



UNLIMITED VALUE

LEADING PRACTICE
IN UNLIMITED VALUE
CREATION



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



1. Executive Summary

From 2016, a research partnership including Libraries Unlimited, the University of Exeter Business School, the Real Ideas Organisation (RIO) and Open Data Institute (ODI) Devon has been worked together to understand how libraries can learn to develop a better understanding of their 'social value' - the difference that libraries make to the people and communities they serve. The project, named Unlimited Value, received £200,000 funding from Arts Council England's research programme. The research sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) What social value do libraries create and how do they do so?
- 2) How can libraries connect social value to financial value in ways that amplify rather than undermine the essence of what makes a library 'special' in the eyes of the public?
- 3) How can library leaders and managers best respond to this challenge of needing to work in more 'socially enterprising' ways?

The partners conducted a detailed review of existing academic literature and, using an Action Learning research method, tracked the experiences to explore how people working in and leading libraries in Devon develop understandings of social value over time.

Simultaneously, ODI Devon worked with Libraries Unlimited to generate new insights into their user data, and led two workshops with stakeholders and staff members on the way data can capture and evidence existing social value, as well as helping them to identify and open up further opportunities to make a difference.

The literature review and research findings draw attention to the multiple ways in which library services are learning to capture their social impact. No single, generalisable method is identified as a template for understanding social value. Instead, evidence suggests that libraries are adopting what, in social enterprise research, is known as a 'bricolage' approach to capturing their impact. This means that rather than adopting a standardised model, libraries are using the resources to hand to build individualised and persuasive cases for the difference they make, in ways that support the unique nature of each library service's offer and customer base, and which can be tailored to speak to different stakeholders as necessary.

The Unlimited Value project explored the exact nature of the 'resources at hand' co-opted by libraries to evidence and capture their social value. These resources, which we term the 'tools of bricolage', are;



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- 1) Organisational Values - clear, stated purposes or intentions, mapped onto the organisation's activities through which a causal pathway can be connected between 'who we are' and 'the difference we make'.
- 2) Staff Development - providing staff with opportunities to think and act in more enterprising ways about the importance of identifying how 'library work' makes a social difference and how this can be captured and used to advocate for continued investment.
- 3) Data - drawing on organisational data in ways that evidence 'what libraries do' for communities, justify existing activities and help to prioritise future action. In particular, the work conducted by ODI Devon points to a new role for libraries, helping people navigate information in an age of 'open data'.

This three-dimensional model, which we call the 'Unlimited Value' model for social value creation, is a key finding from the research. Leaders of library services need to become proficient at understanding how social value connects to each of the dimensions - because each one acts like a 'lens' which brings certain aspects of their organisation's social impact into focus.



The implications of the Unlimited Value project have been welcomed by policy makers and thought leaders in the libraries and wider cultural sector. Interim and end-of-project findings were shared with key stakeholders at several events including two research summits, held in Exeter (October 2017) and Whitehall, London (July 2018). A full timeline for the project including dates of internal and external dissemination events is on pages 16 and 17.

Unlimited Value was also embedded as a teaching case study in several postgraduate and undergraduate modules at the University of Exeter Business School. Over 500 students have benefited from exploring the challenge of how to capture the social impact of an organisation - helping to enrich and expedite the practical outcomes for Libraries Unlimited, and developing a better understanding of the challenges of leading and working in the arts/cultural sector. This activity has pioneered a new Higher Education partnership model for library services and Higher Education Institutions looking to develop more embedded, impactful and sustained relationships. Unlimited Value was cited as a best practice case study in Arts Council England's (Pecakar, 2018) recent examination of Higher Education and Public Libraries partnerships.

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The research partners have created several toolkits, reports, films and blog posts which will be of practical interest to others in the library services and cultural sector, as well as the social enterprise or 'third sector'. These are listed on page 38. Several additional activities have developed out of the project and its research findings. The Business School and Libraries Unlimited launched a knowledge exchange programme for the four existing public service mutuals (including Libraries Unlimited) delivering library services in England. The four project partners have also produced a leadership development programme for emerging public service mutuals, run in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Both of these activities were funded through the Higher Education Innovation Fund.



About the Project

Funded by Arts Council England, Unlimited Value was a two year research project which explored how libraries can capture, evidence and monetise their social, cultural and economic impacts (known as 'social value'), at a time of significant social, technological and public sector change. The project partners Libraries Unlimited, University of Exeter Business School, Real Ideas Organisation and ODI Devon worked together to:

- Generate new understandings about what makes libraries special in the eyes of their stakeholders.
- Learn how to lead libraries in socially enterprising ways that help sustain library services in the longer term.
- Use library data to generate new understandings of how the 'social value' libraries create can be evidenced in persuasive and financially lucrative ways.

1.1 Key Project Information

Unlimited Value received £200,000 of Arts Council England funding under Grant Number: 07648.

The total estimated cost of the project was £316,000 including match funding from the partner organisations.

The funding was awarded in October 2016, work commenced in January 2017 and the project officially ended in December 2018.

The project was overseen by a Steering Group which met roughly every 3 months, with representatives from Arts Council England and the four project partners, with additional representation as required.

Among the major outputs of the project are:

- A leadership development programme creating a network of 'Social Value Champions' in Libraries Unlimited, who developed experience of leading activities relating to social value generation.
- A prototype accessible online platform making Libraries Unlimited's aggregated and anonymised user data available for the organisation, and potentially for others, to use to shed further light on and evidence the impact that libraries make in their communities.
- Wider discussion on the role of data in libraries through two data workshops for a range of stakeholders and through building a platform of diverse Devon-wide open data, with this made widely available for further development and prototyping.
- An international network of policy makers and library leaders, stakeholders and experts, interested in leading thought and practice on how 21st Century Libraries can both capture, and generate revenue pathways from, their social value - created through the two Research Summits and the work of the research partners.

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1.2 About the Project Partners

Libraries Unlimited

Libraries Unlimited is a charity and social enterprise, founded in April 2016 as a public sector 'spin-out'. The charity was originally established to run Devon County Council's statutory library service, consisting of 50 public libraries and four mobile libraries, as well as running Devon's three prison libraries in Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Dartmoor, HMP Exeter and HMP Channings Wood.

In its first three years of operation, whilst navigating a significant change programme, the charity has become recognised as one of the sector's leading library services. In April 2018, following a competitive tender, Libraries Unlimited took on the running of Torbay Libraries on behalf of Torbay Council and became one of the first library organisations to become an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. Libraries Unlimited was shortlisted in the Arts, Culture and Heritage category of the 2018 Charity Awards and was named one of Nesta's 50 New Radicals, recognised as making a real difference to society.

Chief Executive: Ciara Eastell OBE

Ciara played a central role in the Unlimited Value project and acted as Chair of the project's Steering Group, bringing together the academic team along with project partners. Ciara brought to the research her long standing experience as a chartered librarian and as a library leader nationally. For the past 10 years, she has been at the helm of the library service in Devon and was a primary architect in the establishment of Libraries Unlimited as a public service mutual in April 2016. Ciara led the 'spin out' process from Devon County Council towards independence and saw early on that Libraries Unlimited, in its first few years as a new organisational entity, needed to find new and more effective ways of capturing the ways in which libraries support their local communities to generate more social value, whilst also providing routes to income generation and financial value for the organisation; hence her support for, and interest in, the Unlimited Value project.

Ciara's networks within libraries and the social enterprise sector nationally and internationally has meant that Unlimited Value has been able to tap into the interest and support of policy makers and library leaders over the past 2 years through our research summits and informal sharing of the research.

Communications and Marketing Manager: Beth O'Sullivan

Beth has more than 10 years' experience of working in both in-house and agency roles in public relations and marketing. She joined Libraries Unlimited in April 2017 and sat on the Unlimited Value Steering Group to lead on engagement and communications surrounding the research and outcomes, working closely with partners and Libraries Unlimited colleagues and associates.

Stock and Performance Manager: Mark Peasley (now retired)

Mark worked for Devon Libraries for over 30 years, including during the transition from Devon County Council to Libraries Unlimited. Mark sat on the project Steering Group and worked closely with ODI Devon to extract and analyse library data.

Service Delivery Manager: Tabitha Witherick

Tabitha joined Libraries Unlimited in 2017 and became involved in the latter part of the project, supporting with stakeholder engagement and embedding the research across the organisation.

In addition, eight members of staff from across Devon took part in Action Learning as Social Value Champions.



University of Exeter Business School



The University of Exeter Business School's (UEBS) mission is to deliver outstanding and innovative business education and research that address the major challenges confronting businesses and society. The co-investigators and research fellow each bring different research expertise to the project:

Principal Investigator: Professor Beverley Hawkins

Beverley's research focuses on leadership learning and practice - her work explores how people 'make things happen', and how they learn to lead themselves and others through change. Her past work has been funded by the ESF and ESRC and published in a number of high ranking journals. She is a trained Action Learning Facilitator accredited by the Institute for Leadership and Management.

Co-Investigators:

Dr Adrian Bailey,

Adrian is a Senior Lecturer in Management at the University of Exeter Business School. He is the co-founder of the Business, Nature and Value research centre that investigates sustainable business practices and business models. His research explores issues of governance within the context of co-operatives and social enterprises.

Professor Tim Coles

Tim's current interests are in the business models and commercial resilience of organisations in, and connected, to the visitor economy. A cornerstone of his previous work, which has been funded by UK research councils and European bodies, has been capacity building both within the higher education sector and among those businesses and agencies partnering with it.

Professor Will Harvey, Associate Dean of Research

Will's research focuses on reputation, talent management and leadership. His research has been funded by the ESRC and the Ministry of Defence. Will has researched and worked with leaders across the world in a variety of sectors, including consulting, defence, education, energy, finance, government, healthcare, insurance, manufacturing, retail and hybrid organisations.

Professor Andi Smart

Andi joined Exeter in 1998. He is Professor of Operations and Process Management, Director of the Centre for Simulation, Analytics and Modelling. Professor Smart's research interest is in the design and improvement of operational systems. He is currently leading a €7.8m Interreg project (VISTA AR) to design systems that enhance visitor experiences at cultural heritage sites. The project aims to identify relationships between immersive (AR/VR) technology, visitor profiles, and visitor experience to inform system design.



Hugh Waters

Hugh is the Research Fellow and Project Coordinator for the Arts Council England funded Unlimited Value project. Hugh is also conducting ESRC funded research which focuses on how transforming into and processes of organising as a socially entrepreneurial Public Service Mutual impacts upon an organisation's identity from the 'pre spin-out' stage through to several years beyond 'spin-out'.

Together, the UEBS co-investigators' expertise spans the fields of learning, change, social enterprise, cultural organisations, organisational reputation, leadership and identity. This has enabled a multi-faceted approach to understanding both the context in which libraries operate, and the research questions at the heart of the project.



Real Ideas Organisation

The Real Ideas Organisation (RIO) Community Interest Company (CIC) are one of the largest social enterprises in Southwest England, with a track record making positive and creative change happen for individuals, organisations and communities – across a diverse range of area and geographies - from education through to employment, and from Cornwall to Gloucestershire.

They run a number of social enterprise business units, including the Column Bakehouse, Ocean Studios, and Devonport Guildhall, and are currently developing the Devonport Markethall as a leading edge digital and VR space in Plymouth. They do this to create interesting and meaningful work in communities in need and to drive local regeneration using principles of balanced and inclusive growth and creativity.

They then use this expertise and learning to help others make similar change happen in socially enterprising ways - including providing support, advice and consultancy for a range of clients such as Arts Council England, Heart of South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), British Council, Power to Change and Cornwall Council, through to direct work with young people not in education, employment or training who need help building more positive futures. They also provide long term support to local schools as they seek to become more socially enterprising.

Because of this diversity of work they have built up real expertise in terms of evaluation, research and social impact, especially across partnerships where collective impact is being generated. They are trained in and using a wide variety of models and approaches such as the Transformational Index, Social Return on Investment, Collective Impact and B Corps on a day-to-day basis.

Co-founder and Director: Matt Little

Matt Little was involved in this research on behalf of RIO. He is a co-founder, director and Head of Impact and Research for the organisation. He has a first class post graduate research background from the University of British Columbia and Oxford; has worked at national level as a Ministerial Advisor and managed large regeneration and education programmes at local and regional level. He has particular expertise in relation to social impact and research, and enterprise and innovation in the social and creative sectors. He was awarded a 2013 Churchill Fellowship and in December 2017 was made one of the first 15 Social Enterprise UK Honorary Fellows.

Much of RIO's work takes place at the complex overlap between social and financial value. Against a backdrop of massive and continuing change in all aspects of community life and public service delivery this research has provided the organisation with the precious opportunity to explore issues at this intersection in more depth, guided by and learning from great and thoughtful partners with significant and contrasting expertise: a leading international business school, the Open Data Institute and one of the most innovative and socially enterprising library services in the country.

As a longstanding partner of Libraries Unlimited, and with their own interest in the development of local services in Cornwall, RIO are passionate about libraries: their inherent democracy, inclusivity and openness; their anchor role in local communities; and the help and support they are able to provide to people at key times in their lives. The hope is that insights gained through this research therefore lead to 'more and ever-better' impact.

ODI Devon

ODI Devon is the Devon Node (a local associate or branch) of the Open Data Institute, which was set up by Sir Tim Berners-Lee and Professor Nigel Shadbolt in 2012 to inspire people to connect and innovate through data to tackle global challenges. ODI Devon helps organisations and communities engage with and share data by advocating, assisting, training, mentoring and generally enabling conversations about open data in the local area.

ODI Devon has always recognised its key role in enabling information and data literacy and it was these values shared with Libraries Unlimited that sparked the idea of collaborating on open data and data literacy initiatives. The Node has also been developing knowledge around open data infrastructure and strategic design approaches to data problems which it felt was missing in the industry (as opposed to purely technological approaches), and this also felt like an area worth exploring with organisations that had significant physical and intellectual footprint in the region.



2. Our research base and questions

2.1 Project background: Why research the social value of libraries?

This project explored, against a backdrop of intense technological, social and public sector change, how library services can best capture that which makes them 'special' in the eyes of stakeholders. This is better articulated as 'social value' - the impact that libraries have on the lives of local users and communities. Though the research focuses on library services explicitly, the findings are also of relevance for other cultural organisations, such as archives and museums, as well as the wider social enterprise sector.

The generation, measurement and monetisation of long term social impacts - that is, the translation of *social value* into the *financial value* that helps libraries to sustain themselves over the longer term - is a timely challenge given the advent of 'commissioning' in public services. We are increasingly seeing public services being delivered in radical forms that blur the boundaries between public and private, and public service organisations are being held more accountable for the long-term outcomes of the services they deliver. Understandings of the real purpose of what libraries are 'for' are also changing; despite evidence that 'book-borrowing' from public libraries is decreasing (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, 2018), research indicates that libraries remain close to the hearts of local communities (Carnegie UK 2017), important 'third spaces' with the potential to enrich our lives in social, cultural and economic terms.

One such organisation is Libraries Unlimited, the lead partner in this project. As one of the first library services to establish itself as a public service mutual, Libraries Unlimited must learn to think increasingly entrepreneurially about how it can generate revenue but steer a careful balance to ensure 'financial' does not detract from or undermine 'social'.

This project has tracked the experiences of a group of library staff identified as 'Social Value Champions' within the organisation as they seek to strike this balance, and explore how data can be used to inform discussions about social value. Using these two research strands, the project has created a model for better understanding the 'how' of leading an organisation in its pursuit of interlocked social and financial value. This data, along with a systematic review of the existing peer-reviewed literature, and examination of related practitioner





reports, enabled us to answer the research questions listed below, and established at the start of our project.

2.2 Our research questions

Over the initial discussions, the research partners formulated the following research questions:

- 1) What social value do libraries create and how do they do so?
- 2) How can libraries connect social value to financial value in ways that amplify rather than undermine the essence of what makes a library 'special' in the eyes of the public?
- 3) How can library leaders and managers best respond to this challenge of needing to work in more 'socially enterprising' ways?

2.3 Existing research on the social value of libraries

The investigating researchers conducted a systematic review of the peer reviewed literature in academic journals, exploring the social value of libraries. This was supplemented by material from the practitioner literature, which was known by the project partners to have had a significant impact on practitioner understanding.

The full 9,500-word review is being published as a separate document, and will be freely available online under the title '*How do Libraries Evaluate Social Value? A Review of the Research Literature*'. The review explains the search terms and databases used in our systematic method. It articulates in detail how 'social value' has been defined and examined in this sector and discusses the methods used in a range of studies seeking to capture the social value of libraries.

In this report, we summarise the backdrop against which our research questions emerged, and list the key contributions in the literature to date and set out the important gaps which remain in scholarly and practitioner understanding, to which this project has contributed.

2.3.1 Understanding how libraries contribute to civic life

Understandings of the 'social value' of library services are contextualised by the significant re-framing of libraries' contributions to society, such that as well as being 'repositories of books' (Walpole 2004: 4) they are also recognised as important 'third places' through which communities establish a shared language and identity (Oldenburg 1989, Montgomery and Miller 2010, Harris 2007, 2003). At an intuitive level, libraries are understood to support social inclusion, mental and physical wellbeing, and digital literacy (Walpole 2013, Sieghart 2014, BOP Consulting/Arts Council England 2014). In the US, research advocates that libraries are important contributors to civic society, facilitating engagement and trust (Putnam and Feldstein 2003). The consequences of this re-conceptualisation are that long-established measures of library activity, such as statistics on book borrowing, no longer fully record the extent or range of services and impacts achieved by the accessible infrastructure that public libraries offer to communities and individuals. Whilst there is generalised understanding that libraries make an important difference in their communities, no widespread measure has been identified for calculating and evidencing this contribution. At the same time, and following technological change, demand from service users is also shifting in ways that also impact other cultural institutions such as museums and archives (Sieghart 2014, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2003).

As previously noted, this shift in the purpose of libraries is accompanied by the emergence of commissioning in the public sector in the UK, as well as fundamental reforms in the ways that public services can be delivered at local level. Leaders of public library services must develop a far more detailed understanding of how their service impacts local communities, be able to present this convincingly to commissioners and other stakeholders, and be able



to negotiate the socially enterprising balance articulated above as they seek to grow and develop both their organisation and their impact.

This is the context in which our research was undertaken. A number of shifts in society, local authority governance structures and technology are pointing to a new and multi-faceted role for libraries, which also mean we must look again at how to measure and evaluate their contribution to society.

2.3.2. Key findings from our literature review

Our systematic review identified that an 'ad-hoc' approach to measuring, evaluating and monetising 'social value' is emerging in the libraries sector. It is clear from the literature that a single measure of the social value of libraries is yet to emerge, and instead, library services and researchers have sought to (re-)define these measures on an individual case basis, to create stories and narratives that fit the unique context of specific libraries or library services and that fulfil the required purposes in each case (e.g. contract management and monitoring; communications and advocacy; reflection and evaluation).

The diversity of approaches is underpinned by a similar diversity of definitions of 'value' itself and the fact that libraries themselves create many diverse forms of social value. This is informed by *inter alia* understandings of economic value (Imholz and Weil Arns 2007), cultural capital (Goulding 2008), intellectual capital (Kostaglios 2013) and so on.

As a result, across the sector a patchwork emerges of methods for capturing social value, using quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. There is no evidence of take-up of a systematic or standardised approach, although aspects of well-known models such as Social Return on Investment (SROI) may be incorporated into the repertoire of impact-capture tools used by evaluators.

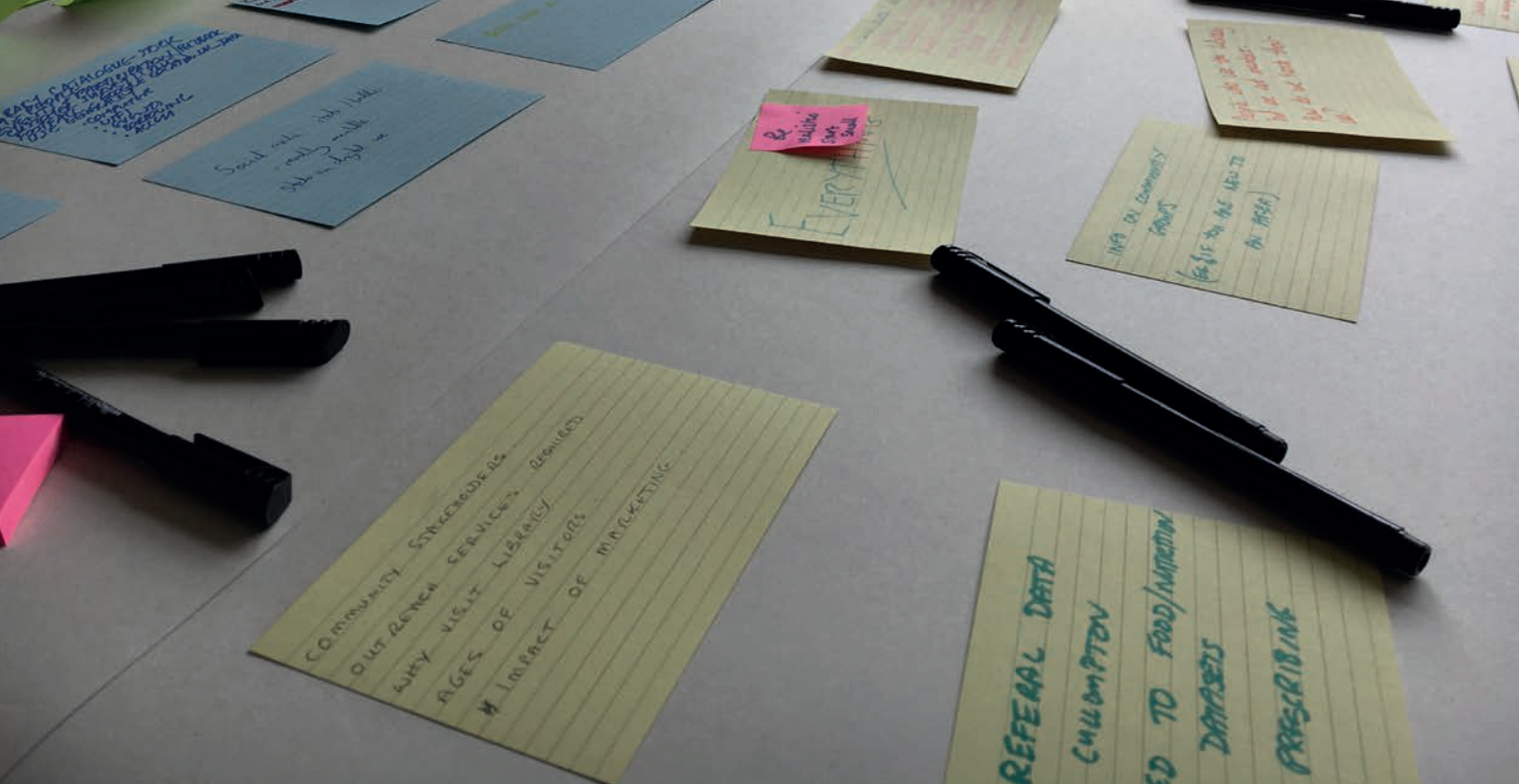
The challenge of evaluating social impact is well noted by the academic literature. Reflecting on the opportunities for social inclusion and partnership offered by libraries, Ormerod notes 'the value placed on membership of a networked community is often intangible' (1999, p. 140). This 'transcendent' value of libraries does not lend itself to easy quantification, and scholars have cautioned against evaluating public services solely against economic measures (Town, 2011), drawing attention to the fact that libraries also contribute in un-measurable ways by enabling communities to develop resilience against endogenous and exogenous shocks (Goulding 2004, Grace and Sen 2013, Scott 2011).

Nonetheless, efforts to calculate this contribution in financial terms through forms of cost-benefit have been undertaken at a case level, with contributions to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and jobs used together with economic multipliers in the case of Ontario's public libraries (Sawyer 1996).

Similar measures have been used elsewhere, in an evaluation of the St Louis public libraries (Holt et al 1999) and by BOP Consulting in partnership with Arts Council England (2014). Cost-Benefit analyses explore the 'opportunity cost' of *not* having a library service. These are often used alongside analyses which ask library users what they would be 'willing to pay' if the service were not provided for free - also known as 'contingent valuation' (Kostiak 2002).

However, the unique nature of individual library services and diverse methodologies renders measurement inconsistent across different communities, regions and service providers. For example, Tenopir and King (2000: 208) identified that it cost '7.2 times more *not* to have a library than to have one', and the British Library's review of its own service identified a benefit to society of £5 for every £1 spent (British Library 2004: 5). Even within a single service, variation can be significant; Murphy, Glavin and Natali's (2007) evaluation of San Francisco State Library estimated the total value of benefits to society at between \$87m and \$207m - an outcome which perhaps best articulates the challenge of achieving accuracy and consistency in evaluating social and financial value.





An effort to standardise library evaluation has emerged through Poll's (2012) proposed ISO standard. However, the literature identifies several challenges with evaluating intangible social benefits (Morris et al 2002). Where proxy measures are used to translate these into economic terms, these are often not reported (as in the case of Haratsis, 1995).

Furthermore, whilst some evidence on the impact of libraries on literacy levels is better understood, this data does not reflect the above mentioned changes in the purpose of libraries in society. Importantly, the research base lacks both a consistent approach to evaluating social value, and the longitudinal data required to evidence long-term social change (BOP Consulting/Arts Council England, 2014). Our review (p18) concludes:

“although some studies identify economic/financial ‘proxies’ for evaluating how public libraries support the physical, cultural and social wellbeing of individuals and communities, this has been accomplished on a case-by-case basis and in a largely ‘ad-hoc’ manner. Whilst efforts have been made to standardise library impact capture, Poll’s (2012) model has not been incorporated by the organisations studied in the academic literature. At a more generalised systematic level, the ‘black box’ through which libraries accomplish these outcomes remains tightly closed.”

2.3.4 Insights from the social enterprise literature

Interestingly, these findings mirror evidence from the scholarship on social enterprise. This literature offers some interesting insights given the emergence of so-called ‘alternative delivery models’ within the library sector, in which organisations must balance their social missions alongside financial viability (Ryan and Line 2008, Battilana and Lee 2014). These models are informed by hybrid or ‘blended’ logics, bringing together understandings of ‘public service delivery’ with a ‘private sector ethos’ that sees these organisations competing to deliver services. Whilst insights from social enterprise are perhaps particularly valuable for those service providers (including Libraries Unlimited) who have ‘spun out’ from the local authority, they remain pertinent to all library services who operate in multi-stakeholder public service contexts, where each stakeholder is likely to interpret ‘social value’ slightly differently, and either prefer, require or impose different approaches to measuring and capturing it as a result (Ebrahim et al 2014).



Despite the emergence and gradual take-up of standardised models such as SROI and Balanced ScoreCard (Kaplan and Norton 1996, Somers 2005, Bull 2007), social entrepreneurs across a number of sectors avoid standardised methods because of a lack of available data, or because their diverse impact is better captured using other means (Molecke and Pinkse 2017). Instead, organisations are found to employ what, in the social enterprise literature, is known as a 'bricolage' approach (Molecke and Pinkse 2017, Baker and Nelson 2005, Garud & Karnøe, 2003). Bricolage is derived from the French for 'Do it yourself' or 'DIY'. A bricolage approach refers to how members of social enterprises find it more effective to harness what is readily available to them - using the 'resources at hand' - to measure and develop their social impact. This means that libraries use the resources at hand, developing a more creative approach to capturing and measuring their social value. The bricolage approach suggests that rather than trying to find a single measure or 'model' of social value, library services may be better off learning to use the resources available to them in creative ways, to advocate for the important difference they make to the communities they serve. In other words, the 'how' is perhaps even more important than the 'what' - library services must learn better how to use the 'tools' implicated in creating social value.

2.3.5 Literature review conclusions and research gaps:

Our literature review indicates that to date and like their social enterprise counterparts, library services have not found a route forward in standardised models of social value capture. The literature suggests that sole use of standardised methods is not appropriate because:

- A. Libraries are multiplicitous places, bringing together complex communities of users with different needs relating to different outcomes.
- B. Like social enterprise workers, library staff and leaders often identify other, more convincing ways to track and tell the story of their impact on a case-by-case basis.
- C. Different forms of social value require a variety of metrics for understanding and measurement.
- D. Multiple imperatives exist for understanding, tracking, measuring and reporting on social value in all its forms. Sometimes an imperative is internally generated (e.g. the organisation wanting to understand its impact in order to make more of it or communicate about it) and sometimes an imperative can be externally generated or imposed (e.g. the organisation tracking and reporting on a particular aspect of social value or set of metrics as part of its contractual or grant obligations).

In addition, a number of gaps are identified in the scholarly literature, to which this project has sought to contribute, either by igniting a conversation, or by providing further understanding. In particular our systematic review method uncovered:

- *No research on how library services utilise, create and curate public data.*
This is an important omission; whilst some authors identify the potential of data analytics for libraries (Kostagiolas 2013, Becker and Sanders 2006), the process by which this might be implemented and the subsequent implications are not discussed. Given the role of libraries as developers of digital literacy, 'information service providers', and trusted guardians of public information (Carnegie UK, 2017) it appears that library services might have much to gain by developing discussion on how libraries could a) use their own data to drive strategic activity and b) develop conversations about how data repositories are managed and leveraged in communities.
- *No research on how library services develop staff to 'lead' social value generation.*
This is an important gap because although the recent Skills Strategy developed by CILIP and the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) (2015)





places emphasis on leadership development, no mention is made of the specific skills required to capture, evidence and monetise social value, and no discussion in the literature is found on how these skills could be built. Furthermore, given the 'bricolage' effort adopted by many library services in relation to social value, it is likely that staff - including frontline staff - are creating this patchwork of methods incorporating their tacit knowledge - *the resources at hand* - about the difference they are making in local communities. Understanding how frontline staff make sense of their local impacts in order to create 'more and better' is a fruitful avenue for future research.

- *No research exploring how organisational values (and agendas) shape the process of social value amplification or monetisation.*

This is significant for two reasons. The first is because methods that connect organisational values explicitly to long-term social outcomes are becoming increasingly mainstream in the 'third' sector, which as evidenced above, mirrors the libraries sector in terms of the need to evidence social value. Discussion about methodologies such as "Theory of Change", that establish causal pathways between stated organisational values or purposes, and eventual outcomes (and connected to costs of the inputs required to deliver such outcomes) is scarce in the literature, although it is noted in the social enterprise scholarship.

The second reason is that stakeholder perceptions of social value are shaped by the often hidden or 'tacit' political agendas that underpin their 'stake' in the organisation. Explicitly surfacing organisational values - and stakeholder values - might offer a more nuanced insight into how social value is interpreted differently in different contexts, leading to differences in how outcomes are either emphasised, minimised or hidden from view. In order to better understand social value capture in libraries, there must be a recognition that it is an inherently political process, used by organisations (not just libraries, but local authorities, competing organisations, charities and other partners) to drive their agendas, in a context of increasing financial pressure.

Together these omissions are especially significant because, as our findings indicate, they have something in common. These three research gaps - organisational values, data analytics, and staff development - are important for the *implementation* of mechanisms that capture, amplify and monetise social value. To use the language of the social enterprise literature, they represent the *tools of bricolage* - the resources at hand which are available for use by library leaders and members of library staff, to generate understanding about social and financial value.

To capture more understanding about how organisations might adopt these tools, we needed a method that tracked the process of embedding them over time, in support of social value amplification. Our research method is set out briefly below.

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Libraries are multiplicitous places, bringing together complex communities of users with different needs relating to different outcomes.

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3. Our research method and implementation

3.1 An Action Research approach

To interrogate the research questions, the project partners adopted a multi-method approach incorporating the expertise of each of its members. Our method was broadly informed by the principles of participatory action research:

“a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.”

(Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4).

This project sought to track the experiences of library staff and managers across Devon as they grapple with the challenge of capturing and monetising social value. Drawing on the important literature gaps listed above, we focused on two key mechanisms for collecting data. These were:

- Making use of Libraries Unlimited’s existing user data - explored in section 3.2
- Developing and tracking how participants engage with social value-related challenges over time, with these often, in turn, linked to money and financial value some way - explored in section 3.3.

Importantly this approach to data collection is a mechanism itself for creating social value. Those participating in the research used the Action Learning sets and data discovery processes as opportunities to tackle ‘real world’ challenges in their local libraries and for their organisation and communities.

3.2 An open data approach

Our aim was to develop narratives that demonstrate the possibilities of open data in the context of libraries. This is inherently challenging as open data can be an abstract concept for many people, so it was important to try and build a shared understanding of what open data was (and how it related to the work people were already doing), what it could be used for (through prototyping and sample analysis), and the impact it could have.

Secondly, we aimed to develop processes around open data that made the data itself easier to publish and to reuse. We provided a platform for this (<https://libraries.thedata.place>) and published sample data to it, and we also ran workshops to both discover more data in the local context and to use the data in different ways.

Finally, we tried to develop a community around data and libraries, that would nurture an ecosystem of people, data, infrastructure and other resources: it was hoped that this would be largely self-sustaining.

In practice this took the form of the following interventions:

Data discovery

We worked directly with the data that the library service had and was already using, but also ran a workshop with a wider community of stakeholders both inside and outside of Libraries Unlimited to discover the data everyone already knew about, the data people wished they had, and the resources and infrastructure available that could help.

Data Publishing

We set up an open data portal and used it to release and publish as much open data as we could in the time available based on the outcomes of the discovery process.





We looked at the hurdles to publishing more data and of the issues around staff using it more effectively: the project coincided with a replacement of the Library Management System and this highlighted that there were systemic issues with open data and the relatively small number of library management system suppliers.

Prototyping

We ran a prototyping workshop that helped to inspire people to build things with the data - not just technical interventions but policies or new project briefs as well.

Taken together, these interventions to collectively see the value of data, improve processes for publishing data and strengthen the communities who use it help to build a resilient data culture.

We undertook two main types of workshops:

- **Discovery workshops** - that sought to uncover resources, people, and requirements in an unclear and evolving data ecosystem
- **Prototyping workshops** - designed to help people think through issues by devising (or even building) solutions in a rapid, iterative fashion.

In each case the workshops were built on the foundations of workshops ODI use with other clients to explore similar themes. However, they were adapted to the spaces we were in and the participants' own perspectives and needs.

In both cases flexible facilitation proved essential to get the best out of each workshop. Workshops have typically lasted a day and have ranged in size from six to 30 people.

3.3 The 'Social Value Champions' leadership development programme

The lead researcher and research fellow from the University of Exeter, and the Chief Executive of Libraries Unlimited established a leadership development programme within Libraries Unlimited. Participants were invited to participate by becoming 'Social Value Champions' for the organisation. By taking part, participants committed to attending a series of Action Learning sets, focused on developing a better organisational understanding of generating social value. These meetings were spread at regular intervals throughout the project's duration, and interspersed with additional developmental workshops and activities to which the participants were invited. A list of these can be found in the project timeline. The opportunity to participate was open to all members of staff from across Libraries Unlimited, irrespective of role, seniority or whether part-time or full-time members of staff and relevant costs (such as travel and backfilling time for their substantive roles) were covered by the project. Eight members of staff formed the first cohort of Social Value Champions; most were frontline members of staff with one from a support team. These individuals formed the first of our Action Learning sets.





Action Learning was developed by Revans (1982) as a practical peer support method for helping employees and managers solve their problems in ‘real time’, informed by an understanding that individuals learn practical solutions by reflecting on experience (Kolb and Kolb 2005). It has been used by diverse organisations as a leadership development tool, partly because of its practical nature, and partly in recognition of the role that reflection opportunities play in developing leadership practice (Raelin 2006). Action Learning has been found to help individuals navigate the shifts in understanding that are required by organisational transformations (Hawkins, Correia and Pye 2017).

Action Learning participants are invited to share their current challenges with a group of peers known as a ‘set’. By asking a series of clarifying and then open questions, the participants’ peers help them establish a set of actions that enable them to make progress towards resolving their challenge. These actions are recorded at each meeting, and provide a useful record for participants of their proposed ‘next steps’. At the subsequent meeting, participants each reflect on their progress, before continuing to apply questioning techniques to the next stage of their challenge.

For this strand of research, data was captured by recording the Action Learning sets as they took place over time. This enabled the project researchers to track how participants developed practical understanding of how to tackle the social value challenge. Following the success of the first cohort, a second series of workshops were established to introduce other members of Libraries Unlimited to Action Learning principles.

Group 1 1: 8 participants, 6 meetings between June 2017 and March 2018. All participants were female.

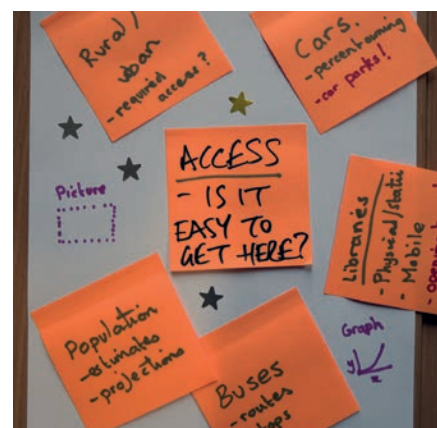
Group 2: 7 participants, ongoing (4 meetings between June 2018 and November 2018 a further planned for February 2019). 3 participants were female and 4 were male.

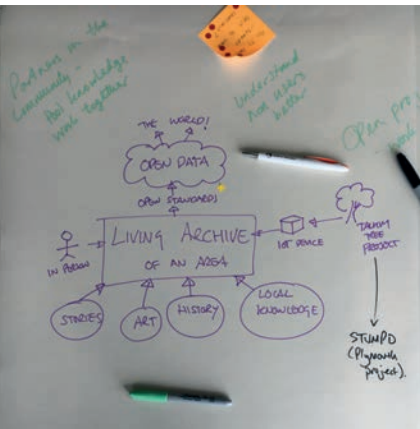
Each meeting lasted between 3-4 hours, generating audio data which was subsequently transcribed and coded using NVivo data analysis software.

Follow-up interviews with participants confirm that the Action Learning sets were a valuable tool to develop confidence, leadership and a sense of connectedness to the organisation itself and to other members of staff. The outcomes are explored further in the findings and implications sections below.

3.4 Ethics, responsibility and research integrity

Research ethics and integrity have been a central theme of this project. The data collection method was approved by the University of Exeter’s research ethics committee, and all participants provided their informed consent. The researchers gave particular thought to the potential for Action Learning set data to be identifiable (given the small number of participants and the named organisational partner, Libraries Unlimited) and sensitive (given that people are discussing





important matters over a period of time, with close colleagues). The participants were assured that no identifying or sensitive data will be published and that the research team are aware of their responsibility to make every effort to protect their anonymity.

3.5 On the validity of project findings

The value of participatory action research is judged not on its replicability - by their nature, action research designs are often based on a single case, following a small group of individuals who seek to make a difference in their own social world (McTaggart 1991). However, the value of action research methodology lies in the potential for insights and potential solutions developed through the research to have wider significance e.g. for a sector such as libraries and information services, or the cultural and creative industries (Eden and Huxham 1996). Ensuring the continued resonance of research findings within the wider sphere of practice is an important way of checking and maintaining the validity of the research, which meant that stakeholder engagement became central to our research methodology.

To this end, we shared our interim research findings with stakeholders, library professionals and policy makers, social entrepreneurs, Arts Council England and other stakeholders at two Research Summits in October 2017 and July 2018, as well as with the international library community at the Next Library conferences in Aarhus (2017) and Berlin (2018).

Feedback captured at these summits and events informed subsequent project activity and was captured in an interim project report (after the October summit) and post-summit feedback blog post (after the July summit). We view these as an important part of our research triangulation process (these are available via: blogs.exeter.ac.uk/unlimitedvalue/).

3.4 Timeline

Unlimited Value Project Activity Timeline	Venue	Date
Data Discovery Day	Exeter	17 03 17
Libraries Unlimited Business Development Day	Cullompton	25 04 17
2nd Leadership Symposium	Mykonos	02 05 17
Arts Council England Peer Learning Day London	London Southbank Centre	11 05 17
Action Learning Set A1	University of Exeter	21 06 17
Next Library Aarhus	Aarhus, Denmark	12-16 06 17
Presentation at RSA event 'power to create'	Exeter Library	06 07 17
Action Learning Set A2	University of Exeter	19 07 17
Plus Tate Network Talk	Unknown	22 09 17
Action Learning Set A3	University of Exeter	21 09 17
Mini-conference with Loyds Bank Innovation Lab on Big Data	University of Exeter	10 10 17
Project pitch lecture to students	University of Exeter	10 10 17
Libraries Unlimited Staff Conference & AGM	Ivybridge	30 10 17
Initial Meeting with Marketing Dissertation Student	Exeter Library	31 10 17
Libraries Unlimited Fundraising Workshop	Cullompton	06 11 17
Action Learning Set A4	University of Exeter	07 11 17
Libraries Unlimited Service Plan Review	Exeter	10 11 17
Libraries Unlimited Visit from 'in file'	Exeter Library	29 11 17
NPO Creative Session	Exeter Library	08 12 17
Action Learning Set A5	University of Exeter	05 12 17
Presentation to HR Masters Students	University of Exeter	12 12 17
Action learning video filming	Various	24 01 18
Dr Greg Molecke session at Libraries Unlimited	Exeter Library	01 02 18
Libraries Unlimited Collaboration day - Action learning taster	Barnstaple Library	06 02 18
Libraries Unlimited Collaboration day - Action learning taster	Exeter Library	09 02 18
Unlimited Value Prototyping Day	Exeter Library	07 02 18
Action Learning Set A 6	University of Exeter	20 02 18

4. Research findings: The tools of bricolage, or how libraries come to capture and understand social value in practice.

In this section, we review the key themes emerging from our research process and data. We identify the challenge of establishing a standard model of evaluating libraries' social value, when libraries often offer very distinctive services, and operate in a multi-stakeholder environment where different partner organisations, users, members, customers, funders and commissioners themselves have varied understandings of, and requirements around, social value.

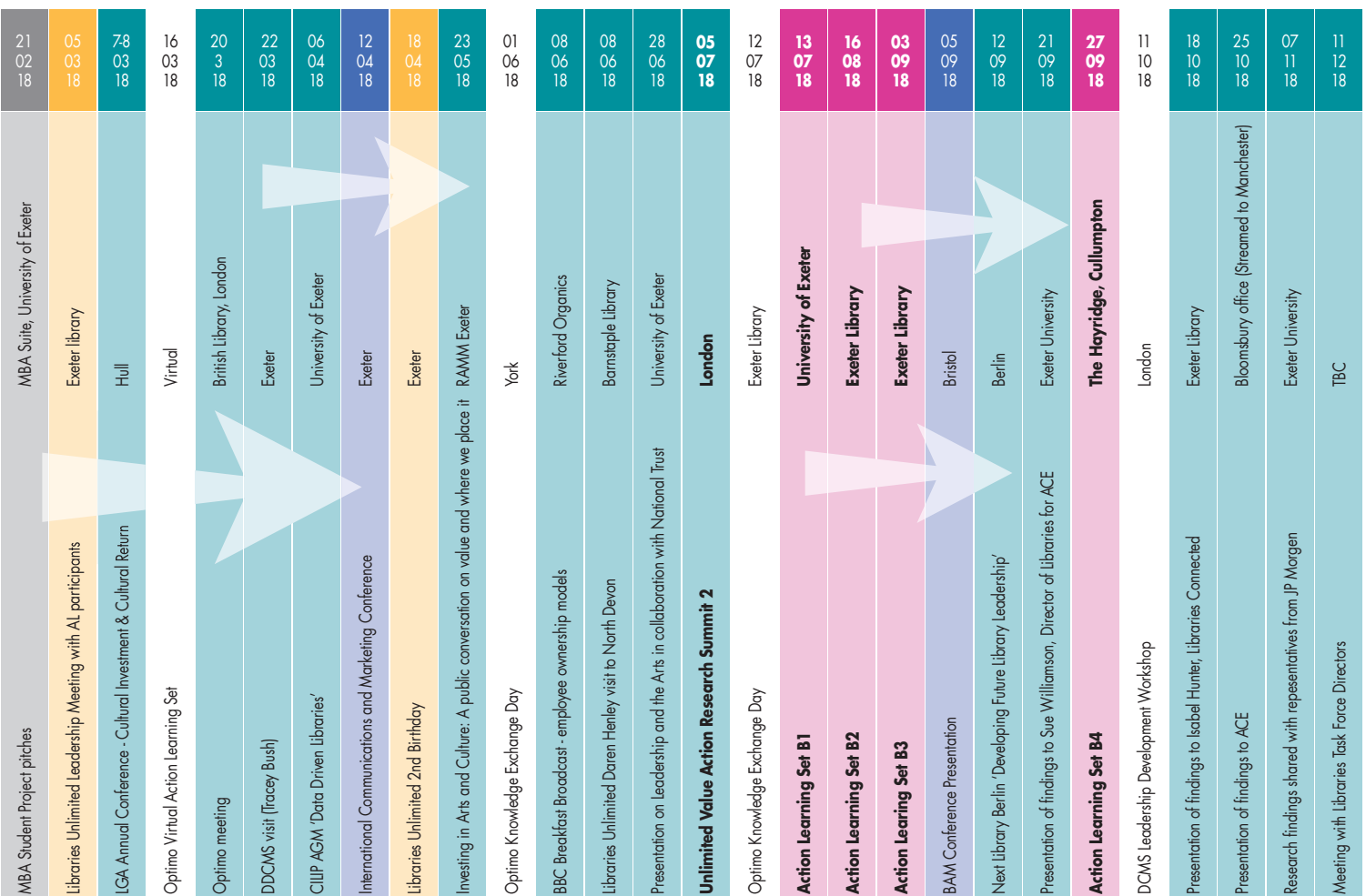
4.1 Introduction - what are libraries 'for'?

Over time, a central finding emerged regarding the varied and open-ended nature of the purpose of library services - what libraries are *for*. Almost every Action Learning set we facilitated explored themes of organisational purpose and identity. This question also consistently arose during our data discovery and prototyping workshops, and through our discussions at Research Summits. It also emerged during an Arts Council England visit to Barnstaple Library (06.07.18), in which Darren Henley, CEO of Arts Council England, asked a frontline member of staff what a library is 'for'. The member of staff replied

'...I think a library is a place where people can come and be themselves. It's a place where people can meet others on their own terms, or be by themselves. They can do their own thing, but we're here if they need us...'

This response is significant because it articulates so well the multiplicitous nature of library spaces - libraries offer many things, to many people, at different points in each individual's life story. The implication for understanding social value is that, if libraries mean different things, to different people - not just service

Key To Timeline	
GREEN	External
YELLOW	Internal
RED	Data Collection
BLUE	Academic Event
GREY	Student Engagement
EMBOLDENED	Key Project Event





users, but stakeholders, managers and members of staff - establishing a single understanding of a library's 'social value' and how to measure it is likely to prove difficult.

This multiplicitous understanding of 'value' and how libraries provide and evidence it, is mirrored by discussions in the literature about the nature of value. Whereas traditional understandings of value explore 'social value' as distinct from 'financial' value, social enterprises are understood to operate a model of 'blended' value: a 'both/and' rather than an 'either/or' approach. Therefore, library spaces have something in common with notions of value - both have multiple interpretations, often rooted in personal experience or political standpoints.

Discussions of what libraries are 'for' and how this can be measured evoke notions of heterotopias - understood by Lefebvre (2003) to be 'both/and' spaces, inhabited by heterogeneous communities, which *incorporate* different agendas ('both/and') rather than *exclude*, and which are said to enable transformative outcomes due to their capacity for inclusion, potential and possibility.

Heterotopias speak to the point made by the member of staff above, that libraries are inclusive places, that support different communities at the same time. These communities have different perspectives on 'value', and in fact, single measures may by definition be exclusionary - inappropriate in places that, like libraries, seeks to bring together, and support diversity within communities. Instead, what is needed is a both/and approach to understanding social (and financial) value in its many permutations, that recognises the priorities of different community groups, staff members, managers and stakeholders.

The 'what libraries are for' question, and its implications for a multiplicitous understanding of social value, resonates with a finding established initially through our literature review: that no single 'best way' to capture or measure the social value of a library appears to exist. This finding re-emerged through our discussions with other library services such as California State Library, with Social Value Champions, and at our data workshops and Research Summits.

Like social enterprises, library services are rejecting a standardised approach, choosing instead a 'bricolage' approach, where they use the resources at hand - often a mixture of unique organisational insights, paired with quantitative measures and wider proxy measures such as CIPFA data, or statistics on mental health and wellbeing in the community - to understand, build and evidence their contribution to society.

It may be that standardised models will coalesce in the future. Research on bricolage suggests that standardisation does occur over time, as emerging models for harnessing social value are reinforced, disseminated, improved or discarded (Baker and Nelson 2005). However, given the significant capacity and financial restraints that libraries face, and the distinctiveness of individual library services (each of which may offer a different range of services), a standardised approach may prove difficult in the short term though the current review by Libraries Connected of the Universal Offers may prove helpful here.

Standardisation requires a mutual understanding of what libraries are 'for', but this is difficult to achieve in a multi-stakeholder context where even small variances in understanding can have a big impact.

Informed by the likely continuation of bricolage approaches to measuring social value, we evidence how library services can harness the 'tools' of bricolage set out below, to effectively apply their 'resources at hand', tailored to the needs of their own organisation.



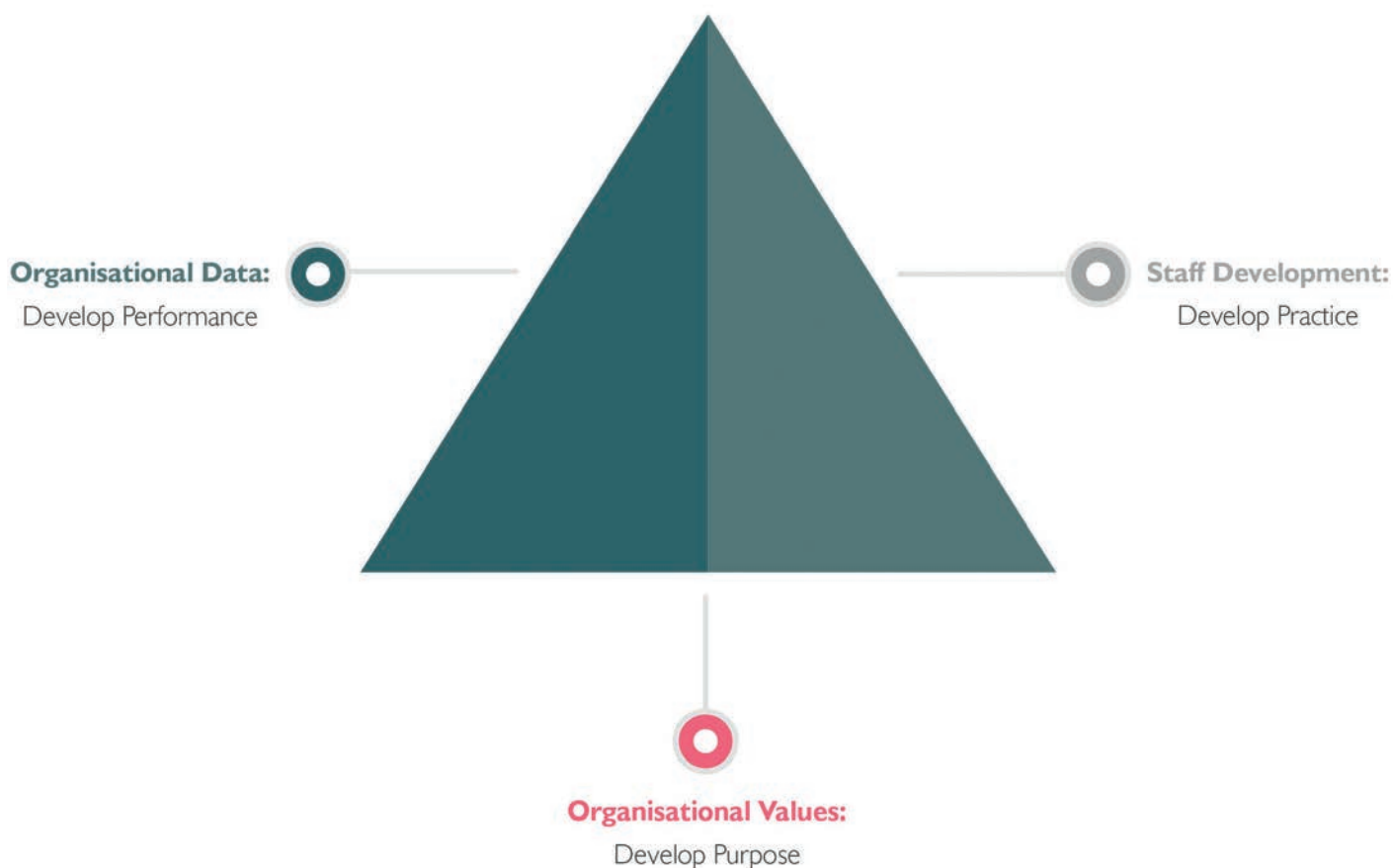
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Establishing a single understanding of a library's 'social value' and how to measure it is likely to prove difficult.

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4.2 The Unlimited Value Model: A three-dimensional approach to understanding the social value of libraries

Figure 1. A 3-dimensional model of social value



Our Unlimited Value model articulates three vital ‘tools’ of bricolage - the resources at hand, through which library services and other cultural institutions gain a better understanding of their multifaceted challenge. These three tools act as ‘pathways to social value’, which each offer different and important insights into how social value can be captured, understood and leveraged by libraries.

4.2.1 Organisational values - developing purpose

Our research clarified how understandings about the social impact created by libraries are iteratively linked to the organisation’s purposes or values. To know the ‘what’, we must know the ‘why’.

At the same time, understandings of ‘what’ libraries achieve feed back into understandings of ‘why’, or purpose - so that purpose and social value are constantly working in dialogue with one another and evolving as they go. This was evidenced through two of our research activities. The first was a ‘Theory of Change’ workshop for Libraries Unlimited’s staff and stakeholders, led in February 2018 by Dr Greg Molecke, an expert on social impact measurement in social enterprises. It was also evidenced during the second series of Action Learning workshops, which brought together managers from across Libraries Unlimited’. Discussions about data, and how it could be sourced and used to evidence impact in the community, also generated discussions about Libraries Unlimited’s core purposes, how they were enacted in practice, and whether they were the most accurate and current representation of the difference that the organisation makes in the community. These activities represented opportunities to ‘live out’ organisational values in ways that do not fix or limit them, but allow them to act as a springboard for action on generating social value, in ways that relate to the varied experiences of stakeholders involved in the discussion.





Organisational values are therefore a vital resource which helps to construct and frame understandings of social value. However, at the same time, understandings of social value re-frame understandings of why the organisation matters, and help staff and stakeholders to envision how these purposes are embedded in their 'lived' practice as members of the organisation. This is how the second resource, 'developing practice' comes into play.

4.2.2. Staff development - developing practice

The second dimension of our 3-D model on the tools of social value engages the tacit understandings possessed by organisational members, about how their work makes a difference.

Following the *Public Library Skills Strategy (2017-2030)*, which advocates 'promoting leadership at every level', building the capacity of all organisational members to understand social value capture, measurement, communication and persuasion, is likely to offer richer and more nuanced insights, than concentrating this expertise at the top of the organisation or in a particular silo within it.

Increasingly, scholars are recognising that leadership is not merely a set of competencies possessed by individuals, but also a 'social-relational process' (Cullen-Lester Maupin and Carter 2017: 130-131), in which leadership is 'claimed' by individuals, and 'granted' by others with the authority to confer legitimacy (De Rue and Ashford 2010).

Developing practice, through opportunities such as the Social Value Champions programme, therefore becomes a process by which groups can become empowered to work together effectively as leaders, shaping practice in ways that are recognised by others in the organisation. Building opportunities for stakeholders and library staff to recognise one another's input into discussions about social value develops individuals, and works to build the leadership capacity of the community as a whole.

This is evidenced by the outcomes in our Action Learning sets, which originally focused on ideas or projects owned by individual members of staff - a social history project, a plan to offer library wall space as commissioned exhibition space to local artists, or an idea to deliver 'pop-up' libraries. Over time, as the group became familiar with one another and learned to trust one another's legitimacy and commitment, they started to tackle more systemic, organisational challenges.

By being 'granted' a visible role as Social Value Champions, the participants were also able to act with more influence in their local social relationships - to 'claim' leadership, and influence others about the significance of social impact and how to capture it. The Social Values Champions programme encouraged participants to hold 'taster' sessions on Action Learning, participate in Values Mapping exercises, and take on presenting roles at the Libraries Unlimited Staff Conference and Research Summits. In this way, their insights were shared over a wider community, allowing bottom-up insights on social value to spread through the organisation.



“

The Social Values Champions programme encouraged participants

”

Case Study: Beatrice Coveney, Senior Library Supervisor, Exmouth Library



“When I attended my first Action Learning session, it was a bit of an adventure as I didn’t know what to expect. I particularly valued meeting a small group of people on a regular basis. This setting encouraged us to develop positive and nurturing connections with each other and ourselves, and created the right conditions to comfortably challenge each other. The fast-paced working environment at Libraries Unlimited is challenging, and the whole organisation has had to incorporate many changes as well as seizing new opportunities. I’m glad I took part in Action Learning as it has helped me to deal with the challenges, by discovering some hidden inner strength I didn’t think I had and to develop my resilience further. If Action Learning was available for me again, I would definitely seize the opportunity.”

Case Study: Lisa D’Alberti, Library Supervisor, Northam Library



“Action Learning has made a huge difference to the way I approach challenges. It’s given me the confidence to calmly think about my approach through the process of producing an action plan. With realistic timescales and deadlines for actions, the plan provides me with a structure that makes challenges achievable. The Action Learning skills have become embedded and I employ them, often subconsciously, on both a personal and professional level. As a group, we became incredibly close and that bond has remained. It’s great to know there’s a support network to call upon when needed.”

“I’m glad I took part in Action Learning as it has helped me to deal with the challenges, by discovering some hidden inner strength I didn’t think I had and to develop my resilience further.”

“Action Learning has made a huge difference to the way I approach challenges. It’s given me the confidence to calmly think about my approach through the process of producing an action plan.”



4.2.3. Data - developing performance

The third and final tool in the Unlimited Value model is data. Data emerges as a powerful tool for leaders of library services seeking to harness and amplify their social value. Through the data workshops and other work delivered by ODI Devon on Libraries Unlimited's latent customer data, it becomes apparent that data can shape practice around social value in three ways: advocacy, analysing performance, and improving service delivery - and it can also be the basis of new, directly delivered services to library users.

4.2.3.1 Advocacy

By learning more about the impact their service has on a community, libraries and their leaders are better placed to convince commissioners, funders and other stakeholders about the importance of their service. Being familiar with internal data and the other openly available data sets - which can sometimes articulate a 'need' in the community - can help to underpin plausible and persuasive narratives about the role of libraries in local communities, rooting stories about how libraries can change lives in 'objectivity' as well as emotion.

"Data can provide new insight and evidence to inform your toughest decisions. But numbers alone won't convince others. Good stories – with a few key facts thrown in – are what attach emotion to your argument, and... move people to action".

(Nick Morgan, Communications Consultant, 2014)

4.2.3.2. Analysing performance

Analysing organisational data can offer a better insight into how an organisation functions, identifying areas of strength and weakness, and informing the entire operational scope of an organisation - from specific efficiency improvements, to better tactical effectiveness, and a more richly contextualised strategic direction.

4.2.3.3 Improving service delivery

Data can be used to enhance service user experiences through both research and delivery. This involves using data to 'drive' service operations, often in real time to ensure a more efficient and effective service. Sometimes this involves using data to 'nudge' library users towards a particular service offering (Yeung 2017), which is most suited to their needs and most likely to result in satisfaction or social value generation. As with the other two modes of using data, sharing data across organisations, stakeholders and platforms can be important here, rendering openly accessible, or 'open' data a valuable tool for libraries looking to better understand their social value and the needs of their communities.

4.2.3.4 Libraries as data service providers

This last point opens up a wider discussion around the potential for libraries to play a role in the provision of data services. As the original 'information service providers', libraries are well placed to act as custodians of open data, enabling service users to access and understand data about issues affecting their lives, whilst acting as a forum for important discussions about data ethics, privacy and safeguarding.

4.2.4 Implications of our model for understanding the social value of libraries

By harnessing just one of these dimensions, organisational values, staff development and data, library services are looking through a 'lens' which brings certain aspects of social value clearly into focus. However, lenses can also blur as well as emphasise. Focusing 'only' on data at the expense of the organisation's purposes, for example, can cause other aspects of social value, such as those informed by the organisation's values, its sense of what it is 'for' and why this matters, to fall out of focus.

Leaders of library services must therefore pay attention to each of these perspectives - to harness these resources in different ways, at different times, to understand how they might contribute to a meaningful narrative of a service's social value. This is rendered more complex because of the multi-stakeholder environment in which libraries operate - which mean that libraries must incorporate an awareness of the different political agendas and preferences of different stakeholders, whose interests may be salient at different times.

4.2.5 Implications of our model for understanding the connection between social and financial value of libraries

Our second research question refers to how library services should understand the link between social and financial value. We have noted the importance for 'both/and' forms of value above - suggesting that recognising that social and financial value are not necessarily distinct but blended or layered together. Our findings confirm that not only are libraries creating diverse and fluid forms of social value, but that these are of relevance in different ways to different stakeholders.

However - and this is the challenging part - each of these forms of social value might be connected to a different form of business, service or operating model in the organisation, such as a room hire, cafes, bounce and rhyme sessions or makers spaces. This is how the bricolage of blending social and financial value works in practice - using the resources at hand, to ensure that important social outcomes can be delivered in ways that makes libraries vibrant and the organisations that run them financially resilient.

We have identified several 'positives' and several tricky aspects of this blending of social and financial value.

The 'positives':

- The diverse forms of value created by library services means that some services or aspects of the service can potentially be monetised in a wide range of ways to support wider service provision in the future. This might be achieved through:
 - being commissioned to deliver initiatives with particular intended social outcomes such as 'books on prescription' and so on
 - A 'pay as you go' model for cultural events or selling coffee

The 'tricky aspect'

The complexity set out above means that a library service is a highly complex organisation to run, manage and be part of, particularly once it becomes a mutual or social enterprise. This carries both costs and opportunities once you move beyond a simple 'tax pays for it' public sector framing. Managing the many competing demands, with different budgets and staffing models required for each segment of the business model, is challenging. The implication is that library staff, and their leaders, need to become good at 'library bricolage' - using the resources at hand to make day-to-day decisions to constantly balance the social and the financial, and also learning how to use these resources in enterprising ways to create more value when things are working well.

The implication is that the experience of leading library services effectively is characterised by a 'DIY' process involving finding new ways, and learning about new tools, to blend social and financial value together, rather than relying on a standardised template. This is evidenced through our Action Learning sets, which began with a cry for help: 'How can I...?', and once, ended with the realisation that, 'actually I could consult [offer consultation and advice to others] on this!'.



“ A library service is a highly complex organisation to run, manage and be part of, particularly once it becomes a mutual or social enterprise. ”



5. Partner findings, thoughts and implications

In this section, each partner produces a response to the University of Exeter research team’s core findings on behalf of our respective sectors and organisations. They explain what the findings mean from a practical perspective, and set out what learning they are taking away and what changes they would hope to see as a result.



5.2.1 ODI Devon

ODI Devon would sum up its mission in this area by saying we would like every library to be as much a data library as a book lending library. We consider our key finding from this project as being that libraries may be the logical place to house municipal open data initiatives, and substantial benefits could be realised by collectively exploring the challenges and possibilities of such a vital development.

As part of our work we developed some heuristics that serve as guides as we tackle future projects. The most important of these is a reminder that data doesn’t solve anything: the problems we face are not data problems, and so a pipeline develops where real-world problems are turned into data-addressable challenges, solved, and then these data-oriented solutions need to be turned back into things that work on the ground. It is clear to us as data practitioners that this situation mirrors that which has existed with other technologies, namely that all the emotional labour occurs at the ends of this pipeline whilst most of the hype, coverage and resources go to the middle.

Since the understanding of problems—and the judgement as to whether or not they can be turned into data problems—remains the key skill, this project has highlighted to us that library staff are the key societal assets in this space and are on the front line of turning people’s problems into knowledge-addressable challenges.

Library services themselves handle huge amounts of data, from their archives to the fragments of conversations staff have with users; there’s a real opportunity for libraries to lead the way in extending everyone’s understanding of data from being just about numbers, to being about meaningful representations of our worlds, both real and imagined.

“ODI Devon would sum up its mission in this area by saying we would like every library to be as much a data library as a book lending library.”

Libraries are designed to be highly accessible spaces, both physically and in terms of catering for diverse audiences. It is important that the data they share builds upon this by not only being accessible itself but also by furthering the accessibility of services, through better information on how everyone can get the most from their library.

Libraries can also provide perfect spaces for innovation. The Discovery Day highlighted a number of innovation opportunities around the capture and use of data which could provide the basis for prototype projects, such as:

- training and promoting librarians as facilitators of open data access and use;
- enabling more open conversations about the value of sharing users' data;
- making data on library usage more visible in the library;
- using open data to predict and deliver library services;
- developing tools and skills for social media "listening" to monitor trends; and
- forging new data partnerships with other libraries and domain experts to get more value from data.

A crucial challenge for the future of library services remains the building of a *data culture* within them; from how we include everyone in the capture, use and understanding of data to how we communicate the benefits of data sharing to every user of the library.

One of the strongest themes from the Discovery Day was the perceived need for improved methods of *data capture* around library usage. Although library services can easily capture data on borrowing, many of the other uses of libraries are not evidenced. These other uses may well be critical for many visitors and better understanding these would provide rich material on the role of libraries in the community.

Better, ethical use of social media listening and services such as Google Trends could offer libraries a way into understanding their value to users as well as allow them to better understand the issues that might be important to them, allowing libraries to be more proactive in their provision: by understanding how people talk about libraries in social media conversations, how this changes over time or in response to events (or marketing), and how this varies geographically, library services can adapt their messaging and service provision according to needs and establish a different sort of presence in these conversations. The recent successful use of viral tweets by some libraries is the most visible sign of library services starting to find their place in these conversations.

Better collaboration with data around health, local authority and other partners would provide libraries with access to data that allowed them to be more strategic and clearer in how they demonstrate impact. And all of this means that governance plays a critical role - encompassing a higher profile for GDPR processes and compliance activities to give the various stakeholders greater confidence in libraries data handling capabilities.

What to tackle first remains one of the most important questions facing any leadership team wishing to refocus their service: improving internal library data handling could be seen as either a prerequisite, or a consequence, of building external data services. In other words, if library services want to become centres of excellence for data handling, should they start by working on their internal systems or should they build the external services directly and expect the internal ones to catch up later?

The second, but most obvious area of questioning, is about resources. If our data is seen as the infrastructure of the knowledge economy, who is responsible for looking after and maximising our public assets? What is the business model that will enable these assets to be maintained properly and who will primarily benefit? Traditional commissioners of library services probably are not resourced for this and may not uniformly understand the need for it either.



“
Libraries are designed to be highly accessible spaces, both physically and in terms of catering for diverse audiences.
”

5.2.2 Libraries Unlimited

The Unlimited Value research has developed in parallel with our establishment as a new organisation - the project Steering Group began formulating its approach in October 2016, just six months after Libraries Unlimited went live as a new and independent organisation.

Working alongside a set of experienced academics whose research interests include leadership at times of transition, the development of co-operatives and mutuals and reputation management, has provided real-time expertise and insight for senior managers and the Board of Libraries Unlimited to draw on.

As leaders of a new organisation, with a relatively new organisational form as a mutual, for which there is effectively no 'handbook' or years of consolidated best practice, working on this research has helped boost organisational confidence. We have learned that the issues we are having to navigate, most particularly around the careful balancing act of social and financial value, are issues that most new organisations, particularly social enterprises, encounter. It helps to feel that you're not alone in your endeavour and it has been particularly useful to have access to the Unlimited Value model combining organisational values/purposes, staff empowerment and data in the latter stages of the research.

The model has huge potential for the future, both within our own organisation and across the library and broader social enterprise and cultural sector. There is always a danger of looking for a 'silver bullet' that solves all the challenges an organisation faces and the model reminds us that there are several different lenses through which leaders need to view the organisation and its social mission and purpose.

One of the reasons for setting up Libraries Unlimited as a public service mutual was to enable us to find ways to increase the engagement and empowerment of our workforce. In governance terms, we have two staff trustees on our Board who are elected by their colleagues. Libraries Unlimited also operates a Staff Forum, where representatives are elected from staff teams across the organisation. This research, through the Action Learning approach, has given us some incredible insight into how, by adopting an open, non-hierarchical approach and using tried and trusted techniques such as Action Learning, we can start to make a step change in terms of staff leadership and empowerment. It has also provided us with practical tools and confidence, which we can use in a whole range of initiatives and service development in the future.

As the Chief Executive of Libraries Unlimited, I've always believed that leadership sits at all levels of an organisation - it is not something bestowed on you due to your seniority but it is in the behaviours you adopt and the responsibility you take for delivering impact within your working environment, both internally and externally. Our learning on leadership as part of Unlimited Value has cemented that further. Our staff who bravely put themselves forward as Social Value Champions have spoken at conferences, engaged with stakeholders and presented as part of the research team. They have done much more than they, and probably the Steering Group, ever thought was possible. It has been powerful to see how much those members of staff gained confidence as leaders within the organisation as the Action Learning developed. The approach therefore is one that lends itself to further exploration at a national level, particularly given the focus on leadership that underpins the *Public Library Skills Strategy*.

At the heart of this research has been the question 'what is a library for'? Within the library community, this question often runs the risk of being polarised into two apparently opposing perspectives: those who rightly value and cherish the long-standing role of libraries in supporting the reading, learning and information needs of local communities and those who feel that libraries need to develop a new purpose and approach, which speaks to a more contemporary set of needs. Through the research, I believe we've begun to uncover an approach that recognises that these apparently polarised perspectives are not mutually exclusive

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One of the reasons for setting up Libraries Unlimited as a public service mutual was to enable us to find ways to increase the engagement and empowerment of our workforce.
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and that there is potential to encompass multi-stakeholder perceptions within an overarching commitment to the future resilience and success of public libraries.

5.2.3 Real Ideas Organisation

From a social enterprise perspective, the research has chimed with some of the underlying frustrations that have been bubbling away in the sector for the past couple of years at least, including:

- The quest for a 'best way' to track, measure and report on social impact and value, with different tools and approaches often in competition and themselves seeking to monetise and establish pre-eminence in this space.
- Reporting, performance management and accounting models imported from the private sector without enough questioning of efficacy and the underlying assumptions and values that are then also imported (e.g. annual social impact reports analogous to company and shareholder reports. With these usually documenting year-on-year growth in impact: graphs always going up, but this 'growth' often a negative product of austerity and not necessarily a straightforward cause for celebration; and focussing on the singular and individualised difference claimed by the organisation rather than the reality of the complex, interlinked and necessarily collective change taking place in individual lives and communities.)
- The tensions that can exist in organisations between the internal reasons for tracking and seeking to better understand the social value that you create and the external imperatives.

As an example, RIO are a broad-based social enterprise delivering a wide range of outcomes, from education through to employment and training, and working with a relatively high number of different funders, stakeholders, partners and commissioners as a result. The organisation has recently carried out an audit that reveals that they are currently tracking and reporting on over 2000 sizeable items of data every quarter for at least 16 different public or third sector bodies. A number of interesting questions of wider import arise:

- This extensive and diverse monitoring and reporting carries significant real cost, often not able to be recognised in the contracts themselves, and a range of operational implications given the staffing, skills, ICT and systems required to do all this effectively.
- It also carries opportunity costs – when people are logging, counting and reporting on this data they are not necessarily creating further value for the individuals in question who really matter (i.e. people needing help).
- There are psychological and cultural ramifications too, subtly orienting staff and systems towards funders, 'power' and abstract outputs and outcomes rather than customers and communities, and placing them within a contract, performance or grant management matrix.
- These external demands tend to dominate, leaving less time and energy to focus on the particular social value that the organisation itself wants to create.
- They can also sometimes undermine the very social value that they are seeking to track or surface because of the effect they have on the individuals or communities involved (e.g. intrusion, abstraction, depersonalisation...)
- The area is intensely politicised (though not always recognised as such). For example, what happens to all this data; is it well-used; to what extent does it lead to wider improvement and positive social change? The questions asked, and the data required, also tend to come from the centre outwards and downwards. Who decides what type of data matters and the scope and direction of the inquiry or evaluation? Focus of 'performance' (and related data requirement) is usually downwards from the centre to the organisation and individual and limited in scope to the work taking place with them rather than the nature of the system or the way that the commissioner or public body goes about its work. For example, is the issue of ongoing unemployment to be individualised and attributed solely to the capacity of the young person who has dropped out of school or a product of the performance of the education system and economy and the relevant government department?

“What happens to all this data; is it well-used; to what extent does it lead to wider improvement and positive social change?”



Against this backdrop the notion of ‘bricolage’ can offer a powerful, practical and pragmatic way forward in an area that, from RIO’s perspective, has become a bit clogged and dogmatic. Social value becomes properly recognised as a process of making and creating, with all parts of the system involved as agents of change (positive or negative), rather than an absolute ‘thing’ to be logged, captured and itemised. It is nuanced, multi-faceted and subtle, so of course needs different tools and approaches to surface, understand and shape, each appropriate in different contexts. It demands inquisitiveness and a desire to make more. And there is a need for innovation: both in terms of the approaches used, not least so that we make better use of the vast array of data already ‘out there’ as well as the tools and techniques now available to do that; and in terms of developing models and approaches that focus more on generative and collective notions of social value and impact rather than individualised and competitive.

Libraries create myriad social value – health, wellbeing, employment, education, artistic, cultural, homelessness, community safety, early years, cohesion etc.

Finally, when thinking about how social value then links to financial value, particularly in a libraries context, respect can only deepen. Given that libraries create myriad social value – health, wellbeing, employment, education, artistic, cultural, homelessness, community safety, early years, cohesion etc. etc. - they therefore need to develop and run myriad business and operating models to support and deliver this diverse value, all at the same time. As the data from the Action Learning sets show, staff and managers are constantly creating and balancing these forms of value in a context that, currently, is challenging and changing in the extreme. Subconsciously we tend to assume that learning from business and the private sector is a one-way street, but there is so much to learn from libraries in their efforts here as they use all the ‘tools and resources to hand’ in order to maintain trust, keep buildings open, warm, kind, inclusive and welcoming and meet an incredibly diverse and democratic array of pressing needs for individuals and communities. That is the essence of social enterprise.



6. Impact of our Action Research and partnership

This project has created a series of ripples and concrete impacts for each of the partners, outlined below.

6.1 Partner outcomes:

6.1.1 Changes at Libraries Unlimited

At the time of being involved with this research, Libraries Unlimited senior managers were also formulating bids to become a new Arts Council England funded National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) and to run Torbay's library service on behalf of Torbay Council. We were successful with both bids and are now able to use Action Learning in these new areas of work.

We have recruited five existing members of staff as 'Cultural Developers' to support the NPO-funded programme, now known as Evolve. Their role is to act as 'change agents' within the organisation and they are given the space and time to develop and research their own ideas for our Evolve programme, which will run over the next four years. One of these Cultural Developers was also a Social Value champion and she is able to bring her experiences from Unlimited Value to bear in growing this new network of change agents across the organisation.

Unlimited Value has helped us appreciate the huge potential associated with understanding the value of data held within the organisation and the role that our stakeholders have in shaping how we make best use of that data.



Working with colleagues from ODI Devon and RIO has shown us the need to engage our staff, Friends Groups, commissioners and customers in shaping new ways to use data to reveal how people are using libraries; what difference our services make to them and what more we could do to increase the value of our libraries on their lives and communities. The participative way in which the data discovery and data prototyping days took place and the diversity of those who attended confirmed that these are issues people care about. We have learnt first-hand about the value of working together to delve much deeper to reveal new insights and approaches that will ultimately help us shape a more responsive and impactful set of services within our local communities.

6.1.2 Impact on Social Value Champions

After eight members of staff completed the Social Value Champions programme, they created a shared document listing the leadership skills that they collectively agreed had been developed as a result of participation. These included:

- **Creating new networks (collaborative, knowledge, people)**
“The Action Learning process enabled us to develop a peer support network that supported knowledge sharing and social/mental resilience”
- **The power of using clarifying and open questions with our own teams**
“The questioning approach in Action Learning helped us engage differently with our team members, to help develop rapport and encourage them to clarify options available and identify a plan of action.”
- **Using our clarifying and open questions outside of work**
“Some of us have also found ourselves using this approach in other spheres – with our families, and in other social settings.”
- **Building confidence** “...through opportunities to build new skills and develop our ambitions and sense of capability.”
- **Challenging thinking and the ‘usual approach’**
“Action Learning helps you to think differently about how things are done – it helps you challenge ‘taken for granted’ patterns of thought and behaviour so that change can happen.”
- **Thinking more strategically**
“Action Learning addresses the issues that are more easily ‘put off’ or delayed when operational demands take over. It provides a space to think about how to tackle causes rather than symptoms, and to imagine different futures and possibilities.”
- **Hosting, facilitation and public speaking skills**
“By sharing our experiences at the October Action Research Summit and running mini Action Learning Sessions at the Staff Conference.”
- **Working in an informal team structure** “...developed our listening skills and to help others form their plans.”
- **Enabling positive challenge**
“Action Learning can stop negative thought patterns about seemingly ‘impossible’ situations. Focusing on ‘what can or might be done’ through questioning helps to identify how we might alter or improve situations, to identify allies and contributors, and to influence others.”
- **Building a safe space to enable challenge and collaboration to flourish.**
“We learned how to respond to others without judgement, and developed techniques that support collaborative thinking and trust which we can use with our own teams.”

Some of us have also found ourselves using this approach in other spheres – with our families, and in other social settings.

- **An improved sense of connection to and understanding of other parts of the organisation.**

“Participation in this project has helped us approach our work in a more ‘joined-up’ way, understanding challenges facing people in different areas of Libraries Unlimited. It has helped us identify and collaborate on resolving more difficult, widespread issues as well as our own challenges.”

Reflecting in follow-up interviews, participants noted:

“I do really think it has changed my life, and I think that if more people had the chance to take part in Action Learning, it’s got the potential to build a very strong organisation...”

“I have found the open question technique invaluable; absolutely fantastic. It allows me to have challenging conversations in a really collaborative way, it’s enabled me to open up conversations with people that I have previously found difficult. It has given me confidence to have a greater say.”

“[I] approach problems a lot more analytically now and I find I open things up to my team a lot more... I’ll invite them to have an input, feed back, say what they think we could do to move things forward. And [ALS techniques] really helped me with breaking down what I needed to do [for a major piece of recent work] putting it into a plan and working out who I needed to talk to...”

Together these insights indicate an important role for collaboration and dialogue in understanding social value. Our research points to how questioning and discussion tools like Action Learning can enable organisations to develop a richer, more powerful response to social value generation; one that transforms employees as well as communities.

Furthermore, because Action Learning involves cycles of activity and reflection, our research has led to additional direct impacts achieved by the Social Value Champions, including the pop up libraries, monetised wall space, redesigned library spaces and oral history projects noted in section 4.2. A film has been made about one of these projects, called ‘Northam Life Stories’. You can view it <https://youtu.be/LvkcNB-ndKQ>.

6.2.1 Changes at RIO

This project has had significant impact for RIO across a diverse range of areas including:

- Building further understanding across the organisation of social impact and social value, and creating the time, space and stimulus (seeded by the University, Libraries Unlimited and ODI Devon) to develop their practice in this area. As a result of this input RIO have reviewed their own internal social impact framework and are introducing a new approach to this area in 2019, including innovation around data, ongoing work with young people to interrogate social value in terms and ways that have more meaning to them, more direct stakeholder involvement, and dialogue with funders, commissioners and stakeholders around the efficacy of current approaches to monitoring and evaluation.
- Informing their work as they seek to take on and support their own local library in Liskeard, Cornwall.
- Working with the University to provide live briefs and challenges to Business School students and, in turn, receiving high quality advice and feedback on communications and marketing as a result.
- Creating opportunities to partner with Libraries Unlimited around various joint endeavours, including social enterprise support and training for staff and senior managers and work to support libraries around their practice with children and young people.

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I do really think it has changed my life, and I think that if more people had the chance to take part in Action Learning, it’s got the potential to build a very strong organisation.

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6.2.2 Changes at ODI Devon

This project has enabled the founders of ODI Devon to focus their attention more keenly on the impact they make, and we have made improvements in individual and collective learning.

One major step forward as a result of this project was to spin up a new commercial social enterprise venture - The Data Place - to help build open data ecosystems and provide practical help for people with data: one ODI Devon founder is now working full time on this, and whereas previously the Node operated as a loose collective we now have a full commercially viable vehicle for taking our social mission forwards.

In terms of our practise, our data discovery and prototyping workshops have been repeated elsewhere - but they have also always adapted to the different attendees, circumstances and objectives of those supporting them.

Generally we will continue to advocate for libraries as the centres of knowledge work in society and hope to be involved with future projects on this topic. Our relationships with the University of Exeter, Libraries Unlimited and Real Ideas Organisation provide us with a strong regional partnership platform to get involved in future work and we would like to think we have opened the eyes of wider stakeholders to the potential of a more holistic approach to open data.



6.3. Changes at the University of Exeter Business School

Participation in this project has generated significant outcomes for staff and students at the University of Exeter Business School. The challenge of leading library services in a time of change, and social value capture/measurement was incorporated in over 5 modules across the School, from Stage 1 Undergraduate, to postgraduate MBA students. Over 500 students engaged with the project, tackling diverse themes such as leadership development, data analysis, management information systems, research methods and management consultancy. In addition, several dissertation students explored topics relevant to the project including social value capture, international good practice cases, social media strategy and corporate reputation. Engaging with the live challenges emerging from the project enables students to develop creative problem-solving, teamwork and stakeholder engagement skills, boosting their employability by acting as 'project consultants'. Significantly, this also helps to build student awareness of challenges relevant to the arts and cultural sector, building a leadership pipeline of future graduates experienced in tackling these issues in an arts and culture context.

Feedback from students has been overwhelmingly positive:

"..It was a really valuable experience because we got a sense of actual problems companies are facing and we were presented with different approaches to find a solution. By studying the library case it helped us solidify our knowledge about leadership and encouraged us to think analytically."

"As a first year student, I feel like I'd be happy with more case studies like this. There are not too many of such exercises included in the material of our modules. I am a first year student but I hate when people think I am not interested in solving complex problems. It was a challenging one, that's why I liked it!"

At a School level, the outcomes have also been positive. The project was cited as an example of good practice in research/teaching cross-fertilization in the School's 2018 TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) submission, contributing to a Silver TEF award in the same year. As an example of best practice, the project is also feeding into the 'Learning Re-Imagined' and 'Graduates of Distinction' strands of the University's ongoing Education Strategy Consultation, which will shape the strategic direction of education in the Institution for years to come.

6.4 Sector outcomes:

6.4.1 Changes in the social enterprise and public service mutuals sector

The Unlimited Value project has led to a change in provision for emerging public service mutuals in the area of leadership development. The project partners have collaborated on a leadership development programme run in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, for services wishing to transition out of local authorities and become public service mutuals. The programme is underpinned by the Unlimited Value model (focused on staff development, organisational values and data as the tools for understanding social value), laid out in the report findings. To date, 17 participants from 9 organisations have enrolled onto the programme, which held its first workshop in October 2018. Further iterations of the programme are anticipated for 2019.

6.4.2 Collaborations with other public service mutuals

Closer to home, the project led to an improved collaboration between the four current public service mutual library services: Explore York, Inspire (Nottinghamshire), Suffolk Libraries and Libraries Unlimited. Informed by the Action Learning programme at the heart of our research and funded through the Higher Education Innovation Fund, senior managers from each organisation met (physically and virtually) for a series of Action Learning sessions and knowledge exchange visits. The result is improved collaboration over several shared challenges, such as a shared response to consideration of the gender pay gap and ongoing discussions about a shared competency model for library staff.

6.4.3 Building a community of practice on social value generation

The Unlimited Value project brings together a wide range of stakeholders from arts and culture, local and national government, libraries and social enterprises. All these organisations share a need to better understand how to generate and capture social value and find new and innovative ways to connect this to financial value and business models, as well as the resources and tools needed to accomplish this successfully.

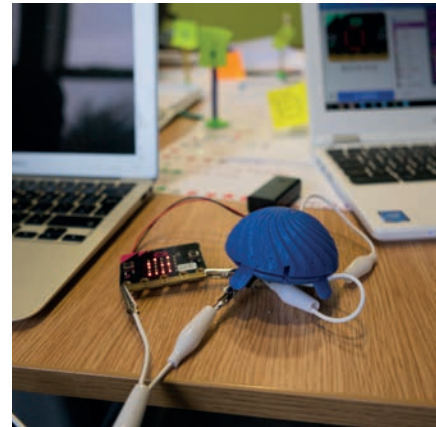
Over two years, the project has built a community of practice, underpinned by two research summits:

1) **Shaping Thought and Practice in Unlimited Value Generation** - Exeter University, 25th October 2017.

2) **Future Facing Libraries** - 10-11 Carlton House Terrace, Westminster 5th July 2018.

Each event brought together over 50 people from across these sectors. Representatives attended from:

- Arts Council England
- The British Library
- The Chartered Institute of Libraries and Information Professionals (CILIP)
- Libraries Connected
- The Libraries Taskforce
- Local authorities
- The Local Government Association
- Public libraries
- The Wellcome Trust



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The project led to an improved collaboration between the four current public service mutual library services.
”

The first event was also streamed to our colleagues at California State Library, and our second was supported by a keynote presentation from Dr Natalie Cole on her own research on California State Library's social impact, in partnership with San José State University.

Feedback indicates that delegates found the two summits helped to transform their understanding of social value, generated useful networking opportunities and encouraged them to apply the project insights and methods, including Action Learning and data, in their own spheres.

Comments from delegates at the October 2017 Summit:

"learning from [the] experience of libraries which share similar challenges to other voluntary organisations in Devon and identifying scope for collaboration all together to achieve a greater social value."

"[the summit] was informative and helped me to overcome an embedded cynicism re: data. Without saying, Ciara + her team libraries unlimited are inspirational."

"[The summit provided insights on] Action Learning as a way of engaging a range of staff"

"[The summit offered] critical thinking on impacts, outcomes, value and relationships"

Feedback generated at the July 2018 Summit

"Ideas sprung from conversations, discussions and presentations today will, I'm sure, find themselves into my planning and delivery."

"My role is related to evaluation and I will embed many of the points raised into the framework we are developing. I will also train colleagues to improve their evaluation work."

"New thinking and information on social and financial return on investment. Reaffirmed [my] passion for community and library!"

Delegates at the Future Facing Libraries Summit were asked to fill out pre and post-event evaluation. The results demonstrated the following:

- 80.56% of attendees agreed/strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of the libraries context, having attended the workshop.
- 60.22% of people agreed/strongly agreed they understood how to embed socially enterprising values in their work following the workshop.

“
Learning from
[the] experience of
libraries which share
similar challenges
to other voluntary
organisations
in Devon and
identifying scope
for collaboration all
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greater social value.
”



7. What next?

This project has created a set of tools or ‘resources at hand’ which can be, and are being, used by library services with limited budgets as they seek to explore their social value and use it to both tell important stories about their impact, make strategic decisions about future activities, and work out new routes to financial value. As with any research project however, we are left with questions as well as answers. Here, we set out some of the big questions which might shape both debate, practice, and future research.

7.1 What are the implications of the social value debate for more ‘corporate’ business models?

In the light of growing awareness that the corporate sector must embed an understanding of its social purpose more deeply into its activities, it emerges that there is much that the social enterprise, and arts and cultural sectors might teach more ‘traditional’ forms of business about how to manage a ‘both/and’ approach to generating social and financial value.

Larry Fink’s well known open letter to CEOs (Fink, 2017) calls for wider engagement on the ‘purpose’ of corporate organisations, incorporating understandings of social impact, diversity and inclusion, and alternative governance structures (Fink 2017). Recent research funded by the British Academy (Cannadine and Mayer 2018) also points to the need to think more creatively about the different forms and functions of business in society. Rather than the third/cultural sectors learning from corporate industry, as is often assumed to be the case, our research indicates that the library sector, and their art and /cultural contemporaries, may provide important insights from which the corporate sector would significantly benefit.

Future research might explore what these organisations can do to lead practice about engaging with social purpose and impact in for-profit-organisations. Are there ways of collaborating between these sectors which might enable both to achieve a more socially responsible, financially resilient society?

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What are the implications of the social value debate for more ‘corporate’ business models?
”

“
What ‘counts’ as
public sector/public
service delivery?
”

7.2 What ‘counts’ as public sector/public service delivery?

Discussions about the ‘bricolage’ approach to social impact capture have led us to think about the patchwork nature of public service delivery in the United Kingdom. The advent of commissioning has resulted in variations in the forms in which services are delivered under different local authorities - so that what ‘counts’ as belonging to the ‘public sector’ in the 21st Century is no longer clearly delineated. We wonder whether we are viewing a wider practice of bricolage in public service delivery. In a bricolage approach to commissioning and delivering public services, the ‘resources at hand’ are the patchwork of social enterprises, commissioners, local authorities and public service mutuals which are woven together differently in each region. Our research findings leave us wondering whether the bricolage concept can offer insight into how different models of service delivery are emerging in different contexts - particularly in the case of public library services, where local authorities are exploring not just public service mutuals, but also trusts and volunteer run models.

7.3 How can libraries (and other cultural institutions) embed a bricolage approach to social value capture into their training and development processes?

The most immediately practical of our questions draws on our finding that embedding an understanding of social value throughout the organisation, and linking it to everyday ‘library work’, is more effective than leaving this knowledge in the hands of the most senior staff members. We hope that using the Unlimited Value model to harness the ‘tools at hand’ in any organisation - data, organisational values, and staff development - will help leaders of library services and other cultural organisations, at all levels of the hierarchy, better create and evidence their social impact.

Through our research, we created some simple templates (for a taster Action Learning session, a stakeholder engagement workshop, and so on) that help people come together to share ideas and build capacity together on this important subject. Important next steps here are to explore how significant funders, policy advocates and umbrella bodies for the libraries sector can be helped to embed understanding, and crucially the practice, of social value bricolage into existing and new training and leadership development programmes. We hope that this model will also resonate beyond the library services sector and offer valuable implications elsewhere in arts and culture.



8. Next steps for the project partners

Ciara says...

Unlimited Value has helped us begin to understand the many different ways that libraries generate social value. We plan to build on this by working closely with our frontline teams to embed their experiences and understanding into our broader strategic understanding of the particular difference we are making as a charity. Our mission to bring ideas, imagination and knowledge to people's lives and communities provides a key entry point as do our six core purposes. Beyond our staff teams, we will use the research to help us focus our marketing plans and campaigns to ensure we reach those who might need libraries most.

As a new National Portfolio Organisation, we plan to carry on using an active approach to staff empowerment to ensure we make the most of the opportunity of ACE funding to animate our libraries with lively, engaging and participative programmes. We are constantly changing as a new organisation and our libraries are equally continuing to evolve in response to local community needs and changing expectations. The tools that we've tried out as part of Unlimited Value will help us as we continue to build this change.

Matt says...

We are currently taking learning from this project and applying it across our own practice – rolling out a revised approach to social impact in 2019 and adopting more nuanced tools and methods as we go. We are also looking to apply some of lessons learned and build on our partnership with Libraries Unlimited as we take on and support one of our own local libraries in Liskeard, Cornwall, over the next year. Finally, in our role as the Arts Council's Bridge organisation for the SW we will disseminate findings and recommendations from this research across the SW and beyond, both to library services and the cultural sector.

Martin says...

This project has helped us focus on an approach to developing open data with partners that led us to form a standalone commercial social enterprise, The Data Place Ltd, that one of our founders now carries out full time. The work of this startup is primarily to take a broader approach to data and to help organisations of all sizes tackle their data problems starting from wherever they are. The Data Place has now helped a dozen different enterprises in the last year alone with issues as diverse as open registers, GDPR, booking systems, enterprise data models and community mapping as well as helping with the mechanics of, and community building around, open data.

Beverley says...

This project has resulted in several academic conference papers, noted in our project timeline at the back of the report. The academic team is hoping to convert these into peer reviewed journal articles, contributing to knowledge in the fields of social impact capture and leadership development. The University of Exeter Business School will also continue to use the Unlimited Value case in teaching across a number of undergraduate and postgraduate modules. The project has catalysed new relationships in the region through co-created events, which have strengthened over the course of the project.

"We are excited about the enriched, ongoing collaborations between the project partners and the University of Exeter Business School. The Unlimited Value project has acted as a springboard for further partnership activity, including plans for a knowledge transfer partnership, an ESRC-funded PhD project and the appointment of one of the team as Chair of Libraries Unlimited."

Professor David Allen, Pro-Vice Chancellor and Executive Dean at the University of Exeter Business School.

“

Unlimited Value has helped us begin to understand the many different ways that libraries generate social value.

”



9. Project legacy - Forthcoming and available resources resulting from the project.

Evaluating the social impact of libraries: a review of the research literature (forthcoming)

An examination of the peer-reviewed scholarship on social impact capture for libraries, supported by relevant policy and professional body reports.

Unlimited Value Interim Project Report (2017).

This report reviews the impact of our first research summit. It provides insights into the stakeholder community's views about how well they understand social value, and how the project is helping them learn more about how to capture it. Available at: <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/unlimitedvalue/blog/2018/02/26/interim-project-report/>

Leadership Development for Public Service Mutuals: A Practical Toolkit (2018)

This toolkit offers practical support to help senior managers build leadership capacity in emerging public service mutuals, based on the three themes identified through our Unlimited Value research: organisational values, data and staff development. The toolkit was produced with additional funding from the Higher Education Impact Fund and includes templates for development workshops, checklists and other useful diagnostics for managers. Available for download at DCMS Mutuals Programme's [webpage](#).

Action Learning Toolkit (2018, forthcoming)

This toolkit was produced to support the Social Value Champions through their Action Learning journey. It provides some useful guidance on how to run Action Learning-inspired sessions and on the questioning technique used to help Action Learning participants solve problems.

Academic Conference Proceedings 2017-18

Abstracts and/or proceedings for the following peer-reviewed conference papers can be found on the project blog here: <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/unlimitedvalue/academic-conferences/>

Waters, H.E, (2017) 'Identity formation: The wake of UK public sector reform and organisational 'spin-out'', 2nd Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Leadership Symposium, Mykonos, Greece. (Published in Conference Proceedings May 2017)

Waters, H.E, (2018) 'Foregrounding an organizational history: Stakeholder perceptions of a young organization's reputation' Communications and Marketing Conference, University of Exeter, April 2018

Waters HE, Hawkins B, Harvey WS, Bailey AR & Coles TE (2018) Developing Entrepreneurial Leadership with Public Service Mutuals, *British Academy of Management Conference*, Bristol.

Practitioner Conference Proceedings 2016-18

Abstracts and / or proceedings for the following practitioner symposia can be found on the project blog here: <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/unlimitedvalue/practitioner-conferences>

Eastell C, Waters H & Little M (2017) Socially enterprising libraries: Ideas, Challenges and Opportunities when seeking to create social and financial value in innovative ways. Next Libraries Conference, Aarhus Denmark.

Hawkins, B. (2017) Power to create: Collaborative routes to social value. Royal Society of Arts panel, Exeter Library, July.



Hawkins, B (2018) What does a 21st century library look like? Local Government Association Annual Culture Tourism and Sport Conference. Hull.

Hawkins, B (2018) Data Driven Libraries. Annual General Meeting of the Southwest Chartered Association of Library and Information Professionals. Exeter

Hawkins B (2018) Investing in arts & culture: A public conversation on value and where we place it. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter.

Witherick, T (2018) Developing Future Library Leadership. Next Libraries Conference, Berlin Germany.



The Data Platform and open data resources

As part of the project we provided an open data portal and published some data to provide a convenient curated set of resources for project partners and the wider stakeholder community.

Data sets that are currently on the portal include some historic operational data samples such as borrower data, library transaction data such as the “Top 10” items borrowed from libraries in different categories, and general libraries information including opening hours, library locations and services provided.

Some specific projects also have data represented on the portal (such as the Reading Well social prescribing data), and there are also a number of contextual data sets giving the background data to the library service - these are largely a curated group of existing open data such as schools in Devon, indices of multiple deprivation, wages in Devon, population projections, business register and employment survey, benefit claimants data and datasets from the County Council including the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and community survey.

Finally there is an experimental dataset showing sentiment analysis from the Twitter social network relating to libraries. This shows the way to potential future datasets that are collected either by the library service directly, or crowdsourced in some way from library users: this sort of dataset could leverage libraries geographical footprint and wide demographic usage spread.

Data we wanted but couldn't get was clustered around the new libraries stock management system - its API has the potential to deliver a much richer and more up to date set of operational data. This was simply due to time pressure on the system supplier, who had to prioritise the core operations of the system during the lifetime of this project.

Data Workshop formats

Libraries Data Discovery Day Visual Report (2017)

Produced by ODI Devon, this report shares photographs and insights from the data discovery workshop, summarising the key findings and themes that emerged from stakeholder discussions.

Available at: http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/unlimitedvalue/files/2017/05/2017_03_28_Data_Discovery_Day_Report_small.pdf

The members of ODI Devon—through The Data Place—are also now able to offer a range of different workshops exploring some of the themes in this report plus other approaches to working collaboratively with data, such as:

- Persona development workshops for understanding the needs of users of services;
- Journey Mapping workshops for understanding the experience of service users and how data can enhance it; and
- Blueprinting workshops for understanding the process flows of data through a service.





Outlines of workshops and downloadable tools can be accessed through the The Data Place website at <https://thedata.place/tools>.

Lesson Plans and Assessment Briefs for University students (forthcoming 2019)

The University of Exeter Business School team are intending to release a variety of lesson plans and/or assessment briefs relating to the challenges identified in the project. An example lesson plan, aimed at first year leadership undergraduates, is provided at the back of this report.

A model for partnerships between HEIs and Arts/Culture Organisations (forthcoming 2019)

The project partners are finalising a report explaining their approach to partnership working, indicating how engaging across teaching, research and capacity building activities are resulting in more impactful change for Libraries Unlimited, deeper research insights for all project partners, and building a pipeline of future graduates with an awareness of arts-cultural sectoral challenges.

Pecakar, K (2018) Higher Education and Public Libraries: Partnerships Research Report for Arts Council England produced by Independent Mind.

This report uses the Unlimited Value project as a best practice case study (Appendix 1) explaining the value of collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and Libraries in the UK.



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Pip's Pets
Cat Nap
Coco the cat was
but she
curled up she
Pip
This book
There are
Pip's Pets
Cat Nap

