Public libraries and the unemployed in Sheffield, United Kingdom: a literature review

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1.   The Introduction

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Topic of research: Public libraries and the unemployed

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Bob Usherwood

I have an undergraduate degree in librarianship (bibliotecología) at the University

Autonomous of Nuevo León in Monterrey, Nuevo León, México, a masters degree in library science at the State University of New York at Buffalo, NY, USA. I entered the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield to do PhD studies on the public libraries fields under the supervision of Prof. Bob Usherwood. The topics I have chosen are related the core of my MPhil/PhD Transfer and to my PhD per se. In the MPhil/PhD I am assessing the needs and problems of the unemployed people at the Broomhall Community of Sheffield. In the PhD I will try to discover ways of how the public library or other sectors provide services to those people in order to satisfy their needs.

The methodology I am using for my projects is qualitative. I have made a research essay for my supervisor of 5, 000 words on the subject just clarify better which methodologies and methods to employ. Tthis paper can be accessed at: http://www.geocities.com/zapopanmuela/qualitativemethodologyinlis.htm . But in this module I did not include anything related to methodologies, so nothing from that work, which covered over 40 pertinent bibliographic records, was included here. My searches were more focused only on the research problem itself which is: first, which are the needs and problems of the unemployed people in Broomhall and the second part throughout the whole doctoral studies will be how those problems are solved or alleviated through the library service provision.

The following must be recorded:

The format you have adopted for your bibliography.

The format I adopted was bibliographic following the Harvard Style as explained at my department in the 2003-2004 Handbook for Research Students.

The major databases you have searched and relied on.

The major databases I relied on to search my information were: Star at the University of Sheffield, COPAC, LISA, Dissertation Abstracts, Index to Thesis (the British thesis database), the Publications Database of the Dept. of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield and other which supported electronic journals.

The style you have used to cite and list references in your literature review.

Harvard Style as explained at my department in the 2003-2004 Handbook for Research Students.

The search engines you have used for your Internet comparison.

AlltheWeb and Google.

The subject gateways you have used for your Internet comparison.

Mainly Resource Discovery Network and from there pointed me out to several other gateways like AskJeeves and The Internet Public Library.

2. The search strategy and the learning review

a. A brief statement of the topic of your literature search.

As explained in the introduction section, my research problem for the MPhil/PhD transfer is to find out about the problems and needs which are faced by the unemployed people in the Broomhall community of the Sharrow Ward. The masters like project would be extended in scope and geographical coverage in the PhD thesis per se, then the idea would be to correlate the findings of the needs and problems of the unemployed people and the role the public library and other organisms from the voluntary or private or other sectors play in order to cope or ameliorate these people's problems.

My supervisor since August 2003 has been helping me and guiding me to have as much focused as possible the problem of research, the terminology and methodology and all the process in full.

b. An explanation of your choice of information sources.

The first battle horse was the Departmental database. Then I moved to the OPACs both the University of Sheffield Library STAR and COPAC, then I moved LISA. I also looked through some Hispanic American indexes but I did not find any pertinent records good to mention. The best choice was LISA in order to know the LIS standardized terms of the descriptors. The first few findings guided me to time after time better results, avoiding serendipity at all times, always searching for a purpose, with a purpose, with a defined

strategy and avoiding as much unnecessary surfing and browsing as possible in order to optimize time. The free and open Web was searched through AlltheWeb and Google through the advanced search option.

c.   A list of key words and terms which you searched.

Most of the terms I used or a combination of them, both, using syntax proximity and Boolean logic operators:

Search

Results

(('Community-analysis' in DE) or ('Community-information-services' in DE) or ('Community-libraries' in DE) or ('Community-networks' in DE) or ('Community-programmes' in DE) or ('Computerized-community-information-services' in DE) or ('Consumer-health-information' in DE) or ('Ethnic-community-libraries' in DE)) and (('Employees-' in DE) or ('Employment-prospects' in DE) or ('Employment-vacancies' in DE) or ('Job-applications' in DE) or ('Job-hunting' in DE) or ('Unemployment-' in DE) or ('Unemployed-' in DE))

#8   2

('Employees-' in DE) or ('Employment-prospects' in DE) or ('Employment-vacancies' in DE) or ('Job-applications' in DE) or ('Job-hunting' in DE) or ('Unemployment-' in DE) or ('Unemployed-' in DE)

#7   517

('Community-analysis' in DE) or ('Community-information-services' in DE) or ('Community-libraries' in DE) or ('Community-networks' in DE) or ('Community-programmes' in DE) or ('Computerized-community-information-services' in DE) or ('Consumer-health-information' in DE) or ('Ethnic-community-libraries' in DE)

#6

(librar* and employ*) in DE

#5

590

(('Public libraries' or 'Institutional libraries') and Unemployed)
in DE

#4

41

((('Public lib

raries' or 'Institutional libraries') and (Unemployed or 'welfare services' or Handicapped or Isolated or Disadvantaged)) in DE
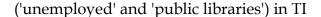
#3

1196Display

(Public-libraries; Unemployed-; Welfare-services; Handicapped-; Institutional-libraries; Isolated-; Disadvantaged-;) in DE

#2

0

('unemployed' and 'public libraries') in TI

#1   2
                                                        Display

a.   A brief account of your searches.

I have several months doing searches about this research problem and about the methodology being used.

Sometimes some of the literature results used by an author are worthwhile reviewing, but this has not been commonly the case, because in most of the literature reviewed few authors have used qualitative research methodologies. Thus, keeping originality in the focus, scope and methodology of the research problem is highly considered to the time of searching for literature, that is, although no one author might do the same type of research in the same way as other, still trying to figure out to find more innovative, creative and insightful views of the same problem is always at stake in all aspects of the process; the literature review research is one of the pillars of this project.

b.   An account of your logging techniques.

I regularly login through the portal of the Library, although I have set already accounts for Athens as well.

c.   A record of how you saved your search results.

This record I maintain it mainly in the same LISA database. I have set a permanent search until 31 December 2006. Any one with access to the LISA database through WebSPIRS (Silver Platter Information Retrieval System) can go to the section of Load History and then it loads prior searches one has done. In this case by entering this email as follows: Zapopan.Muela@sheffield.ac.uk the historic searches pop up then one chooses which one to open, notice that the Z and M are case sensitive, it should be exactly like that.

d.   An evaluation of the information sources you used and the results you obtained.

The results obtained are rather qualitative than quantitative.

From all the 75 references, only three were obtained through the open free Web. Two are books from pertinent academic sources, one from Great Britain and the other from Finland. The other reference is an article from another respected academic source from Murcia, Spain.

The remaining 72 records were obtained from the Departmental Database, STAR, and LISA in these common two steps: first the reference was found then the material retrieved physically either in a form of monographs, thesis, pamphlets, etc. from the libraries' stacks or as journal articles through the original journal articles. Most of the records from LISA was nearly impossible to retrieve them or read them.

All the records retrieved here are peer reviewed records, thus this is a guarantee that the information is of the high standards as far as a library and information science standards is about. Since the whole process of research is rather qualitative than quantitative, a strict and rigorous observance of the pertinence of the information being used is highly taken into consideration. It is more important the precision, pertinence and quality of the advancement then the speed or abundance; it goes festina lente as Romans said, in haste but slowly, that is, consistently, but slowly.

It is admitted before hand that this exhausting literature review process shown in this excellent course, needs to cover more sources of information that might have been left out. This module has been of great value and help for this project, and certainly was one of the best choices suggested by my supervisor.

3. The Literature Review

1.

The Broomhall community was chosen among all the wards of Sheffield because the
Sharrow ward where Broomhall is included is the catchment area with the highest
levels of unemployment according to one study of 1997. (See Sheffield District
Unit of Delivery, 1997: 32). Thus it is a highly deprived area with a high
cultural diversity from many immigrant people from other countries which makes
it particularly complex and perhaps more distinctive than other wards.

From the general perspective as to understand the theoretical aspects of
unemployment, these are the authors reviewed: Daniel, W. W. (1990, Balloch, S.
& Association of Metropolitan Authorities, (1985).

The studies being reviewed which have carried on research as to survey the
unemployed needs as towards finding their best ways to be met are these for the
British context: McManus, K.M. (1987) made a critical study of the information
needs of the trade unionists from the Merseyside Trade Union Community and the
Unemployed Resource Centre; Streatfield, D.R. (1980) did a critical survey of
the community workers; Moss, H.E. (1972) did a survey of the unemployed staff
in Sheffield; Stark, C.A. (1983) did an exploration of the information and
advice sources for the unemployed in Sheffield; Sutton, C. (2001) did a
qualitative study about the unemployed disabled people from the LIS sector;
Zhu, W. (2003) did a study of the employment needs of young Chinese people in
Sheffield.

To understand the current research which shows evidence of how the unemployed
needs of information have been met these are the authors reviewed: White, V.
(1982), Barugh, J. and Woodhouse, R. G. (1987), and Hankin, D. (1995) have made
in a 13 years time span a full analysis of all the possible issues public
libraries have to deal with in order to respond satisfactorily to the
information needs of unemployed.

To find about the actual possible alternatives to offer library services to the
unemployed these were the authors reviewed: In the Japanese reality: Kirton, M.
(1984) developed some employment patterns linked to the LIS sector and women.
In the Portuguese context, Santos, A.M. De O.A. Da S. (1994) has made a study
of the disemination of labour and employment. In the British reality: Boniwell,
K. (1998) designed a database for Action for Employment to be offered at local
authorities or employment organisms; McLaughlin, D. (1995) proposed the used of
the Internet to be used by the local authorities; Parry, A.S. (1998) has linked
the perceptions of employment opportunities with the informational society;

Scanlan, N. (1991) created a guide for the Sheffield Department of Employment Library using Apply Macintosh software; Stubbs, M. (2002) and Underhill, E. (2000) both have created some tools to improve the management of information for the unemployed at the Department for Education and Employment.

What apparently is not known from these previous studies –even from the highly critical study edited by Muddiman (2000) Open to All? The Public Library and Social Exclusion— and that may be consider their limitations, are the possible relations that deprived areas such as the catchment area of this study may bring as a cause for unemployment correlated with the problems or needs for the unemployed to find their right information about employment chances according to their profile. These problems for the unemployed to find information might then be related to economic, social, political, educational, linguistic and some other factors which may influence their status of being unemployed, or being unable to find the most suitable venues of information finding to meet their information for employment needs and problems.

Thus, the possible contribution of this study might be to continue with all the previous studies shown here, as some others that come on the process, and link their findings, theirs limitations, their projections and the like with the concrete context of this study's area of research which is highly multicultural and deprived. This analysis might bring new light on how the deprived and multicultural communities face the challenges to find the right tracks towards the right seeking and finding processes of the information which in turn may solve their problems for employment.

At the same time this study might set the basis for a more general and deeper study of research, following these lines, as to find about and analyze the correlations of these needs of information with some possible library or information service providers, but that is beyond the scope of this study. Also this study will make strong use of qualitative methodology and particularly community profiling –which apparently has not been used deeply in the prior research shown here-- , therefore it might bring a very different treatment of the problem, its data gathering techniques and therefore differently particular and enriched analysis and results.

Up to this point of the research is hard to develop a thorough and proper literature review since from all the 75 references shown above most of the actual documents were not available to review them. And even if all the documents would have arrived on time it would have not been possible to review them either, because some of them were written in languages other than English or Spanish –the working languages I use--, as for example in Dutch, German, Slovak or Swedish.

Nonetheless, it was possible to make a succinct bibliometric content analysis citations. The total of citations were 75. To try to situate the problem of the public libraries and the unemployed in any possible relation, the year of the records were classified by decades. From the 1970s 3 records were published; from the 1980s 30; from the 1990s another 30 and from the current 2000s years 12 records were published regarding to the topics of this research. The major database used was LISA which exists since 1969, so one cannot explain why only 3 records were found from the 1970s. But it is significant to see how the 1980s and the 1990s were equal, with 30 records each. That is, the problems or solutions researched in the period happens to be even, steady and consistent in that 20 years period. The first decade for the 2000s has not finished yet, but while the ratio of publishing of the phenomenon either in the 1980s or 1990s decade was of 3 documents per year –specially journal articles—in the first 3 completed years of the 2000s first decades the ratio is of 4 documents per year. Thus if based on this a projection is estimated, then there would be therefore published 40 documents in the same time span of a decade.

By this probabilistic calculation based simply on a non accurate citation analysis, one can infer that if in the first 2000s decade researching on this phenomenon goes constant, then it might be possible to assume that far from decreasing the phenomenon is increasing. Be made this, either to assess the problems or their solutions.

To continue with this probabilistic brief analysis, the counting of the countries where the 75 records were published may shed another different light. Most of the records were published in Great Britain: 41, followed by 15 in Holland the Netherlands, 7 in Germany, 3 in Slovakia, 3 in the USA, 2 in Australia, and 1 in each of these: Spain, Finland, Sweden and Brazil. These findings, nevertheless the actual documents were not read or revised, are relevant by considering that the scholarly communication published around the world is an actual reflex of the society where it is published or taken place.

To make more insights about the research about the public libraries and its relation with the unemployed the quantitative approach is not the best option, by itself. A qualitative interpretation is required. From the 41 records found in the whole Great Bretain 19 belongs or relate to Sheffield, and in Sheffield 18 are mostly masters dissertations carried on at the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield. This relevant finding has many sides to be looked at it. In the methodology parallel literature being under way which data is not included here, it was read on two British working class classics: Engels' The Condition of the Working Class in England and Orwell's The Road to Wingan Pier, that Sheffield, respectively in the 1850s to the 1890s in Engels'

work and from the 1900s to the 1940s in Orwells, was one of the three poorest towns in Great Britain. As mentioned above, the Sharrow Ward of Sheffield is not only one of the poorest wards in Sheffield, but all across the country.

Thus, it is very plausible to realize of a high volume of empirical research being developed by the University of Sheffield, specially from its Centre of Public Libraries and Information in Society, and specially from masters and doctoral students and being recorded as thesis and many dissertations. This shows that there is a severe problem related with unemployment in Sheffield, but also a strong emphasis of this research centre and the students enrolled in the university committed to find the problems and their solutions. This is a very plausible thing to do.

But if these 75 records were a very consistent sample of the literature published around the world, then an alarming finding is found in this brief calculation. Only few scholars from 10 countries out of few hundreds are being aware of the problems of unemployment and relating it to the public libraries. So, this shows a terrible gap in the literature and a terrible challenge for the whole planet. This shows as well that Great Britain is leading the way now considering the problem of the unemployed and now the solutions offered by the public library service provision. By all means it is possible that this search might be incomplete or even incorrect and misses many other sources of literature which were not able to be indexed or abstracted in LISA, or which not appeared free on the Web, etc., but still, if LISA mostly indexes records from many countries of the world and in hundreds of languages with double translation to English, then this simple and succinct analysis shows a crude fact on the phenomenon being researched. And since the scope of this research is located in Sheffield and employing qualitative research methodologies, then the big universal generalities would not be much of the interest of this scope, nevertheless is mentioned as to have worldwide frame as how Sheffield, and Great Britain is located in the world as for this phenomenon. And this does not mean there is not unemployed in the world, as far as capitalism goes, it is a law to be always unemployed people. There is unemployed any where, and the public libraries have a lot to do to contribute to alleviate this problem in the communities, the Sharrow Ward has critical statistical figures of unemployment, thus this research and many others across Great Britain are meant to be.

4. References of the Literature Review

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