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Libraries, the Public Sphere, and Democracy 2.0

Libraries have played an important role in democracy throughout the years. Libraries, besides housing and preserving collections, hold an important place in the public sphere by organizing and providing access to information to all citizens regardless of socio-economic status. In recent years, socio-technical developments including Web 2.0 have had profound influence on democratic societies. Will the explosion of information available on the Internet marginalize the role of libraries in the public sphere? Should socio-technical developments change the democratic roles of libraries?

This paper provides brief introduction to the role of libraries in democracies and an overview of the role of libraries in the public sphere. While the technology and the amount of information available on the Web has caused librarians to need to reevaluate the purpose of libraries, especially public libraries, this paper argues that the library's core mission and role in the public sphere is just as, if not more, important in the age of Democracy 2.0.

Keywords: Library; Public Libraries; Democracy; Public Sphere; Democracy 2.0; Librarianship

The Democratic Role of Libraries

Athenian democracy is believed to have grown as powerful as it did because the citizens of Athens were more informed and made better decisions than their counterparts (Hanson 2009). Many founding fathers of American democracy likewise believed access to information was a cornerstone of a successful democratic society. Thomas Jefferson, the principal writer of the Declaration of Independence and third President of the United States said that given a choice between government or newspapers, he would not hesitate to choose newspapers (Jefferson & Peterson 1993,

p. 78). James Madison, a political philosopher who became the fourth president of the United States, believed that "A popular Government without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives" (Madison & Hunt 1990 p. 103). As professor Sue Curry Jansen writes, classic models of democracy were based on 'the assumption that knowledge is a social resource, a public utility, or a collective good' (Jansen 1988, p. 167). What institutions enable the citizenry to acquire this public, collective good known as knowledge? For Jansen, it is public libraries that provide this foundation.

Since the first public library in Athens opened in 332 BC (Cornell 1989), libraries have played an integral role in informing society. This role, a reoccurring theme in library and information science literature (Buschman 2007), has long been used to justifying expenditures on public libraries. In 1849 prominent American librarian Charles Coffin Jewett, while working as the librarian of the Smithsonian Institute, identified several social benefits of public libraries including 'an indirect benefit to the nation in the form of greater economic productivity and a better quality of life' (Jewett & Harris 1975 p. 82). While at the Smithsonian Institute he strongly pushed for the Smithsonian's library to become a national library. While Jewett was ultimately not successful in this effort, he had an everlasting effect on the library profession in America. In 1853 he was one of five men who planned the first library conference held in North America and was unanimously elected its president. While the conference did not directly lead to a

permanent library association as Jewett hoped (in part because of American Civil War) it could still be viewed as a forerunner of the American Library Association, which was established some twenty-three years later in 1876 (Wiegand 2002).

Following his tenure as the library director at the Smithsonian, Jewett went on to become the library director at the Boston Public Library – the first free public library located in North America.¹ The beliefs of Jewett and other librarians of his time have shaped North American librarianship to this day. Internationally, libraries and archives play an important role in collecting, preserving, and providing public access to books. However, libraries do more than serve as warehouses of information. Besides housing and preserving collections, libraries hold an important place in the public sphere by organizing collections with the principle of unfettered access to information by everyone including the underprivileged. The 1875 Annual Report of the Boston Public Library said that ‘the sole relation of a town library to the general interest is as a supplement to the school system; as an instrumentality of higher instruction to all classes of people’ (Boston Public Library 1875, p. 17). Despite the apparent current emphasis of many public library collections on recreational reading, professional North American librarians continue to believe in this democratic purpose of libraries.

One of the main catalysts for the rapid increase of public libraries throughout the English speaking world in the late 1800s and early 1900s was Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie spent more than \$55 million of his fortune to build some 2,500 libraries in communities throughout the United States, Canada, the British Isles, and elsewhere. Of

these libraries, 1,689 were built in the United States at an estimated equivalent of \$3 billion U.S. dollars (Wooden 2006, p. 4). Carnegie's main condition for providing funding was that the community agrees to 'accept and maintain it as a public institution' (Carnegie 1968, p. 38). This condition was to ensure ongoing community support of the libraries he funded.

Carnegie had two main reasons for donating his wealth to public libraries. The first was that he believed 'libraries added to the meritocratic nature of America' and that any person with the inclination and desire could educate themselves (Lorenzen 1999, p. 75). Carnegie's second reason was that, as an immigrant himself, he felt immigrants needed to acquire knowledge about American culture to become full participants in society and that libraries enabled this to happen. These educational and cultural roles are still prevalent in today's libraries around the globe. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Section on Public Libraries wrote that public libraries play an important role in 'a democratic society by giving the individual access to a wide and varied range of knowledge, ideas and opinions' (IFLA Section on Public Libraries, 2001, p. 2).

It should not be overlooked, however, that libraries serve other democratic interests besides the cultural and the educational. They also, by their mere existence, 'potentially verify (or refute) claims to authority' in making resources available, continuing the process of informed debate, which is at the core of the public sphere and of democracy (Buschman 2005).

Multiple Roles of Public Libraries

The library and information science literature has numerous articles that discuss the roles of public libraries in society. Since the time when free public libraries were founded, librarians 'with almost missionary zeal' have invoked the power of libraries and the printed word to lead readers in their upward 'ascent to the higher realms of knowledge' (Molz & Dain 1999, p. 12). However, as noted previously, this is not the only role they serve. Libraries, especially public libraries, often serve a multiplicity of roles. Librarians point to circulation statistics as one measure of the library's value to funding agencies and professional organizations. But loaning the latest best selling novel or blockbuster movie, serving the recreational interests of the citizenry, is not necessarily the same role as serving the library's democratic and educational roles to society.

Managing these multiple roles of the public library has been a struggle since the middle part of the nineteenth century governments first started to fund public libraries through taxation. Massachusetts in 1848 became the first state in the United States to allow municipalities to raise taxes for public libraries. The Public Libraries Act in 1850 did the same for Great Britain (Glynn 2004, p. 8). This conflict between serving democratic and recreational purposes has been noted by many in the library profession throughout the years and 'the demand versus quality debate [...] in all probability will never be completely resolved' (Molz & Dain 1999, p. 32).

Despite this conflict, public libraries have served a democratic purpose since their inception. For example, in the early part of the twentieth century funding of public libraries in the United States increased their activities in the area of Americanization of new immigrants (Glynn 2004, p. 14). This role continues in American public libraries to this day with libraries providing access to information along with programs such as English as a Second Language. This is not an uniquely American phenomena, the Ottawa Public Library (2010) in Canada offers literacy classes and supports second language classes in both French and English, and the Médiathèque Intercommunale in Ouest Provence, France offers various cultural programs alongside programs for helping people get jobs such as resume writing services (Pouchol 2008).

Libraries and The Public Sphere

German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas wondered how and why democratic governments grew out of earlier closed political systems that were based on the divine rights of kings. Librarian and scholar John Buschman (2005) explains that Habermas's answer to this question is that a 'sphere of non-governmental opinion making' developed from the mercantile economies of northern Europe. As people gathered in new urban places, such as the coffee houses of the day, political conversations took place. These were assisted, or informed, by the intellectual press of the day. This caused two crucial things to happen:

1. Opinion was discussed and recorded outside of a close group of friends and family.
2. The principle was established that in order for the government's power to be accepted as legitimate, its proceedings needed to be public.

The public sphere thus, according to Habermas, is 'first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed' (Habermas 1974, p. 59).

In order for the public sphere to operate effectively all citizens need to be guaranteed access and they need to be informed. Libraries can, and have over the past 150 years, played an important role in this. Buschman identified four ways that libraries, in their existence in democracies, enact many of the aspects of Habermas's public sphere:

- By organizing and providing unfettered access to information, 'libraries house and further rational discourse' (Buschman 2005).
- Librarianship 'enacts the principle of critique and rational argumentation through the commitment to balanced collections, preserving them over time, and furthering inclusion through active attempts to make collections and resources reflect historical and current intellectual diversity' (Buschman 2005).
- Libraries 'potentially verify (or refute) claims to authority in making current and retrospective organized resources available to check the bases of a thesis, law, book, article, policy etc. continuing the process of debate which lies at the heart of the public sphere and democracy' (Buschman 2005).

- Libraries seek to provide access 'to information and education more widely and universally available' including to those who would otherwise be un- or underserved. (Buschman 2005)

Buschman argues that libraries have a fundamental connection to the needs of democracy and 'when we debate information and communication and the future of libraries, we're debating democracy by other means' (Buschman 2005). Librarians should keep their democratic role in mind when making decisions involving the procurement and preservation of materials. Informed debate is essential for both education and democracy, and libraries play an important role in both.

Libraries situated between the government and the public

Libraries are in an interesting position, lying somewhere between the public and the government. This leads to challenges to their collection and acquisitions policies. While most libraries will embrace the concept of neutrality in their collections policies, with limited time and limited budgets, it is necessary for libraries to make decisions about which type of materials they should acquire and keep. This can be over-complicated by their role as a government agency. As Abrar Haider points out, although the public library's mission may be to provide free and open access to information, they are funded by government institutions and 'there is the potential for information to be "controlled" by governments by being tied to funding' (Haider 2009).

Politicians have occasionally sought to influence library acquisitions and collections policies. Nowhere was this more evident than in the mid 1990's at the Municipal Library of Orange located in southern France. Jacques Bompard, a member of the right-wing National Front (*Front National*, FN) party, was elected as mayor of Orange and quickly turned his sights on the public library. The FN attempted to use the public library as a way of stifling opposition viewpoints and spreading their own cultural and political messages. The mayor's office in Orange set up a selection committee in the Mayor's office to oversee new library acquisitions to combat what Bompard felt was the ostracism of materials that contained right-wing thought. A new library administration put into place by Bompard also started to offer public programs that followed FN's political agenda. Librarians throughout France, and indeed the world, cried foul. They denounced the FN's ideological censorship and argued for intellectual freedom. Whether one agrees with the FN that they were 'simply applying democratic principles to library collections because librarians failed to do so' (Kibbee 1993, p. 231) or if they believe the FN was engaged in ideological censorship, the incident in Orange brings the mission and role of the public library in a democracy to the fore-front.

Following this incident, the Association des Bibliothécaires Français (ABF) came up with a set of principles that included the call for librarians to develop library 'collections that enable citizens to better understand public issues, and to resist influence from political, religious, union, or social pressure groups.' (Kibbee 2003, p. 234). While the severity of the situation in Orange attracted the attention of librarians around the globe, and may be uncommon in Western democracies, it is not at all a unique case. While the direct

political influence in library collections that happened in Orange may be rare, a quick search on “library censorship books” on Google's news search shows numbers of challenges to library acquisitions on moral and political grounds in Canada, United States, Malta, China, and elsewhere. Librarians need to recognize their unique positions and put in policies and procedures that maintain collections that, as the ABF called for, enable citizens to understand political issues. With proper policies and procedures, challenges to the libraries role as curator of information for the public good will be less likely to succeed.

Although libraries serve the information needs of the democracy and hold important roles in the public sphere, the long-term effects that the explosion of information on the Internet will have on libraries are not immediately evident. As more information is made available online, will the democratic role of libraries be marginalized? If librarians and the people who run parent organizations of libraries, such as local governments and universities, neglect to keep these democratic roles in mind when making decisions regarding libraries, this is a distinct possibility. However, society can afford the public mission and the democratic good that libraries can offer and librarians need to ensure that potential is preserved (Buschman 2003).

Libraries and Democracy 2.0

An exact definition of Web 2.0 is elusive, but the most important difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is that in Web 2.0 'any participant can be a content creator' while in Web 1.0 the vast majority of users are only consumers of content (Cormode &

Krishnamurthy 2008). Socio-technical developments including Web 2.0 had profound influence on democracy and elections over the past decade. The use of Web 2.0 on relation to politics and government has been referred to using various terms including E-Democracy, Government 2.0, and Democracy 2.0. According to Michael Friis (2009) the premise of Democracy 2.0 is that citizens can use Web 2.0 tools and techniques to enter the political fray and participate in democracy in ways reminiscent of the ancient Greeks. Friis identified two overarching objectives of Democracy 2.0.

The first objective of Democracy 2.0 identified by Friis is to enable direct oversight of politicians independent of the press. This objective is similar to Habermas's public sphere in that it involves ordinary citizens coming together to create public opinion. Where it differs is that for Habermas, media such as newspapers and television shows were necessary to have an informed republic. For Habermas, the free press was important in creating informed opinion. In fact, when discussing Web 2.0 during a lecture in Germany, Habermas (translated into English) said that while the 'Internet can have a subversive effect on intellectual life in authoritarian regimes' the less formal networked forms of interaction made possible on the Web 'weakens the achievements of traditional media.' Habermas went on to explain 'The price we pay for the growth in egalitarianism offered by the Internet is the decentralised access to unedited stories. In this medium, contributions by intellectuals lose their power to create a focus' (Aslma & Erikson 2009 p.3). As can be shown by these two points of view, it remains unclear at this time if the editorial controls that newspapers and other media outlets such as television and radio stations use can be completely bypassed in delivering information about current events and political issues that is necessary for creating an informed

public opinion. Regardless of whether or not the traditional media controls can be successfully circumvented when providing political information to the public, it appears evident that Democracy 2.0 would enable public opinion to be formed independent of the editorial pages of newspapers such as *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*. This can now happen in a way that might not have been possible thirty or so years ago when Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky published their essay about the mass media propaganda mill in which they lamented that the mass media allowed the powerful to 'fix the premise of discourse' and decide what the general population is 'allowed to see, here, and think about' (Herman & Chomsky 1988, p. 14).

Public libraries have traditionally provided access to information to all of the citizenry.² As debate moves online, will the library's role of supplier of the information necessary for the democratic good be eroded as newspaper circulation has been eroded in the United States? One of the most obvious roles for libraries in Democracy 2.0, which public librarians have whole-heartedly embraced, is to provide Internet access to people that would otherwise not have it. There are other important roles for libraries. As the amount of information increases, the problems with information access may change, but they do not dissipate. While much of the world's scholarly and political writings are now created in digital format, they are often not freely available via Open Access or other methods. Libraries are in a position to provide access to a large number of online resources that only a small percentage of the population would be able to afford on their own.

There are additional challenges for libraries and society even for the freely available materials. Who is going to preserve the information for future scholars and historians if not librarians and archivists? While libraries may not be necessary to gather freely available online resources for immediate and near-term consumption, libraries and other organizations are necessary to provide independent methods to search for and evaluate the information. While some may argue that corporations such as Google who provide Internet search engines can accomplish this, there appears to be an inherent risk in relying on organizations whose existence is not for the purpose of creating and informed public that can participate in the public sphere. Google's informal corporate motto is "Don't Be Evil" but ask entrepreneurs Adam and Shivaun Raff if they live up to that and they will tell you no. They say that Google suddenly dropped their company, Foundem, from the top Google search results and then later put the spotlight on their own shopping comparison site (Brad 2010). If Google's supposedly objective search algorithms can suddenly place a competitor in the back pages of search results where they will never be found, how can librarians be sure that the search results are really objective?

While the amount of freely available information is growing at an extraordinary rate, for all practical purposes, access to that information is controlled by fewer and fewer corporate entities. For example, Google has over 65 per cent of the Internet search market (Frommer 2009), and has scanned over ten million books. This has not gone unnoticed by French President Nicolas Sarkozy who has pledged almost \$1.1 billion towards digitizing French literary works. Sarkozy said 'We won't let ourselves be stripped of our heritage to the benefit of a big company, no matter how friendly, big or

American it is' (Sayre 2009). Sarkozy, the Ruffs, and others are concerned about large corporations, who are not answerable to the citizenry, being the gatekeepers of information. Librarians should be as well.

Friis's second objective of Democracy 2.0 is to involve citizens directly in the legislative process. Governments pass many laws, and while a few catch national (or even international) headlines such as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (better known as Health Care Reform) in the United States, there are many more bills and laws that do not make headlines because they affect few people. Democracy 2.0 can make these bills, the 'Long Tail of legislation' (Friis 2002, p. 198) if you will, discoverable to allow for debate in the public sphere. Libraries here too can play an important role. By providing access to not only the text and information about the bills, but also providing filters and categorizing information, libraries can facilitate informed debates. Librarians can also answer reference questions, in a neutral, impartial manner, that organizations and persons lobbying for or against a bill would be unlike to provide.

While Democracy 2.0 has its supporters there are some skeptics as well. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have had a brought attention to grassroots democratic movements in places such as Iran. However, thus far, when governments have consulted the people in online forums such as when United States President Barack Obama's Office of Science and Technology Policy asked for ideas about making government more transparent, some of the top suggestions, such as the legalization marijuana and the legitimacy of President Obama's birth certificate, had very little if any relationship to transparency (Giridharadas 2009). Eric Schmidt, Chief Executive Officer

(CEO) of Google said in October 2008 that the Internet is a cesspool filled with bad information (Ives 2008). Schmidt went on to explain that brands are part of the solution to this problem. Schmidt was mostly referring to corporate brands but this concept applies to libraries as well. A 2005 report to the membership of the OCLC Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) showed that the 'Library Brand' is viewed globally as a trustworthy source of quality information (De Rosa 2005). Although the Library Brand at the time of OCLC's report, and most likely today, is dominant in the category of books, moving forward it is reasonable to believe that libraries are in a position to capitalize on this good will in other arenas as well. Librarians, as experts in information, can help the citizenry find relevant, trustworthy information about a particular cause or topic.

Politicians and political parties have used Web 2.0 in many ways. One of the first campaigns to bring Web 2.0 technologies into the United States' presidential elections was the 2004 campaign of Howard Dean. Dean's success in raising awareness, and money, with his *Blog for America*, caught everyone's attention. In 2006, the 'blogging revolution' came to Canadian politics during their federal elections (Small 2008, p. 85). This trend has continued across the Atlantic. By 2007 local activists, grassroots organizations, and party branches in Norway established a Web 2.0 presence, although at the time part Web site managers 'indicted a more professional "Web 1.0" mindset' (Kalnes 2009, p.67). However, by the time of the 2009 Norwegian elections, most political parties had at least a hybrid, a "Web 1.5" site which is a mixture of Web 1.0 top-down approaches and Web 2.0 bottom up approaches to the World Wide Web (Dron & Anderson 2009).

As more and more politicians and political parties move content and discussion to either Web 1.5 or Web 2.0 platforms, what roles and responsibilities do libraries have?

Libraries, in their democratic mission, need to provide timely access to political information. This means providing computers with Internet connections, but it also means providing links to information and computer and information literacy courses that help people use these platforms that they may not be familiar with. Providing links to political Web presences may be even more important on the local scale than the national scale because citizens are less likely to be aware that such information exists about local politics.

Libraries and archives have another important role to play in this arena. They preserve trusted, unaltered, versions of the political information for the future for historians, and indeed, for future elections. Imagine a local mayor having a Web presence today. In ten or twenty years she may be running for governor, parliament, or even president. Would not her thoughts on political issues as mayor be important to the electorate? The Library of Congress has acquired the entire archive of public tweets made in the micro-blogging Web site, Twitter. While tweets about cats playing with iPads might not be important to future generations, the tweet Barack Obama made when he won the U.S. Presidential election is historic in nature (Dooley 2010). Although some experts think the effect of using of Twitter for organizing protests following the 2009 Iranian elections has been overstated, the tweets and other social media postings in Iran and the earlier "Twitter Revolution" in Moldova played an important role in informing the world what was happening (Schleifer 2009) and will provide valuable firsthand accounts to scholars in the future. While most libraries are not in a position to capture the whole archive of

Twitter, they can play an important role in archiving Web 2.0 (and indeed even Web 1.0) content that relates to local politics.

Public Libraries can also serve other needs in the digital world. For example, by providing infrastructure and support for local digitization projects, libraries can be a host to local history repositories. Libraries have long 'been places to preserve and provide access to the historical and cultural record' (Werle & Fox 2007) of their communities and this role should not go away even if different skills, tools, and services are needed in the Web 2.0 world.

Future of Libraries

The future of all libraries, especially public libraries, is in doubt. While currently there is not a mass movement to close down public libraries, there are many efforts, some successful, to drastically cut library funding in the United States. While this is in part a natural reaction to the current economic climate where all government services are on the chopping board, there may be more to it. Do politicians, like Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey, who recently proposed a 74 percent reduction in state funding to libraries (Osborne 2010), appreciate the importance of public libraries in the public sphere and in democracies in general? Do voters appreciate it? Do they even know about it? Has concentrating on overall user statistics to show the value of the public library, instead of a 'candid assessment of the usefulness of libraries' (Skyes 1987, p.

87) that takes into account the nature of materials borrowed and services offered, help disguise the library's role in democracy from many?

The proliferation of information on the Internet, the growth of the mega bookstores such as Barnes and Nobles, and questionable economic times has placed libraries at a crossroads. Many librarians in an effort to show their worth have tried to compete with chain bookstores, Amazon.coms, and the Walmarts of the world. They have done this by adding fancy coffee shops, concentrating on the latest best sellers, and implementing new library marketing techniques. Twenty years ago, librarian Stephen Akey (1990) described this trend in libraries as "McLibraries." While this strategy may attract some additional clientèle, as a non-profit government organization, on the surface it does not appear to be sustainable. Barnes & Noble can install coffee shops and expensive seating because they make a profit selling books, videos, and other merchandise. Will the McDonaldization of libraries, while enabling short-term gains, cause lasting long-term harm to the Library Brand, and perhaps to the institution of public libraries themselves? This is a very real and longstanding concern by some in the library world and the 'commoditization and "customer" orientation of librarianship has recently been challenged by a number of activist scholars' (Epperson 2006). Despite these concerns, reports such as OCLC's *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* and Public Agenda's *Long Overdue* show the brand is still strong. The president of Public Agenda wrote about her organization's report and said it showed most Americans believe 'we absolutely need public libraries to provide [...] information to anyone who needs it' (Wooden 2006, p.3). Public Agenda's report also showed that

while many government agencies are seen as untrustworthy, libraries appear to be practically immune from this sense of distrust.

The immunity for distrust and belief that libraries are important for democracy may not, however, last forever and may not lead to continued support of the public library. As seen in New Jersey and elsewhere around the globe, government budgets are under attack. If the library cannot make an argument for its share of the funding, library funding will be drastically cut or eliminated. With efforts from private corporations such as Google to digitize the world's information, politicians and citizens alike may not see the need to continue funding public libraries, even if they are beloved and trusted, when faced with huge government budget deficits and competing priorities such as schools, health care, roads, police, and prisons.

While the economy will most likely turn around at some point, it would not be wise presume that any funding cuts made during this economic down-turn will come back even when the economy recovers. The current "McLibraries" oriented method of thinking about librarianship 'makes the library more oriented towards current demand than towards what they could and should supply in society' (Kann-Christensen & Andersen 2009, p. 210). As budget pressures increase it is unclear why the government should tax the public for the recreational pursuits of others. As the trustees of the Boston Public Library put it 135 years ago, 'no part of the duty of a municipality to raise taxes for the amusement of people, unless the amusement is tolerably clearly seen to be conducive to higher ends of good citizenship' (Boston Public Library 1875, p. 17).

Although society has accepted the recreational role of libraries, with vast amounts of information available online and relatively inexpensive books available online or at the local chain bookstore, there is no guarantee this will continue, especially if the economic situation worsens. It is not a new phenomenon that library policy makers have confused 'means with ends, or services with purpose' (Waller 2008, p. 381) but to continue to do so may have catastrophic effects. Relying on economic instead of democratic terms, and following business models instead of public service models, the public library is in danger of losing its nature as a public institution. Libraries 'simply cannot be true to [their] raison d'être and [their] democratic role while unthinkingly and enthusiastically embracing an economic one' (Buschman 2004, p. 42). By relying in economic terms libraries also run the risk of outsourcing core operations such, as purchasing, processing, and selection functions as has happened in a number of locations including the Hawai'i State Public Library System in 1996 (Knuth & Bair-Mundy 1998).

However there is some good news; a bit of a silver lining in the dark gray clouds. Citizens still feel that public libraries are important for democracies. It may not be too late for librarians and supporters of libraries to start making the case more broadly that the library is an important cornerstone in a democracy. This can be done with impassioned letters to editors and to political leaders. Opinion pieces such as library trustee Kate McCaffery's (2010) writings on the proposed library cuts in New Jersey that emphasize that 'Public libraries are at the heart of American democracy' and that they 'promote the free exchange of ideas and expression' will have a longer lasting effect than selling someone a cup of coffee and a biscotti, no matter how delicious they might be. This is not to say that public libraries should totally abandon the latest best seller

but they need to do a better job balancing it with the more democratic roles of the library.

Conclusion

Should socio-technical developments change the democratic roles of libraries? This paper argues that the library's core mission and role in the public sphere is just as, if not more, important in the age of Democracy 2.0. Libraries still have an important role in the public sphere to ensure that unfettered access to balanced collections of information is available to all. However, in order to continue to have public support, libraries must retain their legitimacy as important democratic institutions. Market forces from outside of the library realm are increasingly competing in the information space, combined with governmental budget deficits, places libraries in a perilous situation. However, surveys of the general population show that libraries are seen as trustworthy and receive much good will so it is not too late to act. As Kann-Christensen and Andersen (2009 pp. 221-222) explain, in order to maintain legitimacy, libraries should 'argue primarily for their mission in society and focus on [aiding] users in developing identities and social and political consciousness, rather than promoting efficiency.' If libraries can successfully make the argument that libraries still play important educational, informational, and cultural roles in democratic society, the public will continue to support, and fund, them as an important institutions in the public sphere.

Notes

1. There is a lot of disagreement about what was truly the first free public library. Much of this controversy stems from various definitions of what constitutes a free public

library. However, because of its size and establishment just following the first act in North America allowing public taxation for free public libraries, it is safe to say that the Boston Public Library was at least 'the first large public library' (Boston Public Library 2010).

2. While this is the ideal, it is not entirely accurate. Some public libraries have in fact excluded categories or classes of people over the years. For example, in the United States during the period of segregation some public libraries excluded African-Americans. In some cases colored public libraries were formed. For a history of one such library, see Cheryl Knott Malone's (1999) 'Autonomy and Accommodation: Houston's Colored Carnegie Library, 1907–1922.'

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