

manager of library M4 in the following statement: “Because they [well-off people] would probably buy a book or have their own computer. The sort of services we offer, computers, internet, benefit validation and books...people with affluence, who work, who have their own means do not tend to use the library, they manage all this on their own”.

In terms of users by genre, this study has highlighted a higher occurrence of female users compared to male users. A similar conclusion was drawn by Clark and Hawkins (2011) in a study conducted on young people in secondary education, according to which, 49.2% of UK girls use public libraries compared to only 38.7% of boys.

The concept and perception of public libraries in customers’ minds is different in the two countries and so is the perception that each set of citizens have about them. Although the libraries’ main traditional role of providing information is, without doubt, maintained in both countries, their secondary use is profoundly different. In England, according to the findings from this research, libraries are undertaking a very practical role in the life of their customers, providing an ever

increasing number of 'social services' such as job seeking advice and social benefits validation and this is very well in line with other research (Sung et al., 2011). In Italy, libraries have a lighter but nevertheless important role in the life of the Italians; by proposing pleasurable activities and entertainment programmes, they are filling the much needed niche of affordable, quality fun for everybody. Public libraries are seen as 'indoor public squares' where people meet to read, talk discuss and, ultimately, get together (Agnoli, 2009; Revelli, 2009). These differences between countries are symptomatic of the fact that library services in both England and Italy are evolving differently simply in accordance with the society they serve.

Among the large variety of activities organised by public libraries to attract non-users and to keep users engaged, reading groups are the most popular solution in England. English libraries usually have several reading groups to cater for a range of tastes and groups, including, for example literature groups, play groups and writing groups. In Italy, although librarians have started in recent years to propose reading groups, they are accomplishing very good attendance levels. In Italy, the onset of organised reading groups in libraries was as recent as 2003-2005 and in 2006 the first national

gathering for all reading groups' members was organised at Arco di Trento (Gruppo di Lettura, 2006). Prior to this date, there were only pioneering attempts from isolated libraries, like that of Cologno Monzese which, in the '90s, started to propose a number of reading groups, but still very much in the form of seminars and workshops. This late but steady diffusion of reading groups in Italy compared to the rest of Europe came has been fuelled by the thriving reading groups in the UK and USA (Ferrieri, 2006). The ethos of the reading groups in England is, first of all, that reading is a pleasurable activity, which, in addition, can provide opportunities for social interaction, cultural stimulation and literacy advancement (Long, 2004). Such an idea is slightly different from that of Latin American reading groups, the other major school of thought in reading groups, where the purpose is still mainly educational and is closely connected with cultural emancipation (Barnes-Karol, 2010). The Italian approach to reading groups is more similar to the Anglo-Saxon model, but while in England reading groups are an integral part of the society and are now organised in all sorts of venues and settings, in Italy they are strictly dependent on public libraries' support.

In terms of marketing and self-promotion, all English and Italian libraries are up-to-date with the latest technologies and well connected to all major social networks, in particular Facebook and Twitter; they rely heavily on online facilities, in particular the library's official website, to promote and advertise their products and events. Particularly in Italy, mailing lists are proving to be very effective and provide fast responses from customers, while online blogs are heavily used among information professionals to update and support each other. However, traditional marketing tools are still very much employed everywhere, particularly leaflets and word of mouth, which are still seen to be among the most effective means of communication. In England, posters to advertise libraries' activities in the local community are common. This choice is possibly due to the limited budgets available to small-medium sized libraries for which other ways of marketing could be out of reach (Townsend, 2012). It has been confirmed by the surveyed librarians that cost-effectiveness, coupled with large-scale distribution is also behind the considerable use of digital marketing tools, which, in addition, as suggested by Marquez (2012) present the bonus of being relatively easy to set up and implement.

Good marketing and self-promotion are crucial to the revitalisation process public libraries are going through and are, most significantly, an important component of their strategy to attract non-users. A targeted marketing campaign can effectively contribute to changing the image that stakeholders have of public libraries and increase the number of visits to a library (Hariff and Rowley, 2011); in their article on 'branding' of UK libraries these authors recommend that libraries "develop an understanding of and a vision for the identity and position of their library, and the specific services within their portfolio. They need to articulate and communicate the benefits to users, rather than relying on statements of the service offered. Persistence is essential to shift entrenched images and refresh perceptions of what the library offers". In this sense, a centralised effort should be made and a marketing campaign at national level should be created to maximise the impact.

Conclusion

Public libraries in England and Italy recognise that the non-users' issue is a serious problem and that, in particular, teenagers and

young people need to be more engaged and targeted, in both countries, as the new and future generation of potential library users. Librarians are already proposing programmes of activities directly to schools which are proving to be effective in driving more students through the library's doors. However, this study has highlighted the role that different society settings can play in the perception that young people have of public libraries. Therefore, while in Italy librarians are well accepted among young people, who consider them also point of social gathering, in England they represent an estranged entity.

From this study it emerges also that, at the opposite end of the age scale, the trend is completely reversed, with English pensioners who are assiduous visitors of public libraries, which they use as a form of social interaction and a pleasurable time-passing activity. This is in contrast with the Italian pensioners who are seldom attracted by libraries and favour their domestic settings.

Public libraries in England and Italy have different roles in the society they serve and therefore attract different publics. The main, traditional services of lending books and retrieving information are

provided everywhere, but critical emphasis is given to additional, different aspects in each of the two countries. English libraries are very functional and task-orientated with a focus on the customer seen mainly as 'citizen'. Their key purpose, once the traditional library services are guaranteed, is to facilitate the users' daily life. Benefits validation, patient health information points and job seeking advice are offered daily in almost all the public libraries surveyed. This is definitely a valuable service for the community, but the risk is that people will eventually start seeing the library as a one-stop shop where they can solve administrative matters rather than a cultural centre.

On the other hand, the Italian public libraries are more focused on fulfilling the 'leisure' function. In Italy, the fundamental purpose of a library is still that of delivering knowledge and information, but the social aspect is probably as important. The public library is conceived as a assembly point for people who want to read the newspaper for free, for students who use the facilities to conduct their studies but also to spend the day with friends and for all those customers who want quality, low-cost (or no cost at all) entertainment and cultural incentives.

Recommendations: The two realities identified in Manchester and Rome are not necessarily incompatible; on the contrary, they could, and should, be integrated. Also, another country's modus operandi must not be taken light-heartedly as profoundly different socio-economic aspects play major roles in defining a nation and what makes it more or less successful. However, looking at the experience of others, running pilot events, proposing new trial services or, in other words, being more daring, could be the right way forward for public libraries to revitalise themselves. There is also the need to further develop the libraries' digital presence in ways that engage different target groups, for example by proposing introductory, easy-to-follow computer courses for elderly people in Italy and free computer games sessions and gadget trials for teenagers in England.

Future research: additional studies on the information and reading habits of non-users, and in general digital citizens are needed to generate insights from which public libraries and information practitioners might benefit. It would also be of great interest to further analyse the link between the national cultures and the role of public libraries across Europe, and how this role is at present and might continue to evolve in the future. Further, more research should be

conducted on how reading groups can be cultivated, managed and used, for different age groups and genres.

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