

Looking to the Future: Public Libraries in Romania and their Role in the Community

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Abstract: Public libraries have been serving their communities for a very long time, meeting the information and cultural needs of different categories of users and overpassing different changes in society, technology and, communication. The past few years have brought us many challenges such as the continuous advance of information and communication technologies or the recent COVID-19 pandemic. In this context many public libraries have understood the need to get prepared for the future and reshape their role and services and they have started to take a series of measures which could help them overcome future challenges. This research focus on public libraries in Romania, analysing their role in community in a time and a society where there is a decline of interest in education, culture, reading and these institutions are low-funded. This qualitative study conducted among librarians in Romania revealed which are the technological, economic, and social changes with an impact on their recent activity, their collaborations and partnerships and their future objectives.

Keywords: public libraries, role, objectives, challenges, collaborations, partnerships, Romania

Introduction

Public libraries provide access to information, knowledge, and cultural services for a diverse public with different needs, requirements and preferences. These needs and preferences are strongly influenced by the technological advance. In this way, the context in which public libraries function is in a continuous change and this leads to the need for updates and adaptation to new requirements and needs of the community served by these institutions.

According to the IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 2022 the public library is “the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and



information readily available to its users” (the IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 2022, p. 1).

Public libraries have experienced transformations over the years and as Bouaarmi (2024) notes the role of this type of institution has changed “from a passive institution to an active one by creating new interactive services and activities” (Bouaarmi, 2024, p. 1).

Recent challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic pushed things even farther and forced libraries, including public libraries, to move forward faster to more online services for their communities of users. Otike et al. (2021) mention not only a change of their role but also of their vision in providing new services and access to valid information as a consequence of this pandemic which affected people and institutions everywhere.

In Romania, according to article 22 in the Library Law, “Public libraries ensure equal access to information and documents necessary for the information, lifelong education and personal development of users” (Legea Bibliotecilor nr. 334, 2002, art. 22, pct. 2).

After overcoming the pandemic period for which no institution was really prepared, public libraries in Romania should focus now on their role in the community and consider future strategies which could allow them to adapt to change and face the challenges of the next years in a smooth way.

Starting from research conducted abroad regarding public libraries and their services, the future of these institutions, and the author’s interest triggered by the discussions of an International Reading Group debating on recent developments, trends, and practices of public libraries, the present study takes a look at public libraries in Romania and their current role in the local community through the eyes of specialists working in this type of institutions.

Public libraries and future challenges in the context of digital transformation

Public libraries function in an ever changing environment, providing access for the community to information and knowledge, lifelong learning programs and cultural activities.

In some countries such as Denmark, public libraries are the most used cultural institutions, having in this way a great impact on the public. The report of a study conducted by Roskilde Central Library mentions that “Public libraries are impactful in multiple ways” (Seismonaut & Roskilde Central Library, 2021, p. 8). This multifaceted impact on the users refers according to this study to public libraries being “a heaven in which users can immerse themselves and experience well-being”, giving users “perspective on life”, allowing them “to develop creativity” and helping “form and maintain communities” (Seismonaut & Roskilde Central Library, 2021). The same report identified the groups of services users can access in a public library: the collection, the events, the physical facilities and staff guidance (Seismonaut & Roskilde Central Library, 2021, p. 51).

Public libraries are seen as „essential platforms of social life” (Peterson, 2023), community centers and community builders, a function that „will help libraries to thrive in the future” (Scott, 2011, p.193).

The future of libraries around the world will be clearly shaped by technological advances and changes within user communities, including potential ones, and libraries will evolve towards agile and strategic thinking. An analysis of recent literature and research on the future of public libraries and their role in the community points out to some key aspects for their development such as future challenges, new technologies, especially artificial intelligence, digital transformation, social needs, economic aspects, learning, space, community engagement, partnerships, and others (Government of Ireland, 2023; CILIP, 2024; ALA, 2025).

Public libraries are in the attention of authorities in their countries and professional associations and other bodies. A framework for the future of public libraries can be identified starting from the findings of new studies and research by individual specialists, reports of library associations and other professional bodies, as well as surveys conducted by industry actors (Government of Ireland, 2023; CILIP, 2024; ALA, 2025; Crisp, 2025).

A recent report launched by CILIP and based on trends analysis, horizon-scanning, scenarios and critical analysis presents the challenges and opportunities in front of public libraries (Dwyer, 2024), an important conclusion being that “all library services should be thinking about the future”. The report is accompanied by a toolkit to help libraries prepare for the future. The report recognizes seven key areas for public libraries to act: visits, governance and leadership, finance, workforce, digital, value propositions, and social infrastructure. The three areas where efforts by public libraries could lead to the best results include digital access and social isolation, governance and leadership, and futures literacy (CILIP, 2024).

ALA’s Center for the Future of Libraries points out trends relevant to libraries and organizes them according to the following areas: Society, Technology, Education, the Environment, Politics (and Government), Economics, and Demographics (STEEPED) (ALA, 2025).

The digital transformation of society shapes the future of libraries too. According to Baker (2025), libraries need to adapt and adopt new technologies. Artificial intelligence and information literacy and digital skills will be among the most important aspects for libraries in the future, as well as provision of sustainable spaces and services. The library as a place for community and user needs will be at the base of future services development. In the future libraries will have to focus on hybrid spaces, collections, and services.

Baker writes about a shared vision of libraries, “a future where access to knowledge, preservation of culture, and fostering informed and engaged communities remain at the heart of the library’s mission” (Baker, 2025, p. 98).

Despite having the same mission, public libraries in different countries have a different approach and provide different services. Funding and priorities are different depending on the country and the authorities’ interest and this depends

according to Williams on “the social, economic, political, and cultural forces” in every country (Williams, 2025). Public libraries’ development advanced in parallel with the technological evolution. Social needs and technologies will shape the future evolution of public libraries and the services they offer.

Public libraries will continue to be “safe and welcoming community spaces, and (...) a core place to access information and knowledge” and partnerships will present important opportunities for public libraries to deliver their mission in the future (Williams, 2025, p. 240).

More flexible access to services and community engagement are among the most important aspects regarding the future of public libraries as indicated by a recent survey conducted by a technology products and services supplier for library spaces (Crisp, 2025).

Public libraries need to focus on how to adapt to technological and social change and face the challenges of the future. Analysts of the public libraries’ evolution state that besides flexibility, adaptability, new partnerships, etc. these institutions could also appeal to strategic planning and scenarios for the future in order to „navigate uncertain times” (Adams et al., 2023) such as those we live nowadays. A scenario-based approach could help libraries overcome the current challenges and prepare for the future. This approach has been discussed in the library literature and used by many libraries to discuss their future goals and analyse the world in which they will operate (Adams et al., 2023) but not all libraries are in the situation to use this method. However, it is possible for libraries in various contexts, no matter the size of their collection or community, their budget, etc. to analyse the social, technological and other aspects which influence their functioning and can impact the library’s activity in the future.

Challenges and future objectives of public libraries in Romania are explored within this study, starting from the current developments from abroad and the findings in recent research. In order to investigate how prepared for the future these libraries are and how they identify their current role in the local community, we conducted this study among specialists in this type of libraries in Romania.

Previous research on libraries in Romania (academic, public, and specialized libraries) revealed their desire to develop cooperation and partnerships with other organizations and implement new managerial processes such as knowledge management (Porumbeanu 2010; Porumbeanu Madge, 2009; 2012; Madge, 2010; 2013a; 2017), to improve the quality of access to information, know better their users’ needs and preferences, but also the abilities needed in the future by their specialists (Porumbeanu, 2003; 2009a; 2009b; Madge, 2016; Madge & Robu, 2019; 2020; Madge et al., 2023; Popescu & Madge, 2024a), to develop innovative services and library resources and also their relationships with their users (Porumbeanu & Madge; 2009; Haasion & Madge, 2020; Haasio et al., 2021; Popescu & Madge, 2024b). The findings in all these previous studies are relevant but only few focused on public libraries.

Objectives of the study

The aim of this study was to get a glimpse of the current positioning of public libraries in Romania in their local community but also in the face of current and future challenges in the digital society. More specifically, the objectives were:

- to investigate the current role of public libraries in the local community and the major aspects in society with an impact on their activity and
- to identify challenges librarians foresee in the near future with the potential to affect the functioning of public libraries, and future objectives of public libraries.

Materials and Methods

Study design

This was a qualitative study grounded on semi-structured interviews with public librarians in Romania. Following development of the study instrument, a pilot test was conducted with three public librarians from other institutions than those of the final participants which ensured the instrument's clarity, reliability, and validity.

Study participants

Fourteen librarians (corresponding to the inclusion criteria, full time employees, with indefinite employment contract) from different county and communal public libraries in Romania participated in this qualitative study.

We aimed for representation across various regions in the country in order to ensure diverse perspectives regarding the current and future role of public libraries in Romania, public library's role in community, the technological, economic, and social aspects with an impact on the public library activity, future challenges and future objectives.

Participant background

13 female librarians, and 1 male librarian (see Figure 1) participated in this study, most of them in the age groups of 44-50 and 51-60 (see Figure 2).

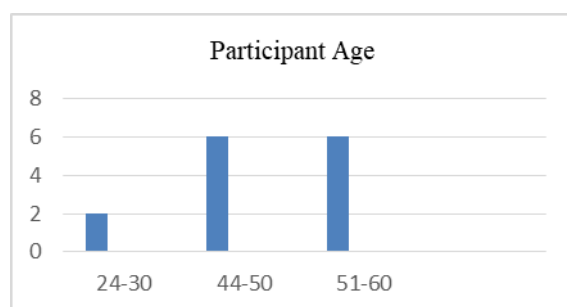


Figure 1 Participants age

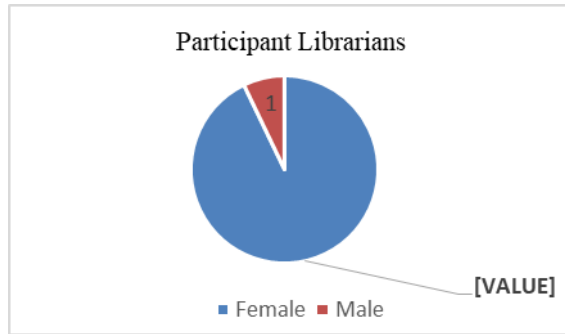


Figure 2 Librarians participating in the study

They were specialists with a different work experience in library, most of them having between 21 and 34 years of library experience (see Figure 3) and from different libraries in terms of staff, users, collections, etc.

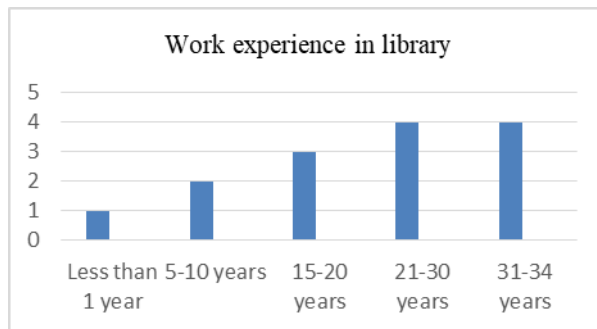


Figure 3 Work experience in library of the participants in the study

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected between 10 and 29 January 2024. Two weeks before the proper interviews, participants received open-ended questions by email, through which we wanted to find out the problems public libraries in various counties are facing and what the librarians' strategic and agile thinking is which corresponds to the socio-economic and demographic climate in their region.

After that, the interviews took place, and respondents were invited to answer similar open-ended questions regarding their opinion on possible changes in the library future role for the communities of active and potential users.

For our qualitative content analysis, we combined the automated method with the manual method for more reliability and accuracy. We used Leximancer, which performs both conceptual analysis and relational analysis: it measures the presence of concepts in the text, as well as how they are correlated. (Leximancer, 2021)

The text was initially introduced in Leximancer in order to see the reliable in vivo codes and their interrelations (see Figure 4). The in vivo codes can be found in the tables in Appendices (A, B, C, D). The principal codes in themes or broader subjects of conversation have been generated in different colors, depending on the respective coincidences. Diverse related clusters were then assigned to main codes, and the organized data obtained by generalization showed two final main themes (public libraries and future of public libraries) and six main codes (by grouping the same underlying idea or meaning, respectively role of public libraries, their current challenges, collaborations and partnerships, space, future challenges and future objectives).

The concept map (Figure 4) shows the relevant codes that are in relationship (the nodal points in the large coloured spheres are connected with lines), for example, the important role of public libraries for the respective community is observed from the point of view of contributing to the cultural development of the area and the role of libraries in that area-specific network of partnerships between libraries-local administration-hospitals-cultural institutions in the area.

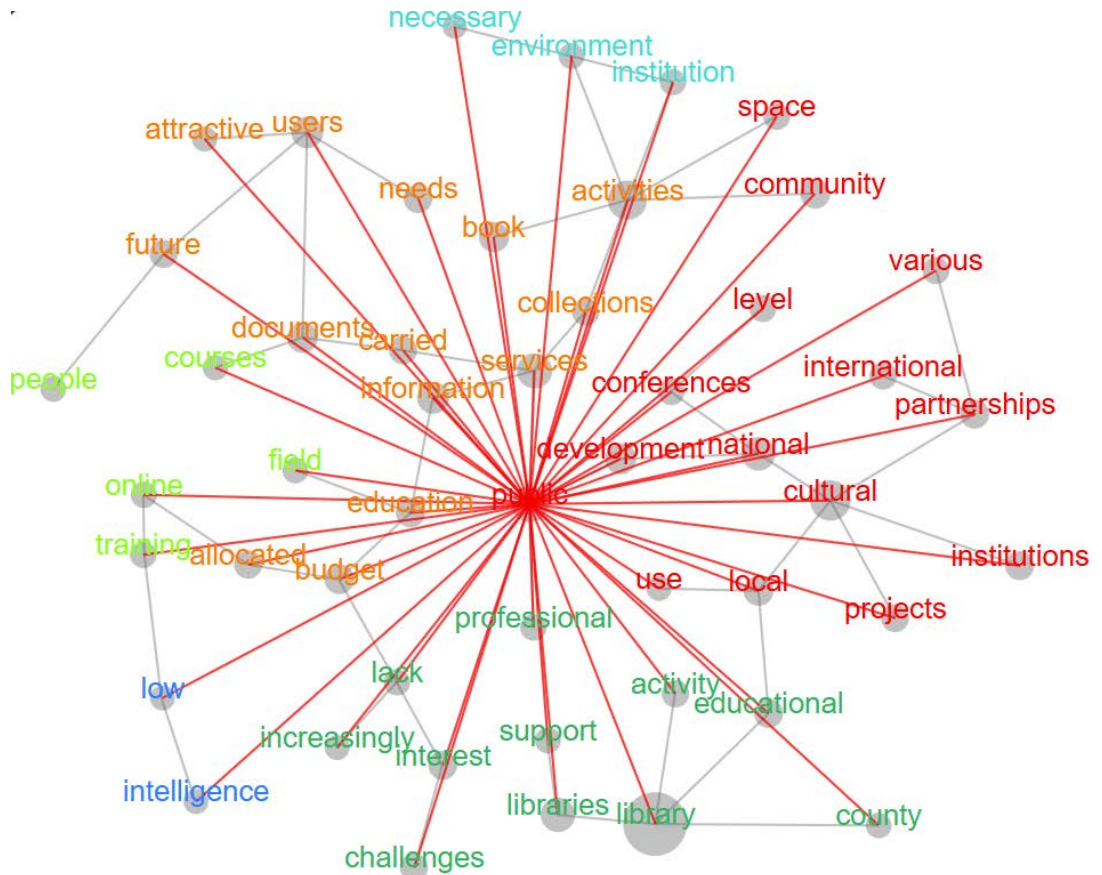


Figure 4 Concept map generated by Leximancer

Then, thematic analysis was conducted manually using the framework approach, following the steps outlined by Gale et al. (2013): familiarisation, coding, development of a thematic framework, and interpretation. Initially, the data were reviewed to gain familiarity, after which preliminary codes were generated by organising the data. These codes were then examined and grouped into broader themes. After the manual coding, the same themes came out as in the Leximancer map. The identified themes were reviewed and refined, with relevant data collated under each theme. Finally, the themes were clearly defined, and the findings were written up. The analytical framework is presented in Table 1.

All respondents stated that they expect developments and challenges in the context of information and communication technology progress, as well as due

to increasingly sophisticated and more focused requirements for rapid access to relevant information from various user groups. As observed from the pilot research and from the answers obtained initially by email, a synchronization of opinions in the same broad directions had already been reached and then generalized by obtaining saturation in the interview responses, through the same broad themes and concepts.

The graphics and the findings were showed to six participants with a higher position in their libraries and they were validated. Two participants provided some additional explanations to their first answers.

In the end, we showed all the results to the participants who confirmed that these were the ideas and aspects they had in mind when they answered the questions.

Theme	Code	Description
Public Libraries	Role	Positioning of public libraries Romania in their local community.
	Current challenges	Technological, economic, and social aspects with an impact on public libraries' activity.
	Collaborations and Partnerships	Collaborations and partnerships public libraries with other institutions.
	Space	The space provided by public libraries for services and activities for the benefit of the community.
Future of public libraries	Future Challenges	Challenges librarians foresee in the future with the potential to affect the functioning of public libraries.
	Future Objectives	Future objectives of public libraries and how these institutions could remain relevant in the future.

Table 1 Analytical framework

Results

After developing the thematic framework, a series of clear and distinctive themes resulted, as indicated in bold in the following paragraphs.

One of our main objectives in this study was to find out the participants' opinion on the role of public libraries

Current role of public libraries in the local community

Asked to characterize their library and its current role in the local community, the participants mentioned that their library is a modern cultural and educational institution, open for anyone, open for information, socialization, open for partnerships, for the needs of the community, an accessible institution, a cultural forum, a community center, an important cultural vector in the community through the variety of activities it carries out and the public it addresses. Another participant noted that her library is an ambassador of the locality on a national and international level, specifying that it won an IFLA prize a few years ago, being in the top 3 of the green libraries in the world. The most used terms to characterize their library were culture, information, socialization, but there was also a participant who mentioned tradition, modernity, adaptation.

Social, technological and economic aspects with an impact on the libraries' activity

Some of the questions in this study regarded the major technological, economic, and social aspects with an impact on the public libraries' activity, including their collaborations and partnerships with other institutions, but also the library space. Participants mentioned in their answers the social challenges related to the institution's image in the community and maintaining an interest in the library institution in the context of a continuous decrease in the number of active users. Some participants consider the environment in which library activity is carried out as increasingly difficult, even hostile, in the sense that cultural and educational activity is not considered a priority by political decision-makers. This is evidenced by the insufficient allocation of financial resources in the field of libraries, which makes the librarian's work even harder. It is especially the case in rural areas, where there is only one librarian, and the library is the only cultural institution.

Regarding the technological aspects, participants in our study mentioned that in a time of continuous and fast technological progress, the inability of public libraries in Romania to reform themselves in a timely and sustainable manner has a negative impact on its activity and its future. The technological gap between the different categories of users, caused by the accelerated evolution of technologies, the multitude of devices that appear and the need to train staff continuously but also the progress of artificial intelligence are other aspects with a potential impact mentioned by the participants.

The economic aspects according to the participants have to do with the decrease in funding which is determined most of the time by the general poor economic situation and unfortunately by the low interest of the authorities in libraries.

Another important economic aspect is the very low salaries which make the librarian profession no longer attractive for young people. Unfortunately, this is an aspect whose effects will be more visible in the future.

Collaborations and partnerships

All participants in our study mentioned that their libraries collaborate and have partnerships for a series of activities with other institutions (see Table 2). Some of the participants also mentioned a series of national or international projects, which their libraries developed in partnership with other organizations.

Education institutions (kindergartens, schools and high schools, universities)
Cultural institutions (museums, archives, theaters, art centers, cultural associations)
Media institutions (radio stations, TV stations)
Other public libraries in the region, in the country and abroad
The National Library
Library associations
Ethnic minorities' associations
Medical institutions (hospitals, medical associations)
Local authorities (the Police)
Non-profit organizations

Table 2 Partner institutions for public libraries in Romania

“Our library is very active in partnerships with cultural institutions, schools, non-governmental organisations, and various associations.”

“We collaborate with kindergartens, schools and high schools, non-profit organisations, local institutions (museums, other libraries in the region, art centers, hospitals, cultural associations, the Police, theaters, universities, archives, local authorities, media institutions – radio stations), libraries in the country and from abroad, library associations.”

“Our library has partnerships with an important number of institutions from different fields of activity, such as the County School Inspectorate, the Teachers' Association, the universities in our county, specialized institutions of cultural memory: archives, cultural institutions: museums, local media institutions, ethnic minority organisations, other types of institutions, foundations, non-governmental organisations, at local or national level. We collaborate with these institutions for different educational projects, conferences, book launchings, exhibitions, writing of collaborative volumes, etc.”

Library space

We were also interested to find out about the space provided by public libraries in Romania. In our study, the most used terms to describe the space in which the public library carries out its activity were functional, dynamic, pleasant, quiet, warm, and welcoming space for all age groups. There was also a mention of the fact that the space is small for the current needs, and this is true for many other

public libraries in Romania. At the same time another participant mentioned the new, generous space in her library, proof that there are also public libraries in Romania which benefitted in the past years of new buildings which meet the current standards in the field. One participant characterized her library space as “one in which traditional library services blend harmoniously with very modern ones”.

Future challenges and future objectives of the public libraries

We wanted to know the librarians’ opinions on the future challenges and future objectives of their libraries.

First, asked if their library is prepared for the challenges of the future, 10 participants gave a negative answer and only 4 said Yes, some considering that they are certainly not prepared for the AI, and the libraries need funds to invest in technologies and in the librarians’ training. One participant expressed her confidence in the skills and training of her colleagues and another one who gave a positive answer mentioned that her library has Makerspace, a section where they build robots, they do programming and modeling and 3D printing. This is one example that public libraries in Romania have already implemented innovative services based on newest technologies and resources.

Asked about future challenges, participants identified different types of challenges for their library in the years to come (see Table 3). Some of these challenges are common to libraries in other countries too and most of them already have an impact on the public libraries in Romania and they had already been mentioned by the participants to a previous question.

Development of artificial intelligence
Reduced budget
Decrease in specialized staff
Attracting the population to the library
Maintaining interest in books and reading
Ecological education for the local community
Adaptation of services for refugees from Ukraine
Lack of professional development programs
Lack of financial support from state and local authorities

Table 3 Main future challenges for public libraries in Romania

Asked about the future objectives of their libraries, the participants mentioned a series of objectives (see Table 4).

Digitization of documents
Development of new services
Diversifying the library services
The cultural, educational, research and information programs
Supporting lifelong learning
Involvement in promoting the 2030 UN Agenda Sustainable Development Goals
Writing and winning national projects and Erasmus projects

Developing, valuing and disseminating collections that reflect local culture and heritage
Adapting to a reduced budget
Attracting funds from other sources than the budgetary ones
Increasing the visibility of the library
Strengthening the prestige of the institution

Table 4 Future objectives of public libraries in Romania

“(…) digitization of documents, diversification of library services and their quality, continuing the activities carried out so far, adapting to the new budget without money for book purchases, continuing the publication of books about local personalities, developing international partnerships and cooperation.”

“... attracting funds to ensure new collections, attracting more users, writing and winning national projects, managing to adapt to the new, increasingly smaller budgets.”

According to the participants in this study the public library of the future is a digital, innovative, hybrid library, open to the needs of the community. One participant considers that public libraries of the future must be green libraries but at the same time cultural and digital hubs, but also preservers of traditional culture. Others believe that routine activities will be replaced in public libraries by robots and artificial intelligence, and librarians will deal much more with what involves relating to people and solving some needs that machines cannot solve.

“The public library of the future should be adapted to current technologies and the new digital generation of users. The spaces should be redesigned and furnished in a way that attracts and is much more friendly. Public libraries could remain relevant in the future if they could meet users with the latest books and tailored to the wishes of the users, new service offers, online loan of documents, without the need for users to come to the library, the introduction of games and gamification in the activities carried out.”

“The public library of the future must be hybrid. It must continuously adapt to the constantly changing internal and external environment. The library of the future should be open to the needs of users and attractive in terms of what it offers both in terms of the documents provided and the possibilities of spending free time in the library. A library that adapts to the social and cultural needs of the time.”

Discussion

In this study, we investigated the current positioning of public libraries in Romania in their local community and in the face of current and future challenges as well as the future of these institutions in the digital society.

Current role of public libraries in the local community

The answers provided by the participants in this study prove that despite the various budgetary, image and development difficulties encountered by the public libraries in Romania, they succeed somehow to act as important cultural institutions, serving the needs of their communities and evolving with their community needs. This is consistent with the approach from other countries, where public libraries “must reflect the different ways in which people use them” (Government of Ireland. 2023, p. 3) and the shift is clearly towards the role of community builders and social innovators, which according to Desmarchelier et al. (2024) means that “their activities modify interaction patterns among individuals”.

The terms mentioned by the participants in our study seem to touch all the stages in the public libraries’ evolution identified by Pateman (2020) for the public libraries in the United Kingdom, the “traditional library”, the “community-led library” and, the “needs-based library” (Pateman, 2020 as cited by Desmarchelier et al., 2024).

Public libraries in Romania also seem to be actively engaged and follow the world trends set by professional associations such as IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions). This indicates their desire to keep up with what is happening internationally.

Social, technological and economic aspects with an impact on the libraries’ activity

Being aware of the main social, technological and economic aspects with an impact on their activity could help public libraries take advantage of all the opportunities and risks in their environment.

People's increasingly low interest in education, culture, reading, especially in disadvantaged communities and rural areas is one aspect with an impact on public libraries’ activity and image.

The library's image and the public interest for it is also connected to the fact that most public libraries in Romania have remained till recently background institutions providing traditional services. This is different from other countries, for example Finland, where according to Ylipulli et al. (2023) public libraries “act as centers of education, empowerment and equality”, being respected, well-funded, cultural institutions.

The decline of public interest in libraries and in reading is a phenomenon present in other countries too, not only in Romania. Smith (2019) sees it “as a result of the pervasive use of smartphones”. We consider that one of the main factors for the decrease in the number of users is the digitalization of society and the change in the way people access and use information. According to one of

the participants, easy access to information available online, even if not always reliable information, is a factor for the decrease in the number of users and for the library losing its place in the Romanian society as a central information point.

Even though in Romania the public library is not perceived as the most important cultural institution by the community and at society level the interest in education, culture and reading has decreased over the past 35 years, libraries in Romania have diversified the range of their activities, trying to attract users. Most of them have also been present on Facebook (Madge & Coșerea, 2014) and other social media. Participants in the study mentioned the cultural events organized by the public libraries which led to an increase in the number of users and could contribute to improving the image of the library in its community. As one of the participants mentioned, “the different projects carried out by the library show that libraries are and will remain an important cultural pillar for society”. A special mention was made regarding the activities dedicated to children which are very well received by the local community and raise the awareness of the need for public libraries. This is consistent with other studies which underline the fact that public libraries develop as “a complex cultural space where users of social classes can participate in different activities such as reading, employment and entrepreneurship education, culture, arts, and leisure”. (Shin et al., 2022)

A decrease has been noted in political attention to the value of public libraries in many countries and consequently in the budget they receive. Sørensen (2021) notes that public libraries are “highly dependent on public funding and thereby on positive political convictions”. Liu et al. (2023) also discuss the situation of public libraries in the US – a country with a much better economic situation, which have experienced funding cuts.

However, public libraries in Romania are now an important cultural vector in their local community through the variety of activities carried out and the public they address, but also through the collaborations they have with other institutions.

In many countries, public libraries have started a long time ago to support their users through information, media, and digital literacy, they have adopted “innovative services that enhance service values by promoting new ideas, technologies, and resources” (Syn et al., 2023) and more recently as Ylipulli et al. (2023) mention they started to provide events and training “connected to emerging technologies such as robotics, 3D modeling and AI” becoming in this way “providers of information technologies and related new forms of literacy”. Smith (2020) considers that promotion of user’s literacy skills and acting as information hubs is the main goal of public libraries nowadays.

Public libraries in Romania have tried to follow the example of other countries but it is not always easy especially if these institutions were not completely reformed and the transition from traditional spaces for reading and borrowing books to digital spaces hasn’t happened entirely yet. The limited budget but

other factors too do not allow these institutions to facilitate the continuing training of their own staff and to offer their users all the services they want. In this sense Shin et al. (2022) underline that “To adapt to the new and changing information society, a library needs to be a creative collaboration space that fosters creative thinking rather than a passive space for reading materials by reflecting users and non-users’ needs as well as digital technology and development”. (Shin et al., 2022)

The impact of economic aspects is visible in all libraries’ activities and functioning. But unlike other countries where despite public libraries’ “significant presence, value, and effectiveness in providing services for their communities” (Liu et al., 2023), and where the value, efficiency, and potential of these institutions are discussed in the context of budget cuts, in Romania the decrease in funding is caused by the general economic situation and there are no debates on the role and value of libraries in community.

General economic aspects such as the low-income level of population and the high price of books which obviously have an impact and influence the use of library by the public were mentioned by the participants in our study. But they insisted on the reduction of the allocated budget which seriously affects libraries’ overall functioning especially while building maintenance expenses, the cost of publications, software and other equipment maintenance, etc., increase. With a reduced budget, libraries cannot develop new services, provide access to new documents or invest in new equipment.

In this context, obtaining external funds could be a solution and allow libraries to continue to develop and meet the users’ needs.

Collaborations and partnerships

Previous studies (Madge, 2013b, 2018) conducted among librarians in Romania identified they are open to collaboration and partnerships, and this has remained a constant element which could be an advantage for the public libraries in Romania and could come with many development opportunities for the future. Functioning in isolation is clearly not a successful strategy in our digital interconnected society. For institutions such as libraries whose services are based on various types of resources and on meeting a variety of needs, collaborations and partnerships are a strength.

These collaboration agreements and activities can support public libraries in their mission serving the community.

Library space

Besides the document collections, the other resources they have and the expertise of their specialists, public libraries also provide reading, social, meeting spaces for their community. Shin et al. (2022) discuss public libraries as places at the heart of civic life, “complex cultural and user-oriented spaces”. Space is a central element for a public library nowadays. In Ireland, for example, the National Public Library Strategy, 2023-2027, The Library is the Place: Information, Recreation, Inspiration, space is, next to people and connections, one of the three strategic themes. Providing “trusted and

welcoming facilities that encourage community participation” is among the key elements for public libraries in this country. (Government of Ireland, 2023)

The buildings in which many public libraries in Romania function are not adapted to the current needs of such institutions and unfortunately the budget does not allow improvements or a new library building. But there are also public libraries in Romania functioning in new buildings which meet the current standards in the field.

Future challenges and future objectives of the public libraries

The decrease in the number of library science specialists was mentioned more times in this study and this is a crisis that will deepen in the future given the low interest in this profession. A solution could come from an improvement of the librarian’s statute in society and from a better promotion of this profession among young generations.

The reduced budget can lead to different problems in the library's activity (reduced purchase of new documents, maintenance and updating of the IT structure, services and premises). Up until now libraries have succeeded in functioning and providing a variety of services for their community. The budget challenge will clearly remain an issue, especially in the context of the national and world economic problems.

But the participants are aware that digitization of the library would offer immense potential for development.

From the answers provided by the participants one can understand that public librarians in Romania have many ideas and would like to develop a series of projects, but the main problem is the lack of financial support from state and local authorities.

There are also some specific challenges identified by the librarians in Romania such as the adaptation of services for refugees from Ukraine and their integration into the community. After the war started in the neighboring country in 2022, many Ukrainians came and remained in Romania. Alongside education institutions, public libraries have already made all the efforts to make their services available for these users too.

The future objectives of public libraries in Romania seem in some part to be similar to the libraries in other countries. One special note should be made to the role of public libraries in promoting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which one participant in our study mentioned. According to Aregbesola et al. (2023) public libraries can serve as “hubs for learning, innovation, and collaboration”. We believe that public libraries in Romania can promote sustainable development through partnership, education, resource sharing and development.

The public library of the future and how public libraries could remain relevant in the future

Recent studies regarding the future of public libraries note that they will act as “information hubs in the modern world” (Smith, 2020), as “digital spaces where users can directly experience and use digital devices” (Mehtonen, 2016), as

“knowledge platforms that effectively respond to citizens’ needs for information and cultural activity spaces” (Shin et al., 2022) and that they “can help create more sustainable and equitable communities” (Aregbesola et al., 2023).

Based on the answers received from the librarians participating in this research, the perception is that public libraries in Romania will remain relevant in the future if they keep up with new technologies, if they continuously adapt to changes in society, to the new generations of users. Spaces should be remodeled and furnished so that they attract the public and be much friendlier, libraries should offer up-to-date collections, digital services, new services, gamification, access to learning, educational, and socializing events, generous spaces, with multiple facilities, so that the library represents an alternative to other cultural and leisure offers. Libraries should inspire their users, give that feeling of well-being, relaxation. And according to one participant they will remain relevant in the years to come “by capitalizing on the informational and documentary potential, through the means of the 21st century”.

Strengths and limitations

This study offers insights into the current role, future challenges and future objectives of public libraries in Romania.

The study included public librarians in Romania from different regions of the country, from both urban and rural environments and from different types of public libraries in what concerns the collection size, the budget, the number of staff. The librarians who participated in the research have library work experience ranging from less than a year to 31-34 years. These aspects add to the relevance of findings as they reflect different points of view from different libraries and different librarians.

Furthermore, the questions addressed to participants covered multiple aspects of public libraries from their role in the local community, to major aspects with an impact on their activity, future challenges and future objectives. The questions allowed the librarians to develop and express their views to obtain a complete image of relevant issues. This approach provides a more complete image of how public libraries in Romania position themselves in community and in front of future challenges.

However, this study presents only an image, one facet of public libraries in Romania. The findings of the study cannot be generalized to all libraries in Romania or to libraries in other countries because the sample size was small. The study is based only on the answers provided by 14 librarians which is a very limited number, and the findings reflect mainly the situation in those regions and libraries of Romania which were represented in this research.

Further studies are needed to investigate in more detail and at national level public libraries in Romania. Despite the limitations, this study offers important insights for the understanding of the current situation of public libraries in Romania, and it also contributes to research regarding public libraries in an East European country where funding is not always at the necessary level in order to implement innovative services and new technologies right when they become available.

Conclusions

This study investigated public libraries in Romania, their role in the community and their future objectives. The findings indicate that the insufficient funding and libraries' inability to reform themselves in a timely manner has led to a moderate pace of modernization and change in these institutions.

Unlike similar institutions from other countries, they seem more preoccupied about survival aspects and not about how to prepare for the challenges of the future.

The current focus of public libraries in Romania seems to be on improving the book collection, surviving with small budgets, digitizing the collections, attracting a larger number of users, organizing various cultural and educational activities, establishing international partnerships and collaborations, developing new services, and attracting funds from other sources.

Public libraries in Romania are not the most successful examples in terms of modernizing services, but the answers provided by the participants indicate their willingness to change, to innovate and better serve the community.

The most important finding of this research is that there seems to be a clear understanding among Romanian specialists from public libraries of the need for change and adaptation to the current needs and requirements of their users and to the technological changes in society.

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Appendix A Ccmatrix frequency generated by Leximancer

concept	count	library	cultural	activities	public	services	libraries	national	information
library	93	93	29	29	22	18	21	14	13
cultural	29	29	29	12	11	6	9	10	5
activities	29	29	12	29	6	8	4	8	6
public	22	22	11	6	22	9	9	6	4
services	18	18	6	8	9	18	4	6	7
libraries	21	21	9	4	9	4	21	5	4
national	14	14	10	8	6	6	5	14	3
information	13	13	5	6	4	7	4	3	13
users	18	18	4	5	7	6	5	2	4
developme	13	13	6	6	6	7	3	5	3
documents	11	10	3	4	5	5	4	2	3
book	12	12	5	7	4	2	1	3	3
community	16	16	7	8	6	5	5	3	4
local	11	11	7	5	4	4	6	5	2
budget	10	10	2	4	4	4	3	2	2
education	8	8	2	2	3	5	2	2	6
educationa	10	10	8	5	4	4	3	3	1
institutions	14	14	13	5	3	0	3	4	0
partnership	12	12	7	5	2	4	2	6	1
interest	10	10	3	4	3	3	2	3	2
needs	11	11	4	4	3	5	3	3	3
allocated	8	8	1	2	3	3	3	1	2
carried	10	10	3	7	2	3	4	2	0
future	13	13	3	5	5	1	6	1	2
challenges	11	10	2	3	2	2	3	1	1
projects	9	9	7	4	3	2	4	5	0
collections	7	7	4	4	3	5	1	4	4
activity	9	9	4	4	2	1	3	3	0
internation	8	8	4	4	2	4	2	5	1
level	6	6	4	3	1	3	1	3	2
various	9	9	5	6	1	2	2	3	2
conference	6	6	3	2	1	2	0	2	2
space	9	8	3	6	1	2	2	3	2
training	8	8	1	2	3	2	2	1	2
professiona	6	6	3	2	4	3	1	2	2
online	7	7	1	2	1	0	3	0	3
lack	5	5	2	1	2	2	2	1	2
institution	9	9	4	4	3	1	0	2	1
support	5	5	3	1	2	1	3	2	1
environme	9	9	2	3	2	2	0	1	1
field	5	5	2	1	2	2	2	1	3
people	10	10	3	4	0	1	2	0	4
county	8	8	5	1	2	1	4	2	1

courses	6	6	2	1	3	0	2	1	0
attractive	7	7	1	1	2	1	2	0	2
increasingl	4	4	2	0	1	2	1	0	3
intelligenc	6	6	0	2	1	1	1	1	2
use	5	5	2	2	2	2	1	3	2
low	4	4	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
necessary	7	7	1	1	1	1	1	0	1

Appendix B Cmatrix inverted generated by Leximancer

concept	library	cultural	activities	public	services	libraries	national	informatior	users
library	0.920792	0.920792	0.920792	0.920792	0.920792	0.920792	0.920792	0.920792	0.920792
cultural	0.920792	0.287129	0.693894	0.574257	0.861386	0.669967	0.40198	0.746535	1.292079
activities	0.920792	0.693894	0.287129	1.052805	0.64604	1.507426	0.502475	0.622112	1.033663
public	0.920792	0.574257	1.052805	0.217822	0.435644	0.508251	0.508251	0.707921	0.560113
services	0.920792	0.861386	0.64604	0.435644	0.178218	0.935644	0.415842	0.330976	0.534654
libraries	0.920792	0.669967	1.507426	0.508251	0.935644	0.207921	0.582178	0.675743	0.748515
national	0.920792	0.40198	0.502475	0.508251	0.415842	0.582178	0.138614	0.60066	1.247525
informatior	0.920792	0.746535	0.622112	0.707921	0.330976	0.675743	0.60066	0.128713	0.579208
users	0.920792	1.292079	1.033663	0.560113	0.534654	0.748515	1.247525	0.579208	0.178218
developme	0.920792	0.622112	0.622112	0.471947	0.330976	0.90099	0.360396	0.557756	1.158416
documents	1.012871	1.052805	0.789604	0.479208	0.392079	0.571782	0.762376	0.471947	0.280057
book	0.920792	0.689109	0.492221	0.653465	1.069307	2.49505	0.554455	0.514851	0.427723
community	0.920792	0.656294	0.574257	0.580858	0.570297	0.665347	0.739274	0.514851	1.425743
local	0.920792	0.451202	0.631683	0.59901	0.490099	0.381188	0.304951	0.707921	1.960396
budget	0.920792	1.435644	0.717822	0.544555	0.445545	0.693069	0.693069	0.643564	0.594059
education	0.920792	1.148515	1.148515	0.580858	0.285149	0.831683	0.554455	0.171617	1.425743
educationa	0.920792	0.358911	0.574257	0.544555	0.445545	0.693069	0.462046	1.287129	200
institutions	0.920792	0.309216	0.80396	1.016502	200	0.970297	0.485149	200	200
partnership	0.920792	0.492221	0.689109	1.306931	0.534654	1.247525	0.277228	1.544555	2.138614
interest	0.920792	0.957096	0.717822	0.726073	0.594059	1.039604	0.462046	0.643564	200
needs	0.920792	0.789604	0.789604	0.79868	0.392079	0.762376	0.508251	0.471947	0.392079
allocated	0.920792	2.29703	1.148515	0.580858	0.475248	0.554455	1.108911	0.514851	0.475248
carried	0.920792	0.957096	0.410184	1.089109	0.594059	0.519802	0.693069	200	0.594059
future	0.920792	1.244224	0.746535	0.566337	2.316832	0.450495	1.80198	0.836634	0.463366
challenges	1.012871	1.579208	1.052805	1.19802	0.980198	0.762376	1.524753	1.415842	200
projects	0.920792	0.369165	0.64604	0.653465	0.80198	0.467822	0.249505	200	1.60396
collections	0.920792	0.502475	0.502475	0.508251	0.249505	1.455446	0.242574	0.225248	0.311881
activity	0.920792	0.64604	0.64604	0.980198	1.60396	0.623762	0.415842	200	1.60396
internation	0.920792	0.574257	0.574257	0.871287	0.356436	0.831683	0.221782	1.029703	1.425743
level	0.920792	0.430693	0.574257	1.306931	0.356436	1.247525	0.277228	0.386139	1.069307
various	0.920792	0.516832	0.430693	1.960396	0.80198	0.935644	0.415842	0.579208	1.60396
conference	0.920792	0.574257	0.861386	1.306931	0.534654	200	0.415842	0.386139	1.069307
space	1.035891	0.861386	0.430693	1.960396	0.80198	0.935644	0.415842	0.579208	1.60396
training	0.920792	2.29703	1.148515	0.580858	0.712871	0.831683	1.108911	0.514851	0.475248
professioni	0.920792	0.574257	0.861386	0.326733	0.356436	1.247525	0.415842	0.386139	200
online	0.920792	2.009901	1.004951	1.524753	200	0.485149	200	0.30033	0.623762
lack	0.920792	0.717822	1.435644	0.544555	0.445545	0.519802	0.693069	0.321782	0.891089
institution	0.920792	0.64604	0.64604	0.653465	1.60396	200	0.623762	1.158416	1.60396
support	0.920792	0.478548	1.435644	0.544555	0.891089	0.346535	0.346535	0.643564	200
environmei	0.920792	1.292079	0.861386	0.980198	0.80198	200	1.247525	1.158416	1.60396
field	0.920792	0.717822	1.435644	0.544555	0.445545	0.519802	0.693069	0.214521	0.445545
people	0.920792	0.957096	0.717822	200	1.782178	1.039604	200	0.321782	1.782178
county	0.920792	0.459406	2.29703	0.871287	1.425743	0.415842	0.554455	1.029703	1.425743

courses	0.920792	0.861386	1.722772	0.435644	200	0.623762	0.831683	200	0.356436
attractive	0.920792	2.009901	2.009901	0.762376	1.247525	0.727723	200	0.450495	0.249505
increasingl	0.920792	0.574257	200	0.871287	0.356436	0.831683	200	0.171617	0.712871
intelligence	0.920792	200	0.861386	1.306931	1.069307	1.247525	0.831683	0.386139	200
use	0.920792	0.717822	0.717822	0.544555	0.445545	1.039604	0.231023	0.321782	0.891089
low	0.920792	200	200	0.871287	0.712871	0.831683	200	0.171617	200
necessary	0.920792	2.009901	2.009901	1.524753	1.247525	1.455446	200	0.90099	1.247525

Appendix C Ccmatrix prominence generated by Leximancer

concept	library	cultural	activities	public	services	libraries	national	informatior	users
library	1.086022	1.086022	1.086022	1.086022	1.086022	1.086022	1.086022	1.086022	1.086022
cultural	1.086022	3.482759	1.441142	1.741379	1.16092	1.492611	2.487685	1.339523	0.77394
activities	1.086022	1.441142	3.482759	0.949843	1.547893	0.663383	1.990148	1.607427	0.96743
public	1.086022	1.741379	0.949843	4.590909	2.295455	1.967533	1.967533	1.412587	1.78535
services	1.086022	1.16092	1.547893	2.295455	5.611111	1.068783	2.404762	3.021368	1.8703
libraries	1.086022	1.492611	0.663383	1.967533	1.068783	4.809524	1.717687	1.479854	1.33597
national	1.086022	2.487685	1.990148	1.967533	2.404762	1.717687	7.214286	1.664835	0.80158
informatior	1.086022	1.339523	1.607427	1.412587	3.021368	1.479854	1.664835	7.769231	1.72649
users	1.086022	0.773946	0.967433	1.785354	1.87037	1.335979	0.801587	1.726496	5.61111
developme	1.086022	1.607427	1.607427	2.118881	3.021368	1.10989	2.774725	1.792899	0.86324
documents	0.987292	0.949843	1.266458	2.086777	2.550505	1.748918	1.311688	2.118881	3.57070
book	1.086022	1.45115	2.031609	1.530303	0.935185	0.400794	1.803572	1.942308	2.33796
community	1.086022	1.523707	1.741379	1.721591	1.753472	1.502976	1.352679	1.942308	0.70138
local	1.086022	2.216301	1.583072	1.669421	2.040404	2.623377	3.279221	1.412587	0.51010
budget	1.086022	0.696552	1.393104	1.836364	2.244444	1.442857	1.442857	1.553846	1.68333
education	1.086022	0.87069	0.87069	1.721591	3.506944	1.202381	1.803572	5.826923	0.70138
educationa	1.086022	2.786207	1.741379	1.836364	2.244444	1.442857	2.164286	0.776923	
institutions	1.086022	3.23399	1.243842	0.983766	0	1.030612	2.061225	0	
partnership	1.086022	2.031609	1.45115	0.765152	1.87037	0.801587	3.607143	0.647436	0.46759
interest	1.086022	1.044828	1.393104	1.377273	1.683333	0.961905	2.164286	1.553846	
needs	1.086022	1.266458	1.266458	1.252066	2.550505	1.311688	1.967533	2.118881	2.55050
allocated	1.086022	0.435345	0.87069	1.721591	2.104167	1.803572	0.901786	1.942308	2.10416
carried	1.086022	1.044828	2.437931	0.918182	1.683333	1.92381	1.442857	0	1.68333
future	1.086022	0.803714	1.339523	1.765734	0.431624	2.21978	0.554945	1.195266	2.1581
challenges	0.987292	0.633229	0.949843	0.834711	1.020202	1.311688	0.655844	0.706294	
projects	1.086022	2.708812	1.547893	1.530303	1.246914	2.137566	4.007937	0	0.62345
collections	1.086022	1.990148	1.990148	1.967533	4.007937	0.687075	4.122449	4.43956	3.20634
activity	1.086022	1.547893	1.547893	1.020202	0.623457	1.603175	2.404762	0	0.62345
internation	1.086022	1.741379	1.741379	1.147727	2.805556	1.202381	4.508929	0.971154	0.70138
level	1.086022	2.321839	1.741379	0.765152	2.805556	0.801587	3.607143	2.589744	0.93518
various	1.086022	1.934866	2.321839	0.510101	1.246914	1.068783	2.404762	1.726496	0.62345
conference	1.086022	1.741379	1.16092	0.765152	1.87037	0	2.404762	2.589744	0.93518
space	0.965353	1.16092	2.321839	0.510101	1.246914	1.068783	2.404762	1.726496	0.62345
training	1.086022	0.435345	0.87069	1.721591	1.402778	1.202381	0.901786	1.942308	2.10416
professioni	1.086022	1.741379	1.16092	3.060606	2.805556	0.801587	2.404762	2.589744	
online	1.086022	0.497537	0.995074	0.655844	0	2.061225	0	3.32967	1.60317
lack	1.086022	1.393104	0.696552	1.836364	2.244444	1.92381	1.442857	3.107692	1.12222
institution	1.086022	1.547893	1.547893	1.530303	0.623457	0	1.603175	0.863248	0.62345
support	1.086022	2.089655	0.696552	1.836364	1.122222	2.885714	2.885714	1.553846	
environmei	1.086022	0.773946	1.16092	1.020202	1.246914	0	0.801587	0.863248	0.62345
field	1.086022	1.393104	0.696552	1.836364	2.244444	1.92381	1.442857	4.661539	2.24444
people	1.086022	1.044828	1.393104	0	0.561111	0.961905	0	3.107692	0.56111
county	1.086022	2.176724	0.435345	1.147727	0.701389	2.404762	1.803572	0.971154	0.70138

courses	1.086022	1.16092	0.58046	2.295455	0	1.603175	1.202381	0	2.805556
attractive	1.086022	0.497537	0.497537	1.311688	0.801587	1.37415	0	2.21978	4.00793
increasingl	1.086022	1.741379	0	1.147727	2.805556	1.202381	0	5.826923	1.402778
intelligenc	1.086022	0	1.16092	0.765152	0.935185	0.801587	1.202381	2.589744	0
use	1.086022	1.393104	1.393104	1.836364	2.244444	0.961905	4.328571	3.107692	1.122222
low	1.086022	0	0	1.147727	1.402778	1.202381	0	5.826923	0
necessary	1.086022	0.497537	0.497537	0.655844	0.801587	0.687075	0	1.10989	0.801587

Appendix D Concept Cooccurrence generated by Leximancer

concept	x	y	weight	library	cultural	activities	public	services	libraries
library	0.35343	0.123709	515	93	29	29	22	18	21
cultural	-0.16734	-0.45117	230	29	29	12	11	6	9
activities	0.136557	-0.24654	215	29	12	29	6	8	4
public	0.204574	0.109371	179	22	11	6	22	9	9
services	0.133515	0.005521	165	18	6	8	9	18	4
libraries	0.117791	0.182102	157	21	9	4	9	4	21
national	0.015278	-0.31175	145	14	10	8	6	6	5
informatior	-0.08921	0.212979	127	13	5	6	4	7	4
users	0.222142	0.621264	123	18	4	5	7	6	5
developme	0.048074	-0.12704	115	13	6	6	6	7	3
documents	-0.0759	0.460228	108	10	3	4	5	5	4
book	-0.36893	-0.02906	105	12	5	7	4	2	1
community	0.475008	-0.28136	104	16	7	8	6	5	5
local	-0.12873	-0.33	102	11	7	5	4	4	6
budget	-0.21449	0.334579	100	10	2	4	4	4	3
education	-0.21278	0.187169	94	8	2	2	3	5	2
educatione	-0.26515	-0.36637	90	10	8	5	4	4	3
institutions	-0.25046	-0.86975	90	14	13	5	3	0	3
partnership	0.134703	-0.67755	89	12	7	5	2	4	2
interest	-0.36867	0.113839	88	10	3	4	3	3	2
needs	0.186037	0.36312	86	11	4	4	3	5	3
allocated	-0.20698	0.489632	81	8	1	2	3	3	3
carried	0.042754	0.215124	80	10	3	7	2	3	4
future	0.057817	0.798463	80	13	3	5	5	1	6
challenges	-0.56876	0.057583	78	10	2	3	2	2	3
projects	-0.05103	-0.54071	77	9	7	4	3	2	4
collections	0.060709	-0.00797	72	7	4	4	3	5	1
activity	-0.48251	-0.2307	71	9	4	4	2	1	3
internation	0.200792	-0.50265	71	8	4	4	2	4	2
level	0.007712	-0.37989	66	6	4	3	1	3	1
various	0.040548	-0.72654	65	9	5	6	1	2	2
conference	-0.31837	-0.21421	63	6	3	2	1	2	0
space	-0.16215	-0.63178	61	8	3	6	1	2	2
training	0.05703	0.610596	61	8	1	2	3	2	2
professioni	-0.01035	0.031867	60	6	3	2	4	3	1
online	-0.40093	0.538146	59	7	1	2	1	0	3
lack	-0.24493	0.243902	58	5	2	1	2	2	2
institution	0.531815	-0.39471	56	9	4	4	3	1	0
support	-0.31595	0.014506	54	5	3	1	2	1	3
environmei	-0.69669	-0.3469	53	9	2	3	2	2	0
field	-0.26847	0.403559	52	5	2	1	2	2	2
people	-0.70987	0.634908	52	10	3	4	0	1	2
county	-0.41777	-0.67487	51	8	5	1	2	1	4

courses	-0.18886	0.60189	46	6	2	1	3	0	2
attractive	-0.15236	0.882512	44	7	1	1	2	1	2
increasingl	-0.46507	0.245625	41	4	2	0	1	2	1
intelligenc	-0.67337	0.516699	41	6	0	2	1	1	1
use	-0.16508	-0.14547	41	5	2	2	2	2	1
low	-0.4423	0.591249	40	4	0	0	1	1	1
necessary	0.830448	-0.06007	35	7	1	1	1	1	1