The Quadruple Helix Model of Libraries: The Role of Public Libraries in Newcastle Upon Tyne

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Abstract

This paper is based on semi-structured interviews with library staff members in order to explore both how they perceive the role of libraries in most deprived areas in Newcastle upon Tyne and how they relate with their patrons. We show that public libraries play a primary role in activating a virtuous cycle, in which infrastructures, skills, and increased ability of users to achieve their goals simultaneously result from and feed social inclusion strategies. However, some limits might be related to the availability of public economic resources that tends to affect the smaller libraries by reducing opening times and services provided.

Keywords: Public libraries, social inclusion, digital inclusion, partnership-libraries, Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Introduction

The present paper explores the quadruple helix model (see figure 1) adopted by public libraries in Newcastle upon Tyne (from now, Newcastle), located in northeast England, which serve a population of 280177 inhabitants (ONS 2011). The four helixes of this model are represented by infrastructures (physical inclusion of users), skills (immaterial benefits deriving from an efficient use of infrastructures and activities), and ability (to achieve goals and be more integrated within a society which requires high degree of specialisation), and social inclusion (final goal and generator of a new process based on infrastructures, new skills and goals). Social inclusion is interpreted as both generator and consequence of infrastructures, skills and ability to reach specific goals.

It refers to libraries as facilitators for accessing knowledge and information in relation to their role in enhancing lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups (IFLA/UNESCO 1994). This means that the role of public libraries is not limited to provide infrastructure but also to ensure that library users acquire those skills necessary to efficiently and equally access the resources

available. This is especially evident in the digital era in which expert knowledge is needed to access information (Ragnedda and Muschert 2013). For this reason, libraries have evolved from being only physical places to a hybrid form (Kapitzke 2001) in which physical and digital features coexist. In this direction, some authors refer to the concept of "cybrary" to explain the role of libraries in combining service delivery in person and online (Schmidt 2006).
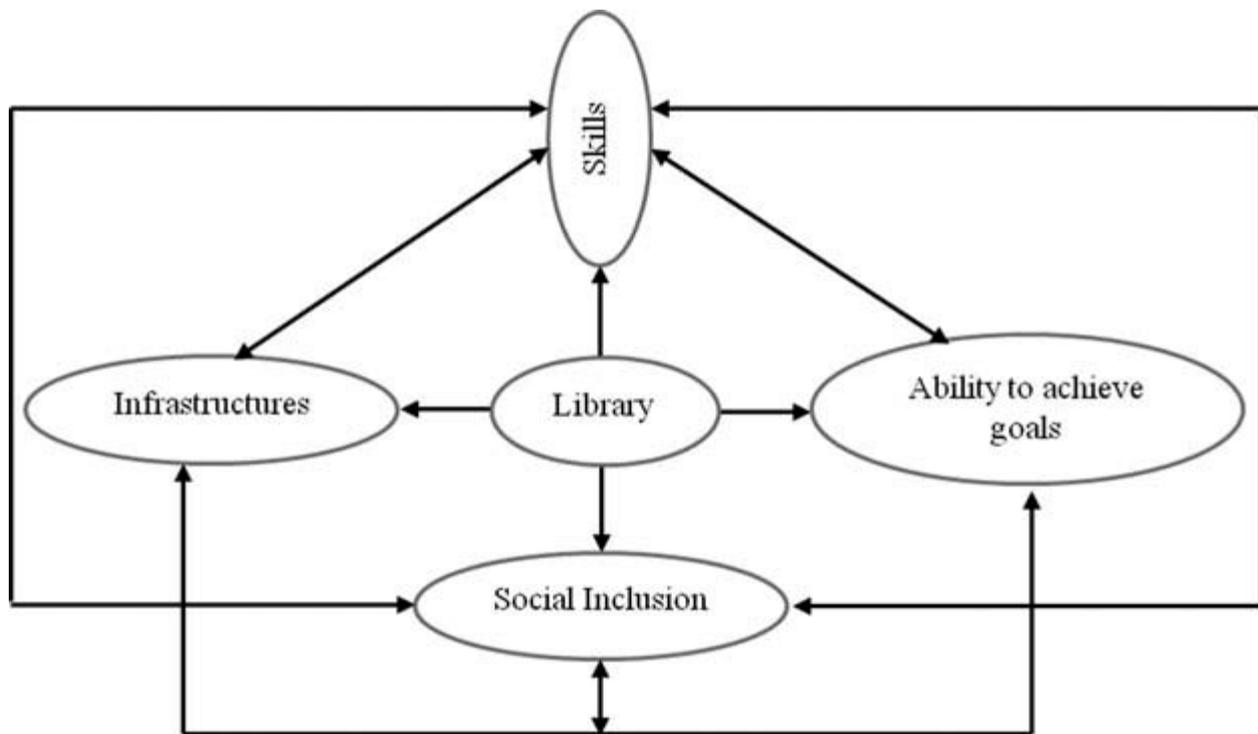

Figure 1. The quadruple helix model of library service

Literature Review

However, the physical experience of libraries is an often-cited value. The library, intended as a place, fulfils a social function by providing a neutral site for users (who are from different backgrounds) to interact (Lougee 2002). Before the Internet was widespread in libraries, Greenhalgh, Landry and Worpole (1993) identified five main areas upon which public libraries produce impacts such as education, social policy, information, cultural enrichment and economic development. However, even after the introduction of information technology (IT) in libraries, these functions still represent the core of the library mission.

Following the literature produced on the societal role of libraries it is possible to identify a triple helix model of libraries in which each helix depends on the others. In this direction, McShane (2011) underlines the role of

library service in increasing civic engagement, literacy and access. Kerslake and Kinnel (1997) argue that public libraries produce effects at least on three levels: community, skills, and economy. In fact, libraries should simultaneously provide physical in-library services, skills and capacity to interpret, manage and efficiently apply the competences and knowledge acquired. To better specify, first of all, libraries as places provide physical infrastructures to facilitate the access to knowledge; secondly, they provide immaterial benefits that result in increased literacy (also in terms of digital literacy) and acquisition of competences and skills to access information (such as ability to easily find the necessary resources); thirdly, they create favourable conditions for efficiently use material and immaterial resources to achieve specific objectives. As a consequence, this learning model is also expected to promote inclusion by creating a favourable environment for people to success. This seems to be particularly evident in time of crisis during which visitor number, membership and usage in public libraries have increased (Bertot, Gorham, Jaeger and Taylor 2012; Rooney-Browne 2009).

At the same time, libraries face a number of challenges related to internal management, financial availability, human and physical resources available. The literature underlines how the accessibility (physical and digital) to library service is not universally ensured (see e.g. Higgins 2013; Krolak 2005). For example, libraries have to allocate financial resources to i) provide physical infrastructures that can be accessible by all; ii) educate internal staff in digital terms if they promote digital literacy; iii) develop efficient digital tools such as websites, electronic database and interactive digital communication (Chua and Goh 2010); iv) invest to make visible both the activities undertaken and the role of library in innovation (Lougee 2002).

Furthermore, staff library should be large enough to i) deliver ordinary services; ii) be engaged in training activities (as both learners and educators); iii) organise learning activities; iv) manage the library system and its connections to local needs (Fourie 2007). Some authors suggest a number of solutions to make the library management successful such as the creation of partnerships between local libraries and public/private external organisations (Dutch 2000; Moxley and Abbas 2016; Pateman 2000; Vincent 2000); the creation of synergies between libraries service and social policies in order to mitigate social exclusion (Hines 2005; Linley 2000;

Muddiman 2000); the consultation of local communities in order to understand real local needs (Dutch 2000; Vincent 2000).

The literature on the relation between libraries and social inclusion highlights the contribution of libraries to the integration of minorities into local communities (Fisher, Durrance and Hinton 2004; Molz and Dain 1999), to serve information needs of homeless people and connect them to social services (Barbieux 2012; Lilienthal, 2011; Muggleton and Ruthven, 2011), to the reduction of juvenile delinquency (Naylor 1987), to the increasing literacy of both children and adults in particular in disadvantaged contexts (Adams, Krolak, Kupidura and Pahernik, 2002; Harding, 2013; Krolak, 2006), to the creation of "new" public spaces (Caidi and Davies 2005; Celano and Neuman 2001; Davies, Schwartz, Servon and Pinkett 2003). The majority of empirical studies carried out on the role of public libraries mainly focused on the perception of users about the library service. This is the reason why the present study fills a gap in literature which rarely explores the performance of public libraries by referring to the staff's points of view. In particular, it refers to more disadvantaged neighbourhoods in order to investigate the role played by libraries in producing social inclusion in these contexts.

The context in which libraries are located in Newcastle is first explored; the methodology adopted for this project is explained; and finally the results obtained from qualitative interviews with staff members of four selected libraries are presented using the quadruple helix model.

Library Service in Newcastle upon Tyne

In England there are over 3,000 public libraries and more than 225 million visits per year (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2016). The macro-areas of intervention identified as priorities for the Library Service in England are: health and wellbeing, social care, economic growth, community cohesion, cultural activity, literacy and digital literacy. While the demographic, economic, and cultural characteristics of library users and the spatial accessibility of libraries in England have been widely explored (see Japzon and Gong 2005), the role of public libraries in revitalising deprived neighbourhoods at the micro-scale (through qualitative methodology) is almost ignored by literature (Usherwood 2001).

In Newcastle upon Tyne fourteen public libraries exist located in twelve wards, which differ in terms of deprivation degree and presence of elderly people (see table 1). Library Service includes a core network of nine libraries (run by the Council), four Partnership funded Libraries (supported by the Council at a reduced cost) and two Community Run libraries (run by volunteers). Tackling social inequalities is one of the main goal of library service, which provides a number of activities in particular addressed to disadvantaged people such as: leisure services, cultural and learning activities, health activities, training on ICTs, homework help groups for children, bespoke services on public and social services (http://www.newcastle.gov.uk). Moreover, a Home Delivery Service is available and Library service also provides a mini-bus service run by volunteers at Kenton, Gosforth, East End and High Heaton Libraries. Following the Newcastle residents' survey (Newcastle City Council 2015) local libraries regular users are most likely to be people aged 25-44, 65+ (both 23%), workless (41%), social housing tenants (24%), disabled (24%) and single person households (26%). By contrast, non-users are most likely to be people aged 45-64 (46%), retired (45%), private tenants (42%) and those living without children (46%).

Research conducted by Usherwood (2001) shows how libraries in Newcastle has a significant role in supporting social cohesion and local identity while reducing isolation by recreating safe, warm and intimate spaces in which people feel welcomed by local institutions; supporting education and independent learners; and organising reading. At the same time, Usherwood's research highlights differences among the impacts produced by libraries in different areas, related to levels of deprivation and the availability of other resources.

Library*	Ward	Population served (ONS, 2011)	% of 65-84 year olds	Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD, 2010)
Walker Library	Walker	12206	15-18	65,94
Outer West Library	Denton	10500	15-18	49,5
Newbiggin Hall Library	Woolsington	11160	15-18	43,66
Newburn Library	Newburn	9536	15-18	30,74
Gosforth Library	West Gosforth	9991	15-18	6,77
Blakelaw Library	Blakelaw	11507	13-14	45,7
High Heaton Library	North Heaton	9574	13-14	30,63
Denton Burn Library	Benwell and Scotswood	12694	13-14	20,47
Fenham Library	Blakelaw	11507	13-14	19,37
Cruddas Library	Elswick	13198	9-12	61,64

West End Library	Elswick	13198	9-12	47,14
Kenton Library	Kenton	11605	9-12	9,64
East End Library	South Heaton	9964	6-8	62.98
City Library	Westgate	10059	6-8	14,66

*Libraries included in the study are reported in bold
Table 1. Libraries in Newcastle upon Tyne, % of 65-74 year olds and IMD per ward (Source: Newcastle City Council, 2011)

In the most deprived wards, the library is seen as "the heart of the community", at least by library users. Usherwood also underlines the importance of public library management to achieve social objectives. Following the approach adopted by Usherwood the present study focused on the following management factors: resources available, promotion of library services, library rules and culture, structure and staff attitudes, location of the library and role of library in the wider area.

Methodology

The present research is based on semi-structured interviews with staff members of four selected public libraries in Newcastle. This, in order to investigate a perspective that is rarely considered in research on libraries, which, by contrast, more often involves users. Libraries were selected by referring to two elements directly connected to social exclusion: degree of deprivation (IMD, 2010) of the areas in which libraries are located; higher presence of elderly residents. Walker Library, Outer West Library, Blacklaw Library and High Heaton Library were selected in relation to a higher concentration of both deprivation (an Index of Multiple Deprivation - IMD > 30) and elderly residents (a percentage of 65-74 year olds population >13%) (see table 1). Newburn Library and Newbeggin Library fulfilled both criteria, but in the first case staff members refused to be interviewed (only observation was carried out in this library) and the second one is an unstaffed library.

Services	Walker Library	Outer West Library	Blakelaw Library	High Heaton Library
Study space	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
On-line catalogue	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Free internet access	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community information/History	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Information about local attractions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Newspaper/Magazines	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Photocopier/Printing/Scan/Fax	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Self-service facility	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cafe meeting	Yes*	Yes*	Yes	Yes*
Class visits	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes***

Children activities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Homework support	Yes	Yes	Yes Success 4 All sessions**	No
Council Information Board	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Free Internet Taster Session	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Work Club	Yes	No	No	No
Reading Group	Yes	Yes	No at the moment	Yes
Knitting group	No	Yes	No	Yes
CD/DVD Book, Movies and Music	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Books and Souvenir for sale	No	Yes	No	No
Display and exhibition space	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Health related activities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community room for hire	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mini-bus visits	No	No	No	Yes
Restore point	Yes (café machine)	Yes (café machine)	Just outside the library (in the same building)	Yes (café machine)
Space for children	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Free phone service to contact council services	Yes	No	No	Yes

Table 2. Facilities/Services provided by libraries
* The library does not provide formal café meetings but the presence of a café area enhances spontaneous socialisation among users (Cookery classes on Thursday).
**After-school clubs and summer schools focus on learning new skills, team building and building community cohesion (http://www.s4a.org.uk/).
*** Visits and activities with students from nursery, primary school and college.

The two criteria were adopted in order to understand the role played by libraries in revitalising disadvantaged contexts, paying a special attention to a segment of population that, given the location of the majority of libraries in the suburbs of Newcastle, might be a risk category excluded from information and access to information, also in relation to a greater difficulty to move around the city to participate in social/cultural/training/entertainment activities. At the same time, the literature shows how libraries can also become bridge between older people and their families thanks to the provision of technologies of communication and the Internet (Cotten et al. 2012; Czaja and Lee 2007).

Outer West Library and Walker Library are directly managed by the council; High Heaton Library and Blakelaw Library are partnership libraries, which resulted from 2013 budget reductions. These cutbacks pushed Newcastle City Council to create partnerships with different bodies including Newcastle College, Your Homes Newcastle and "friends of" groups in order to reduce cost of management.

Library staff members were asked about i) in-services and digital services available in the library; ii) situation pre and post 2013 budget savings; iii) regular users of public library resources; iv) dependency of

users on resources provided by libraries; v) users belonging to different ethnicity; vi) kind of support provided by the staff to users; iv) impacts produced by libraries on the community in which they are located. Interviews ended with the following question: "What do you think the reaction of local communities will be if other libraries will be closed?"

The Quadruple Helix Model of Newcastle libraries

The four libraries selected in Newcastle differ in terms of size and location, but all are characterised by high degree of deprivation and a high concentration of elderly residents.

- Outer West Library is a bigger library (with several staff members) in comparison with the other libraries selected. It is located in a shopping area (Denton Park Shopping Centre) and co-located with the Outer West Customer Service Centre and the Outer West Pool. The building is managed in partnership with the Newcastle College.

- High Heaton is a partnership library between the City Council and the Newcastle College, which run the building.

- Walker Library is a small library (one staff member) co-located with a Leisure Centre (Walker Activity Dome), which is managed by a registered charity, the North Country Leisure (see http://www.northcountryleisure.org.uk/newcastle/walker-activity-dome). It is also located in front of a care home, the Walker Lodge Care Home.

- Blakelaw is a small library (one staff member) co-located with a local Community Centre, run by the Blakelaw Ward Community Partnership (BWCP), which brings together residents and councillors in a charity organisation to revitalise the ward and support public services and social enterprise (see http://loveblakelaw.com/).

Users of these libraries are represented by elderly people, family with children, children from nursery and primary schools (thanks to agreements with local schools), younger and disadvantaged people. The use of services and facilities by these categories of customers is particularly related to their age/stage of

life/unemployment and family status. In fact, as stated by the staff members it is possible to identify several functions of the library in relation to the target users. First of all, libraries are places to relax, enrich culture, and socialise: the majority of elderly people borrow or mostly read books in the library. However, they visit the library also for socialising, meeting other people and chatting in the coffee areas or in occasion of Coffee and Conversation meetings. Second, libraries offer IT services: younger people use the library mainly to access the computers and the Internet. During an observation at High Heaton library a technical problem caused a temporary Internet suspension and the younger people left because the Internet access was the only reason why they had come to the library. Third, libraries are learning arenas: specifically children individually or collectively use learning resources and study areas. They go to the library together with their parents or schoolmates thanks to agreements between libraries and local schools/nurseries. All libraries provide specific areas addressed to children's needs (including computers). The walls of the Blakelaw library are entirely decorated with children drawings and pictures deriving from activities carried out within the library. In High Heaton library the children room is physically separated from the adult area by a glass screen. Fourth, libraries offer job-search support and are safe and warm places in which people can find the information they are looking for: younger and disadvantaged people use library service (in particular the Internet and staff assistance for building CV) to search job.

Disadvantaged people often frequent the library to socialise and spend their time in a friendly environment. The most cited activities by staff members are supporting people both in building their CV and in finding job opportunities, and helping adults and older people to navigate on the Internet and use computers (and related tools such as scan, printers, and fax).

Table 1 shows the main facilities and services provided by libraries in relation to their target users: some activities are addressed to children such as Under 5's play provision (Blakelaw Library - Outer West Library - Newburn Library); Book a Toy (Walker Library); Storytime sessions (Walker Library - Outer West Library); Weekly SureStart play and learn session (Outer West Library), After-school clubs and summer schools/reading focused on learning new skills, team building and building community cohesion (Blakelaw Library, High Heaton Library, Outer West Library). Some others are addressed to inform adults about health-related issues such as Councillor's surgeries in adjoining Neighbourhood Centre (Blakelaw Library-

Outer West Library), Reading Well Books on Prescription where books are prescribed to help people to deal with mental conditions including anxiety, depression, phobias and some eating disorders (Walker Library). Even though these activities play a primary role in both informing and connecting people with external services, the risk is that libraries might reduce their role to deliver basic information to patrons. A stronger involvement with social service and professional social workers might be still needed to better inform and support users in relation to their specific needs (Hines 2015; Moxley and Abbas 2016).

Other activities aim to increase digital skills of all users through collective IT courses or individual support such as Free one-to-one Taster Sessions (all libraries). Finally, elderly people are involved in particular in activities such as Book Discussion Club/reading groups (High Heaton Library - Walker Library - Outer West Library) and knitting groups (High Heaton Library - Walker Library). Following the triple helix model described in the introduction it is possible to inscribe the facilities and services provided by libraries into three categories such as infrastructures, skills and ability. Some of them can be easily inscribed in one of these categories (in particular if they are infrastructures such as study spaces, photocopier/printing/scan/fax/computers etc.), some others show a strong interconnection with the other categories. In fact, in some cases (such as for example work club, reading/knitting groups, health related activities, children activities, free internet taster sessions) libraries provide infrastructures to allow users to acquire skills, which in turn contribute towards increasing the ability to achieve specific goals. Libraries have become not only a hybrid between virtual and physical places, but also between high-intensive and low-intensive arenas (Audunson 2005). In fact, as "impartial" places they invite people regardless of their origin/background/orientations, and this increases opportunities to create low-intensive-arenas in which different kinds of people meet each other and increase their social capital (Johnson 2010). At the same time, the organisation of activities addressed to specific aims (ITs usage, health information, reading/cooking/knitting groups etc.) contributes towards creating high-intensive arenas in which people can cultivate their interests and engagements together with people who share them.

Libraries have changed their role from passive (as authorities that offer a public service) to a proactive attitude. Librarians see the revitalisation of the wider area in which libraries operate as a primary aim of their

work. In particular, they feel responsible for involving elderly people in social activities, for increasing users' skills and ability for achieving their goals, for giving information to users about council and social services, for supporting children in learning activities. In this sense, libraries not only help people to access information but also support them to interpret it for their own uses (Wiegand 2015).

The librarians also assign a "cybrary" role to the library because it offers IT facilities and skills otherwise inaccessible by some people from the area. In relation to the question on the library role in the wider context staff members stated:

"[The library] plays a very important role in proving a public service for people that are social excluded, for people that use Internet facilities and they do not have the possibility to use them at home. It is also important for reading activities [...].We offer a lot of services: free access to PCs and Internet, free Internet classes, IT learning, e-mail, shopping on line, help to access websites. We offer meeting, reading knitting groups. We have also teachers for children who are excluded from school and they come here to learn" (Outer West staff 2016).

"That's a big resource in particular for children: around 200 children use the library. It is also a social meeting place to go for coffee for example, in particular for older people. This is also a place in which you can find information and help [...]. The library offers a lot of services such as one to one internet taster sessions to customers on on-line shopping, basic internet and computers skills, ebay, email, health information, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, digital photography, I-pad and Android tablets. On-line resources also include e-books, newspapers, on-line vocabulary in different languages, information for EU migrants and refugees.
But I think that one of the most important service that we offer is the support to job-searchers. We help them to search job through Internet, to build CVs. Often the library users do not have their own computers or printers at home. They have no access to Internet so the library services are very useful for them. Often people ask for help to go on-line" (High Heaton staff 2016).

"[The library produces] positive impacts because... reading for pleasure, or you need to increase your knowledge about something... As I mentioned earlier a lot of people don't have PCs or Internet access

and they can get unlimited access here as well. It used to be two hours but now it's unlimited...We have newspaper as well, it's also a social place: there are people who come in to meet other people [...]. What alse is around here?... In this area... it is a deprived area and it offers free access to books and free access to warm places to spend time. The key feature of this community is that if it is close there is nothing also, you could go to Byker or to the city library but they are far away" (Walker Library staff 2016).

"It's the centre of the community and a lot of elderly people come and might not go anywhere alse and just come here, you know, to have a chat... That's a neighbourhood community library..So it's lovely [...] Some people don't have PCs at home, that's why they come here... Or their PCs are not working...We have also printing facilities WiFi connected... A lot of people come in to do work, courses " (Blakelaw staff 2016).

All services and facilities provided by libraries produce positive effects in terms community-building, skills-acquisition, and economic impact. In fact, in addition to these services, a British Library's Business and Intellectual Property (IP) Centre was created in September 2011 as partnership between the Newcastle City Council and the British Library in order to support business and encourage the development of new entrepreneurs in libraries (http://www.bipcnewcastle.co.uk/). The Business and IP Centre provides support to develop or reinforce enterprises by providing learning courses on several topics (e.g. marketing, use of digital media, video-making) and one-to-one advice. All these activities aim to simultaneously involve the whole local community and more disadvantaged citizens. However, since 2012 the provision of these services has been threatened by Government spending reductions, which caused the reduction of both the number of Council-run libraries (Murphy 2013) from 18 to 9, and services available (in addition to staff reduction). This means that the majority of activities are taken at the main City Library (located in the city centre), while the smaller libraries suffer from scarce organisation of formal activities. In fact, even in the context of the one-to-one IT training, people have to pre-book their session and they are organised in relation to the availability of volunteers who run these activities. Moreover, even though residents live no more than 2,5 km from a library service, especially in deprived areas, not everyone might be willing to use public transport to reach the central library for attending these activities (even in relation to costs for transport).

Therefore, the reduction of services, in particular within most deprived neighbourhoods, might undermine the public library's mission.

Librarians were sensitive to the question related to a potential closure of the libraries, in particular in those libraries already threatened from closure. In fact, in 2013 the City Council announcement of closing some libraries located in the most deprived areas of Newcastle caused a strong reaction of local communities. They organised protest-campaigns, occupied libraries, created community partnerships to manage the libraries. High Heaton Library was kept open thanks to a partnership between the City Council and the Newcastle College, which decides to share the building with the library service. As stated by the staff, the library was saved from closure thanks to a partnership between Newcastle City Council and Newcastle College, but also thanks to a great mobilisation of the local community and the support offered by volunteers of Friends of High Heaton, who work in the library:

> "The library resulted from a partnership between the City Council, the Newcastle College... that manages also the building, and the Friends of High Heaton. Volunteers of the Friends of High Heaton come on Saturday to help the library staff" (High Heaton staff 2016).

A similar situation happened for the old Walker Library, which was moved in 2013 after a short period of closure as part of Newcastle City Council's budget strategy (Brown 2014; Swan 2014). As stated by a member of the staff:

> "The threat of closure has been already contested in March 2013 by the local community... Residents struggled to keep the library open" (Walker staff 2016).

The active mobilisation of local people for defending their library is also an evidence of the positive value assigned by local communities to libraries and their role in contributing towards social cohesion and local identity. Blakelaw was kept open thanks to the Blakelaw Ward Community Partnership (BWCP), which now owns the building. In 2013 after the announce of closure of the local library the BWCP negotiated with the

council to keep the library open (Stockdale 2015) by renting some spaces for office use and locating the post-office within the library. As stated by a member of the staff:

"[if the library were closed] people would fight to keep the library open because it's such a lovely place [...]. The library was going to be closed three years ago but they got funding to keep the library open and... there was a threat of closure again because all the libraries had cuts... They found that moving the post-office in was another source of income able to keep the library open, but also all the different events in the centre.. So they got extra funding to keep the library open..." (Blakelaw staff 2016)

Even in the case of a library that is not directly threatened from closure, the staff is confident that the local people would strongly react against a potential closure because the library represents for them a constitutive part of the community:

"A lot of people would be very upset if the library closed. We will probably have a petition also involving local people. Something like the occupation Of South London Library in Protest Against Closure in April or the Protest against the closure of Darlington Library in March 2016 (Outer West staff 2016).

Although the libraries were kept open they were forced to reduce or change opening times. Since the 9th of May Outer West Library reduced its service from 54 hours to 23 hours p.w.; Newburn Library from 35.75 to 18.5 hours p.w.; Walker Library from 43 to 23 hours p.w.. Even though Blakelaw Library has increased its service from 16 to 19 hours, it is now open only in the afternoon. This caused some negative consequences, in fact, regular users complain because they cannot use PCs and the Internet early in the morning in particular to work and to search job. This can also cause consequences on the use of libraries in relation to the impossibility for some users (such as for example elderly people) to come to the library in the afternoon. All libraries, except High Heaton, open after 10am. In the case of Blakelaw library, the new opening times (only in the afternoon from 2pm to 6 or 5 pm) represent an obstacle for elderly and children from primary schools:

"I think that a lot of elderly people won't come in the afternoon because I think that when it gets too late in the afternoon they don't like to be out, you know... But it's a shame that they couldn't keep it open in the morning... I think that a lot of elderly people are out in the morning and not in the afternoon [...] Changing in open hours effects on elderly. Elderly people shared a couple of small groups in the morning... I think that the school will find difficult to come and in the afternoon" (Blakelaw staff 2016).

At the same time, some informal activities continue to take place in the spaces of library. In fact, since the library shares an open space with a post-office, even when the library is closed, people can use the library spaces:

"There is the coffee morning which is on Tuesday morning [...]. The library used to be open about 40 hours per week and Saturday morning,.... But now it's just open 2 to 6 every day, and 2 to 5 on Friday and on Saturday. The coffee morning is on Tuesday morning... to keep the continuity" (Blakelaw staff 2016).

Some libraries were kept open thanks to the collaboration between the City Council and other bodies such as for example Newcastle College. This collaboration allows the two partners to share facilities and, as suggested by Moxley and Abbas (2016), not only this might be a response to cutbacks, but it may encourage innovation in the face of limited resources. In fact, it was observed that those libraries which share spaces and buildings with others are more likely to be frequented thanks to the number of people who daily access the building also for other purposes. A number of initiatives resulted from new collaborations such as for example the "Skills Hub" which provides training, career and job advice at the City Library. The project resulted from a partnership between Newcastle City Council, Connexions, National Careers Service, Newcastle Futures, Generation NE, Newcastle College and Newcastle City Learning (see https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/skills-hub).

Another significant initiative is represented by the collaboration between the City Council and Your Home Newcastle which manages council homes on behalf of Newcastle City Council. The resulting "Your Homes

Newcastle Digital Champion Pilot Project" aims to train council tenants to become Digital Champions who in turn will be trainers within their community. This project is part of a comprehensive and long-term strategy to increase digital literacy in order to facilitate the access to council services and improve people life chances. In fact, the original idea was to involve only council tenants, but the City Council decided to involve public libraries in the project in order to attract a greater number of people. This project testifies the attempt of the City Council to create synergies between libraries and social policies aimed at both tackling exclusion (Linley 2000; Muddiman 2000) and reinforcing the educational vocation of libraries in relation to local needs (Vincent, 2000; Dutch, 2000). As a consequence, this learning model is also expected to promote inclusion by creating favourable conditions for people to success.

In this direction, social inclusion refers to the capacity of individuals, families, and communities to participate in society by simultaneously taking advantages for achieving their goals without compromising the collective ones, also in relation to their economic resources, employment, health, education, housing, recreation, culture, and civic engagement (Warschauer 2003). This brings us to reflect on the role of local public libraries in Newcastle, which have the potential to advance people well-being by providing safety places in which people can fulfil their information, education, cultural and social needs (Moxley and Abbas 2016). Public libraries in Newcastle tend to apply a quadruple helix model (see figure 1) in which social inclusion is a start point and a consequence of the activities promoted by libraries. This produces a virtuous cycle of social inclusion in which all elements are strongly interconnected: libraries provide infrastructures that represent a first level of inclusion. These are the basis for users to access information and knowledge, to acquire new skills, and to create the conditions for increasing their ability to achieve their goals and be more integrated within a society which requires high degree of specialisation. In turn skills allow users to efficiently use infrastructures to achieve their goals and increase their well-being (second level of social inclusion). Then, the acquired ability to achieve goals empowers users and pushes them to increase their skills and better use infrastructures to improve their position in the society (third level of social inclusion). Social inclusion simultaneously represents a final goal and a generator of a new innovation process based on infrastructures, new skills and goals.

Conclusions

Libraries play a primary role for the neighbourhoods in which they operate, in particular if these are characterised by high degree of deprivation. Library users are a mixture of people, but they use the library service for different reasons. It is difficult to identify a specific and unique role of libraries because they offer multifunctional services. However, it is possible to identify the social inclusion as the main goal of public libraries, upon which all the other sub-goals depend. This article highlighted how libraries have been increasingly becoming target oriented and how their value is differently perceived by diverse categories of users: for elderly people they are places to relax, enrich culture, and socialise; for younger people they are also an important resource to access the computers and the Internet; for all users, and in particular for children, they are "learning arenas".

For all users they are places in which support is provided to search a job and find useful information. Libraries in Newcastle are based on a quadruple helix model in which infrastructures, skills, and ability to achieve goals are both results and generators of social inclusion. This virtuous cycle indicates a constant evolution of the role of libraries from passive (in relation to their public service character) to proactive institutions, which struggle to involve different kind of users to increase their skills, awareness and capabilities as required by society to be socially included. However, public libraries cannot successfully accomplish this mission alone in relation to a number of factors in particular related to the availability of economic and human resources and competences. This is the reason why the partnership model is becoming vital for developing long-term social inclusion strategy.

Newcastle City Council has already moved some steps in this direction by collocating public libraries with other services managed by different actors, organising some activities/training addressed to disadvantaged people, offering career and job advice services. However, a greater collaboration between libraries and social providers might not only provide information and connect people with social services, but also transform libraries themselves in places in which professional social workers operate. This would produce positive effects in terms of enhancing participation of vulnerable people while increasing their cultural heritage.

The public library approach is slowly shifting from a top-down scheme, which provides an universal and generalised service, to a bottom up logic, which takes into account specific needs of their patrons. One the one hand, local public libraries have a privileged position in assessing local needs, thanks to the small size of the contexts in which they operate, and this contributes towards making them the core around which local communities revolve. On the other hand, the evolution of libraries towards the adoption of proactive and participatory approaches is still hampered by a sword of Damocles represented by the risk of closure. The decreasing availability of economic resources remains the biggest threat for libraries, which sometimes are kept open thanks to the work of volunteers. While the involvement of local people in actively working at the library might increase their participation in community life (in particular elderly), the dependency on volunteers increases the uncertainty about the future of smaller libraries in relation to their availability.

In this direction, enlarging the network of partners (in particular operating in the social sector) might also produce positive effects by reducing costs of management and distributing activities among the libraries (avoiding an overconcentration in the main City Library). In fact, the continuous reduction or change of opening times makes the service discontinuous and generates discontent among local people who, after protesting, might decide not to use the library service anymore.

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