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# **Public libraries, as an infrastructure for a sustainable public sphere: A systematic review of research: a preliminary paper<sup>1</sup>**

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## **1. Abstract**

This paper is based on a systematic literature search aiming at identifying research on the role of libraries as institutions underpinning a sustainable public sphere in a digital age. The major research questions are: 1. Is systematic literature search a fruitful method when it comes to a social scientific/cultural scientific undertakings such as the ALMPUB research project? 2. How does research approach libraries as public sphere institutions? Which topics are dealt with? What about theoretical approaches and what about empirical research versus theoretical contributions and position papers? Some of the major findings are: Research on libraries as public sphere institutions cover a wide range of topics the dominating being freedom of access to information, often related to social inclusion, empowerment and justice. Contributions are often normative and non-empirical, but the proportion of empirically based research is increasing. This paper focuses on contributions related to public libraries.

## **2. Identification of relevant literature: the systematic search**

To ensure a comprehensive identification of relevant literature the search strategy was developed by two librarians in close cooperation with the research team. Both sources/databases and search terms were discussed and tested before the final search strategy was developed. The aim of the literature search was to identify relevant scientific publications in the field covered by the systematic literature review: the changing role of public libraries, archives and museums as institutions underpinning a sustainable public sphere. Increasing cultural diversity in society served by the institutions and digitization were specific areas of interest.

The literature search was conducted using a systematic approach based on the steps of systematic searching described by Nasjonalt kunnskapsenter for helsetjenesten (Nasjonalt kunnskapsenter for helsetjenesten, 2015: 26-33) as a starting point.

Based on the scope of the literature review, 4 elements were identified:

- 1) Institutions (museums, archives, libraries)
- 2) Function, role: public sphere
- 3) Cultural diversity

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#### 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. All searches were performed in March 2017.

Search 1: Element 1 + Element 2 + Element 3

Search 2: Element 1 + Element 2 + Element 4

In addition, two modified versions of these searches, in English and Norwegian, were conducted in Oria (the Norwegian national library catalogue for academic libraries) to identify book titles in English and Scandinavian languages, as well as other publications in Scandinavian languages not indexed in international databases. The modifications were done to adapt to the limited functionality of the database. Details on the strategy and databases included is found in the appendix.

It is important to note that elements 2-4 do not reflect separate domains in the world, and divisions between the elements are thus not straightforward. One might say that there is a hierarchical relationship between element 2 and 3, and element 2 and 4, so that element 3 and element 4 are possible subsets of element 2. The adding of element 3 and 4 to the search 1 + 2 was done to achieve a manageable amount of references. This of course leads to the exclusion of relevant publications indexed with words pertaining only to the “highest” level in the hierarchy, e.g. element 2. To compensate for this loss members of the research team took steps to include known relevant publications within their specific fields that were missing among the references identified through the searches.

The search terms included in each element were intentionally broad to ensure comprehensive results.

### **3. Findings: Approaches and topics**

#### **3.1 Theoretical approaches and perspectives on libraries as public sphere institutions**

Although the number of theoretical contributions are relatively limited, we do find a variety of theoretical positions in the identified articles. Some are relying on concepts taken from sociologist of postmodernism or late modernity such as Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman with their weight on concepts such as self-reflexivity, openness and liquid modernity. (Hvenegaard Rasmussen & Jochumsen, 2007, Area & Pessoa, 2011) . Others have been relying on new institutionalism. (Audunson, 1999; Hansson, 2010; Kann Christensen, 2010; Evjen, 2015). Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century much research related to the role of libraries as places with a potential for building communities have utilized social capital theory has relied upon social capital theory, a theoretical approach summarized by Vårheim (2007).

Library and information science is a practice and profession oriented research field. Such research fields are often theoretically eclectic, picking approaches, which might be useful to elicit the research problem in question. Jamie Johnston is an example of a researcher representing such an approach. She is studying the effect of conversational programming in libraries when it comes to promoting integration of migrants. In her research she combines concepts from social capital theory, contact theory and Habermasian public sphere theory. (Johnston 2016a; Johnston 2016b; Johnstom & Audunson 2017).

Research based on Habermas’ theory and concepts on the public sphere came into main stream 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 was translated into English as late as 1989 – 17 years after the first Norwegian translation was published. The American and UK 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 embodies 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).

Alstad and Curry are preoccupied with similar perspectives when they lament that “the traditional mission of the public library – supporting the self education of the citizenry in order that they can become fully participating members in a democratic society – has been devaluated 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<sup>11</sup>.

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 , are discussing basic concepts related to e-government and public deliberation. The basic problem, as Jaeger describes it, is governments will be tempted to use e-government to present their viewpoints on the net, a strategy which might result in polarization, or if e-government will be used 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.

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<sup>11</sup> To the extent libraries are established in such privatized public spaces, e.g. shopping malls, that 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.

In one interesting contribution, Burnett & Jaeger discusses 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 worlds and how the norms and world view of one's immediate social environment affects one's information behavior 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. (Burnett, Jaeger & Thompson, 2008).

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.

In 1990 Nancy Fraser problematized Habermas concept of the public sphere, stating that it 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 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 a literature being primarily monocultural), then with what she terms the community turn in the 1970s and 1980.

The perhaps most profound theoretical work public libraries and the public sphere has been undertaken by Miachel Widdersheim Mazanori 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, 2015a; Widdersheim & Koizumi, 2015b; Widdersheim & Koizumi, 2017; Widdersheim, 2017). In developing the model they use public sphere theory based on Habermas and an empirical analysis of annual reports from the public library of Pittsburgh, USA. Their point of departure is a set of cores 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 friend 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 19<sup>th</sup> century and first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>. 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 over 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 doing research on 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, 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? (Ashley, 2005). That question is relevant also for libraries.

#### **4. Public libraries and challenges to the public sphere**

In a globalized and digital world, the public sphere faces a number of challenges. How does research on public libraries and the public sphere relate libraries to these challenges?

##### **4.1. Censorship, freedom of expression and access to information**

Libraries are supposed to be institutions where the users can find material eliciting all relevant viewpoints and perspectives related to an issue. Both the American Library Associations Library Bill of Rights, adopted for the first time in 1939 and revised in 1906 (ALA, 1996 and UNESCO's public library manifesto are preoccupied with this issue.). 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" 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. These challenges are also reflected in research.

Darling (1979) reviews attitudes towards censorship in US institutions in an 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 (Drobnicki & et al., 1995) adds 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; Ann Curry, 1997) 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 (A. Curry, 1997). The US' Patriot Act post 9/11 challenged, as mentioned above, libraries' values and library users implied rights . A nationwide study by Goodrum (2007), showed that this act and other related legislation have 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 with explicit references to technology as well as theorists of the public sphere such as Habermas and Ulrich Beck. The new paragraph 100 in the Norwegian constitution, stating that it is the responsibility of the government to lay the foundation for a free and enlightened public discourse and which also stresses the freedom to search and receive information is an important point of departure. A number of US based researchers have published papers focusing upon the challenges to the freedom of searching information in libraries resulting from the Patriot Act. (Gressel, 2014; Jaeger, Bertot & McClure, 2003; Johnson, 2013; Klinefelter, 2007; Matz, 2008).

Sturges (2006), 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.

We also find a tension between moral concerns, e.g. protecting children against harmful content, which is the goal of the US Children's Internet Protection Act, and the value of freedom of access to information. Bracy et. al. (1996) 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 as a discriminating practice.. Jaeger, Bertot & McClure (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; Genevieve, 2012). They focus more on barriers resulting from political impediments relatively independent from technology, continuing a strengthening difference regarding distribution of power in society. Dick rephrases the slogan Information (or knowledge) is power to Power is information and calls for research putting access to information in a wider historical and political context of power relations.

#### **4.2. 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 per cent of the adult population had Internet access at home in 2015 (Pew Research Center, 2015), a substantial and increasing proportion relying on access via smart phones. 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 till now. (Jaeger, Bertot, Thompson, Katz, & DeCoster, 2012; Jaeger & Fleischmann, 2007; Bertot, McClure & Jaeger; Jaeger & Sarin, 2016; Taylor, Jaeger, McDermott, Kodama & Bertot). 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 inherent 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, Gorham, Sarin & Bertot, 2013). Choudhury & Kumar discuss e-government and citizen empowerment in an Indian context.

In line with the community turn described by Newman (op.cit), we find a relatively large amount of research focusing upon the role of libraries when it comes to promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups, particularly immigrants and ethnic minorities, 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 as a result 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 (Garcia Lopez, Caridad Sebastian, & Morales Garcia, 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 (2012) concludes that what is often viewed as “outreach” programmes 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, Wilson & Cocker, 2008; (Birdi, Wilson & Tso, 2009; Birdi, Wilson & Mansoor, 2011). Some respondents were of the opinion that staff members have sufficient cognitive empathy to serve different communities, whereas other but smaller – group 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, Ellenwood & Lazzaro, 2015). A case study undertaken in the city of Perth, Australia, studies library services aiming at integrating immigrants with English as their second language. (Chellah, 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 language revealed an urgent need for English language and computer skills education. Chellah 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.

In three articles Johnston (Johnston 2015a; Johnston, 2015b; Johnston, 2016) studies 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.

#### **4.3. 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 (2016) gives an 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 a potential for community building and as a generator of social capital has had a takeoff since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. century. Söderholm & 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 70s 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 Söderholm and Nolin, focuses upon community hubs, open social space and diversity.

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 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 (Aabø et. Al, 2010; Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Audunson, 2005; Audunson, Essmant & Aabø, 2011; Vårheim, 2008; Vårheim, 2014) and Johnson and Griffis Canadian and US (Johnson, 2010; Griffis & Johnson, 2013; Johnson & Griffis, 2013) 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 (op.cit) are preoccupied with developing public libraries as open public spaces to combat the commercialization of other urban spaces. The 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 workers 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, 2005, 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 intuitions 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 third strand of research is preoccupied with the library’s role as a tool for urban development or community development. (Skot-Hansen, Hvenegaard Rasmussen & Jochumsen, 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 signaling 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. (Carlsson, 2013; Skot-Hansen, Hvenegaard Rasmussen & Jochumsen, op.cit).Blewitt (2014), Cardenas, Lopez & Landeros, (2016) can be placed within the same research tradition. Bilindzic 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 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 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. Scrogam, 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 & Nolin as to how that role can be realized.

#### **4.4. Libraries and social media**

Carlsson, (2015) has 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. Social media as a tool to promote participation from the users is a relatively frequent topic. Cavanagh (2016) in a study of microblogging in Canadian libraries, finds that micro blogging has network effects related to community building.

### **5. Some tentative conclusions**

One aim of this project was to test out the fruitfulness of doing a systematic library review in a social science/cultural science undertaking such as the study of the role of libraries as public sphere institutions. Our conclusion related to this is somewhat ambiguous. The systematic search resulted in a high number of relevant articles, but many relevant studies fell through the net. Indexing practices in the field have to be improved if systematic searches shall yield better results.

As for substantive findings related to research on libraries as public sphere institutions, we found that:

- There is a tendency that normative and programmatic contributions dominate. Titles such as “Can Scottish public Libraries claim they are socially inclusive of all Minority groups when lesbian fiction is still so inaccessible” are illustrating for a strong normative approach.
- Contributions based on systematic empirical studies are relatively few, but empirically based contributions seem to be increasing. Empirically based research, however, seems to be increasing. The growing body of research related to libraries as generators of social capital and social cohesion are using both qualitative and quantitative research design.
- Claims regarding the role of libraries as institutions of critical importance for democracy and the public sphere in a digital age, seem to be mainly declarative and only weakly underpinned by substantial and well-designed research. The main goal of the ALMPUB-project is to provide a firmer research base for reflecting upon the role of libraries and the other ALM-institutions as institutions underpinning a sustainable public sphere.

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