Digital Inclusion in British Columbia's Public Libraries

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the role of libraries in British Columbia in supporting digital inclusion. The research question is: What is the role of British Columbia's public libraries with respect to digital inclusion? Within that role, what do we need to do to accomplish digital inclusion, and what are the barriers that may prevent us from accomplishing it?

I used Nussbaum's Capability Approach as a theoretical framework to explore the issues surrounding digital inclusion and libraries. Further, I used Futures Studies to guide the interviews, using the 7 Questions method.

The research applies a qualitative approach. Eight library staff were interviewed to identify current and future challenges and conflicts faced by public libraries. Semi-structured interviews allowed exploration of the participants' perceptions of past and potential future challenges in supporting digital inclusion and the changes that need to be made if libraries are to better respond to the digital future. Braun and Clarke's approach to thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

The findings suggested that the challenges cluster around:

- Challenges with access, from access to stable funding to digital resources,
- Governance in that libraries have become a type of essential service to communities, and would benefit from clearly articulated roles and more formal connections to government
- Building community, which relates to the library's role as a community educator and connecting community with information and culture.

The findings further suggest that to determine the library's role with regards to digital inclusion, one must first determine the library's role in general as both are very much tied together. The implications of the study are that the Capability Approach enables a way of looking at the role of the library and what libraries can do to support digital inclusion. Developing minimum standards based on that, would be beneficial to libraries by providing consistency and a goal to strive towards. Future Studies provided libraries with a way of examining, understanding, and responding to the challenges.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

When I started my Doctor of Education degree, I had thought to research the role that public libraries play in supporting children's literature. However, I realized during the programme coursework that I have a different interest. I am fascinated by the role that public libraries play in the community, particularly in building community ties, promoting education, and providing access to knowledge and culture. I am equally interested in exploring the effect that digital technology has on libraries and communities, and in understanding the digital divide and the role libraries play regarding digital inclusion. As such, the aim of this research is to explore the future of digital inclusion in public libraries across British Columbia. Ideally, this study will start a conversation on how digital inclusion in public libraries might be developed, how it might be promoted, and explore some of the barriers to it. The research questions are therefore:

> What is the role of British Columbia's public libraries with respect to digital inclusion? Within that role, what do we need to do to accomplish digital inclusion, and what are the barriers that may prevent us from accomplishing it?

These questions were also developed out of curiosity inspired by the British Columbia Public Libraries Divisions new strategic plan for public libraries, released in 2020. The plan discusses the important role libraries play within the community, and how the British Columbia Public Libraries Division would support them through four specific strategic goals:

- Improving the public's access to resources (specifically library collections);
- Building capacity of staff through professional development;
- Advancing citizen engagement by raising awareness of, and access to, government resources; and
- Enhancing governance (Government of British Columbia, 2020).

The plan included key objectives such as "Support[ing] library services that are flexible, inclusive and responsive to people's needs" and "Help[ing] government better engage its citizens and help people benefit from provincial services" (Government of British Columbia, 2020, p. 9). As I read through the document, I asked myself: *How do they intend to do this? Will it really make any significant difference to public libraries?* The plan lists some general actions to focus on, such as "promote opportunities to improve the stability and dependability of high-speed, broadband internet service", and "develop a learning framework starting with

an environmental scan and the creation of an inventory to guide the ministry's strategic involvement in capacity building" (Government of British Columbia, 2020, p. 10), but there is no action plan on how to achieve the goals.

Near the end of the strategic plan there is a chart of goals, with potential measures and an indication as to which strategic goal is supported, but I was struck by how there was no discussion of what precisely the British Columbia Public Libraries intended with their goals or anything about how they will meet them. On revisiting this document nearing the completion of this dissertation, I saw that the page with the strategic plan was last updated in 2022. The only indication of the British Columbia Public Libraries' support to public libraries in the province, beyond regular programs, was the provincial library annual grants. This included information on the 2021 and 2022 grants provided ($14 million each year) and the main funding areas (Government of British Columbia, 2021, 2022a, 2023d). Certainly, the support is beneficial, but the organisation seemed to provide only indirect leadership, mostly in assistance to individual library systems in specific areas. The BC Libraries Branch seemed to be playing a supporting role only, rather than a direct role where they could actively bring about change. Again, the support they provide is helpful and does make a difference in the community, but I could not help thinking that more is necessary, especially when considering the rapidly changing nature of technology and the increasing impact it is having on us all.

Technology, as I will discuss, is changing libraries – how libraries work, how they connect to their communities, and how they support their patrons. As I will discuss further in chapter two, libraries play an educational role in their communities and support civic engagement. I came to wonder how digital technology would change that, and what the library should do in the face of that change. As the BC Libraries Strategic Plan (Government of British Columbia, 2020) states: "They are places for connecting, sharing and lifelong learning. For many people, libraries remove barriers and help close the gap between poverty and opportunity" (p. 3). Libraries do work towards removing barriers and helping to close the gap on poverty, as the Plan (Government of British Columbia, 2020) states, but this caused me to consider what libraries should do in the face of digital technology, and how they should go about doing it.

1.1 My Background in Libraries

In 2005, I graduated with a postgraduate Master of Library and Information Sciences. As a young librarian eager to work to support literacy in my community, I did not fully appreciate the role libraries play in society. I understood the public library's role within the community as providing access to books, information, and literacy help for the community, but I did not fully understand the role libraries play beyond this. As I became more experienced and had the opportunity to work in public libraries across the country, I experienced the way libraries can provide more than just access to information and culture. They teach skills other than reading and literacy and – more importantly – they build community. It is this sense of community within each library - this place that provides education, access to culture, and entertainment to everyone - that still impresses me.

As I worked in different public libraries, I started to gain a better understanding of the roles that libraries can play in a community. Early in my career, I worked as a children's librarian, and as part of my role I would do story times and baby times for our community. Baby times are much like story times but focused as much on the caregiver as the baby. The goal is to teach the caregiver strategies to develop preliteracy skills and provide an opportunity to bond with their baby over books. These are wonderful things to help develop, but I ended up learning about how bringing parents and caregivers together could create friendships. When I became a new parent myself, I really began to understand how important and meaningful those opportunities to meet other people can be. This lesson became even stronger as the wife of a member of military staff: we moved coast to coast across Canada as part of my spouse's military career, and I often endured long periods effectively as a single parent. The public library, as well as the local Military Family Resource Centres, provided us with opportunities to connect with others. These opportunities to connect made all the difference to us as we successfully – and happily – integrated ourselves in our community, however long our stay. I learned quickly that strong community connections were very important in creating and supporting healthy communities.

One posting sent us to a small community on Vancouver Island, in British Columbia on the west coast of Canada. It was at the public library in this community where I learned the role a library can play in the lives of people who have little else. These are people living at the

margins of society. Some of them are homeless, addicted to drugs or alcohol, or vulnerable in other ways. It was at this library where I learned that a person who seemed well kempt could still be homeless. I saw how libraries could be an access point to a warm place in the winter - a safe spot to sleep in the day - while providing computers for both entertainment and filling out government forms. Unfortunately, I also learned how libraries can be a convenient place to buy drugs and where there are sometimes difficult and potentially dangerous encounters. I have had moments where I have been concerned for my safety or the safety of my colleagues. I now live in a larger city, though still on Vancouver Island, and in the weeks leading up to writing this section, the library I work in has experienced overdoses, a patron shouting at and intimidating those around them, and vandalism significant enough to close the branch for three days.

Through all this, at both libraries, I also had wonderful experiences at work: seeing children and their families laughing and playing in the children's department; having amazing interactions with patrons young and old in programs; helping people find their next favourite book; assisting children who are reluctant readers find something to tempt them; and the satisfaction of teaching many how to access our digital collections and online resources. It has been an education on how to balance competing needs and limited resources – how to help everyone in the community to enjoy their public library, be it a child learning a love of reading or someone struggling just to survive. It has been, without doubt, a rewarding and sometimes challenging career.

Over the course of my career, I have also seen how digital technology has changed, and is changing, our world. These changes are impacting my career as a librarian and the nature of services in public libraries. I have watched programmes going from in-person events to being online. I have had author visits within the library itself, as well as those where I have hosted the author online from a different province - reaching students who were in schools or their homes - all while I sat in my office. Items like iPads and podcasting booths are now available in local libraries, and programmes and courses offered to patrons run from the traditional story times to coding classes. We no longer carry as many paper copies of magazines or newspapers in our local branches as we once did because so many are available through our digital resources. Libraries now have websites and social media accounts to

connect to their community to raise awareness of their services and provide another point of contact and access to the library and its services. This reflects the changes to life that digital technology has brought in the community and in family life. My own family enjoys Facetiming with other family members on the east coast of Canada. We stream movies or TV shows via the internet and conduct everyday chores like banking or shopping online. Unfortunately, in societies already so unequal, digital technology has become one more way in which our communities are divided. We are now at a point where it is difficult to fully participate in culture without access to the internet.

1.2 Library Policy and Digital Inclusion

Libraries, library associations, along with other organizations are beginning to recognize some of the issues around digital inclusion and equity. The Government of British Columbia's (n.d.) Post-Secondary Digital Literacy Framework states:

> Digital literacy is becoming increasingly important for accessing public and private services and information. Digital literacy has been key throughout the COVID-19 pandemic for public health updates, access to services, interpersonal connections, work, education, and much more (p. 3).

The Digital Literacy Framework is designed to categorize the knowledge and skills people should have if they are to be considered digitally literate. It is meant to be a tool for post-secondary educational institutions and give them the tools they need to develop the policies necessary to support digital literacy and education.

Likewise, UNESCO recently created a report on Education, with a focus on digital technology and the digital divide: *Reimaging Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* (UNESCO, 2021). This report discusses the impact digital technologies are having on society, and the urgent need for better education for everyone in relation to the effects of the digital world. Essentially, this report calls for a new social contract for education for a sustainable future, to rebuild our relationship with each other, the planet, and technology (UNESCO, 2021). As the UNESCO Report (2021, p. 1) states, the world "is at a turning point" on account of developing digital technologies. The UNESCO Report (2021) continues: "Rapid technological changes are transforming many aspects of our lives. Yet, these

innovations are not adequately directed at equity, inclusion, and democratic participation" (p. 1). The report (UNESCO, 2021) names areas of great concern such as fake news and the digital divide.

In a discussion of how digital technology both connects and divides, the UNESCO (2021) report states:

> The digital – all that has been converted into numerical sequences for computer-enabled transmission, storage, and analysis – saturates vast areas of human activity. As a form of infrastructure (a linking element), the digital does much to 'connect' us. Yet, 'digital divides' persist both in terms of internet access and the skills and competencies needed to leverage technology for collective and personal aims (p. 35).

The UNESCO report stresses that digital technology is not neutral: while it can provide connections and access, there are also inherent dangers. For example, the report claims that digital technology presents "threats knowledge diversity, cultural inclusion, transparency, and intellectual freedom, just as other characteristics can facilitate the sharing of knowledge and information" (UNESCO, 2021, p. 35). The report continues: "algorithmic pathways, platform imperialism, and patterns of governance of digital infrastructures, present acute challenges to sustaining education as a common good" (UNESCO, 2021, p. 35). The report accounts these risks to the implications on the:

> ...right to education as well as for cultural rights related to language, heritage, and aspiration. Rights to information, data and knowledge and the right to democratic participation are also greatly impacted. Core principles of human dignity, including the right to privacy and the right to pursue one's own purposes, come into play when we look at the disruptive transformations digitalization has brought (UNESCO, 2021, p. 35).

The UNESCO Report (2021) stresses the importance of education and how it has the potential to bridge the digital divide.

The combination of watching the dramatic changes unfold within the profession due to the changing nature of technology, combined with the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on society, built on the interest I already had in literacy generally. Part of what I love about my profession is how it builds community and provides opportunities for communities to connect, and how it promotes literacy and lifelong learning, and the benefits that come with it. Sparked by courses I took during my Doctorate in Education, my interests started to shift as I studied

the influence of policy and ethics on education. I explored Martha Nussbaum's (2006) work on the Capability Approach, which caused me to think more closely about the role of the library in society and what it means to live a good life. While I love children's literature - which is what I first thought I would focus on for my dissertation - I found that I had a profound interest in where the future would take us in terms of the public library and digital technology. It is not just libraries that are changing, the world is changing rapidly, and as the UNESCO Report (2021) says, society is very much at a turning point. As Casselden (2023) points out, the COVID-19 pandemic is making that change come faster.

However, I do not believe that we should only be led by technology and the changes it is causing. I think people need to lead; we need to think closely about our world and what that world should look like. In the context of my work and my studies, when looking at digital change and the digital divide, I questioned what the role of libraries should be. As I will discuss later in the dissertation, Nussbaum's (2006) Capability Approach, along with Critical Future Studies, gave me a way of looking at the role of libraries and how to think about the future. The Capability Approach provides a practical framework for me to look at the work of libraries, and future studies provided useful strategies for considering how libraries can move towards a preferred future. When combined, the Capability Approach and Future Studies guided my research as I considered the role of public libraries regarding digital inclusion and explored the role libraries have in supporting digital inclusion and equity. My professional experience suggests that, to overcome some of the barriers that they face, libraries need to have a firm understanding of the role they play in digital inclusion to find a reasonable path forward. Through my research, I will look at the role of the library in the community and make suggestions on potential paths forward.

1.3 Aims, Research Question and Dissertation Structure

The aim of this research is to look at digital inclusion in a library context, with the goal of developing an understanding of the public library's role in supporting digital inclusion, and to suggest some potential paths forward with this. In Chapter 2, I will discuss the role public libraries play in their communities, regarding community building, promoting literacy, lifelong learning, and educational skills, including access to education and information in

general. This will include exploring the relevant policies and practices of such organizations as the American Library Association (ALA), the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA), as well the British Columbia Library Association (BCLA), that discuss the educational role of the public library. From there, I will explore the impact of the digital divide in Chapter 3, and the state of digital equity in Canada, specifically British Columbia. I will then discuss digital literacy in Canada in Chapter 3, including the impact of the Pandemic. Chapter 3 will also take a closer look at digital inclusion and libraries, including how new technologies are influencing libraries (acknowledging that technology has been changing rapidly, especially since the COVID pandemic). I then explore Nussbaum's (2006) Capability Approach in Chapter 4, its list of capabilities and how it applies to libraries, along with its connection to human rights. This will be followed in Chapter 5 by a discussion of the research methodology including the approach the research took (qualitative interpretivist with a grounding in Future Studies), and how I conducted the research in general: the questions I asked participants, my chosen method of data analysis, ethics and quality. In Chapter 6, I present the research findings organized by theme and begin to discuss these with a view to more fully exploring them in Chapter 7, where I also consider the implications of the findings for libraries, the challenges libraries face, and what potentially could be done to help libraries move forward to meet those challenges. Chapter 8 contains my thoughts on the professional implications of my research, and areas for further future research.

Chapter 2: The Role of the Public Library in the Community

2.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter with a discussion on the public library and the roles libraries play in the community. This will include a discussion on libraries as a physical space, content, users, and followed up with a discussion on the educational roles of libraries. I will start by looking at Eric Klinenberg's (2018a) thoughts on libraries and social infrastructure. I will then discuss Mary Palmer's (2022) literature review of future trends in public libraries, which provides an excellent summary of where public libraries are and where they seem to be going, before moving on to the educational roles of libraries.

2.2 Literature Review Strategy

For this research, I chose an iterative and exploratory approach to the literature review. This created possibilities for connecting with literature that was most meaningful to me professionally in relation to the research question. I first created a search strategy based on use of the University of Glasgow's library site and associated databases, single journals like the *Public Libraries* journal, as well as looking through bibliographies of relevant research. Beyond this, I searched through the publications of professional organizations like the American Library Association, the International Federation of Library Associations, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations, and the British Columbia Library Association. I also had a specific search that focused on the publications of Statistics Canada for any relevant information.

For my search terms, I used a combination of the words "libraries" or "public libraries" along with the following:

- Capabilities Approach
- Nussbaum
- Critical Future Studies or just "future studies"
- AI
- British Columbia.

I also used a combination of the following with "libraries" or "public libraries":

- Digital literacy
- Digital inclusion
- Digital equity or equality
- Digital divide
- Digital transformation.

Due to difficulties in finding relevant information, I made the decision to use good quality blogs, generally ones written by industry professionals that spoke to me professionally as well as being relevant to my research.

I will begin my discussion of literature with the work of Marie Palmer (2022) and Eric Klinenberg (2018a) to help set up an explanation of the role of the library, which is necessary to understand the findings of my research.

2.3 The Library as Social Infrastructure

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the things I have learned from my experience working in the library is the way that libraries bring community together and connect it. Eric Klinenberg (2018a) defines the role of libraries in their communities as social infrastructure. Klinenberg (2018a) provides wonderful insight into the role public libraries play in building social infrastructure, and why that infrastructure is so important. He describes social infrastructure as "the physical places and organizations that shape the way people interact" (Klinenberg, 2018a, p. 5). The library is, according to Klinenberg (2018a), one of the shared community spaces that helps build civic life, and in the process helps to deal with some of the major social issues we are encountering today, such as polarization in the community. Libraries do this by providing common ground for the entire community and access to information and knowledge that helps encourage debate and learning. For example, one way the library helps is by providing information on a topic from multiple perspectives, along with staff who can educate community members on not only how to access that information, but also how to assess the quality of that information. The library also provides a space for community members to come together, use and enjoy, thus helping to strengthen community bonds. In other words, the library can help develop patron perspectives and treat other sections of the community with humanity, like the homeless population, while increasing community participation in general.

Klinenberg (2018a) uses the heatwaves that hit Chicago in 1995 as an example of how social infrastructure works. When looking at where in the city had been hardest hit, interesting patterns started to emerge. Simply put, people who were socially isolated suffered more greatly from the heatwave. However, areas with strong social connections, even if they were extremely poor, fared better. He claims that "social infrastructure provides the setting and context for social participation, and the library is among the most critical forms of social infrastructure we have... [and] one of the most undervalued" (Klinenberg, 2018a, p. 32). When social infrastructure disappears, according to Klinenberg (2018a), people become more isolated, they do not want to leave their homes, there is an increase in local crime, and "[d]istrust rises and civic participation wanes" (p. 21).

Libraries, though, provide a social space for everyone. As Klinenberg (2018a) points out, social settings that are commercial do provide people with a place to socialize, but only those who can afford it. This is one of the aspects that set public libraries apart – the ability for anyone to visit and use them at no cost. They are free and patrons are welcome to stay all day. As Klinenberg (2018a) states, "[s]pending time in public social infrastructures requires learning to deal with [our] differences in a civil manner" (p. 45). Klinenberg (2018a) quotes a New York Public Librarian when it comes to what it is that libraries do in terms of bringing people together. The librarian, Andrew, refers to a once popular term to describe the Carnegie libraries that were built across America and Canada: "palaces for the people" (Klinenberg, 2018a, p. 53). Andrew states: "The library really is a palace. It bestows nobility on people who can't otherwise afford a shred of it. People need to have nobility and dignity in their lives... they need other people to recognize it in them too" (Klinenberg, 2018a, p. 53). Public libraries play a significant role in providing space for the community, bringing that community together, whether as a place to be, to read, or to learn.

2.4 The Library and Democracy

Libraries play a civic role within their communities by supporting democracy, though this idea is facing some challenges today. McMenemy (2009, p. 85) defines informed citizenship as "each individual has access to the most appropriate, up to date and accurate information they need to go about their daily lives as citizens". According to Michael Gorman (2015), there is a

relationship between democracy and libraries. He states that a "developed democracy, in any country, is an idea that depends on knowledge and education for all" (Gorman, 2015, p. 190). Gorman (2015, p. 191) continues:

> It is a sad irony that, as American democracy has reached its theoretical ideal (the enfranchisement of all adults, irrespective of gender and race), it is in danger because of an increasingly ill-informed, easily manipulated, and apathetic electorate. A culture of sound bites, political ignorance, vacuous infotainment, Ayn Rand–ian selfish individualism, and unreasoning dislike of government are vitiating the rights for which, at different times, revolutionaries, women, and ethnic minorities fought.

Even with this grim statement, Gorman (2015, p.191) still believes in the value of libraries on society, stating that "Libraries are part of the solution to this modern ill".

Nancy Kranich (2020) has similar beliefs. Kranich (2020, p. 121) states:

> Democracies need libraries. An informed public constitutes the very foundation of a democracy; after all, democracies are about discourse—discourse among the people. If a free society is to survive, it must ensure the preservation of its records and provide free and open access to this information to all its citizens. It must ensure that citizens have the resources to develop the information literacy skills necessary to participate in the democratic process. It must allow unfettered dialogue and guarantee freedom of expression. All of this is done in our libraries, the cornerstone of democracy in our communities.

Kranich (2020, p. 122) is now revisiting these statements in a time of political turmoil where, she claims, "democracy is under siege in both this country and abroad". She (Kranich, 2020, p. 131) believes that democracy "is a hollow concept" without "unfettered access to information". She highlights how American libraries have been fighting book bans for decades, ever since the lead up to World War II and during its aftermath, where the events of that period caused librarians to go from being the censors to fighting against censorship. However, Kranich (2020) also comments on the division currently within our society, stressing the need for society to come together, and the role libraries can play in that. Kranich (2020, p. 144) states:

> two decades later, with citizens losing confidence in many of those processes, libraries are embracing more engaged modes of action that reinvigorate communities, empower citizens, and reconnect with democracy. They have joined a movement toward a more participatory democracy where authority

> rises from the bottom through strategies that seek to bring representative government closer to institutions that work with citizens, not just for them.

Hanell et al (2024, p. 200) also connect libraries to democracy, writing that public libraries "are in most countries promoted as connected to democratic sustainability and development". Hanell et al (2024) remark on division in societies, discussing the rise of the radical right, and the influence it is having on society, especially public libraries (Hanell et al, 2024). They state that this situation "points to the need for renewed discussions on the professional role and understandings of democracy in library practice". Their study highlights "several ethical dilemmas that librarians are currently facing stemming from increased societal polarization and antagonistic rhetoric which does not acknowledge the social rights of minorities" (Hanell et al, 2024, p 219). Hanell et al's (2024) research focuses on how librarians are supposed to support the mission of libraries, work towards and support a democratic society, all while the democratic values are shifting and being challenged politically.

Elaine Westbrooks (2024, n.p.), the Carl A. Kroch University Librarian at Cornell, also believes in the connection between libraries and democracy, stating the following: "Based on the fundamental principle of human equality, [democracy] operates via the mechanism of community decision-making through individual choice" (para. 1). The International Federation of Library Associations also stresses the connection libraries have with democracy, stating: "If information is power, democracy – rule by the people – requires access to information for all. By providing this, libraries have an indispensable role in building and strengthening democracy around the world" (International Federation of Library Associations Libraries, 2019, p. 1). By providing access to information, knowledge, and culture, libraries play a crucial role in democratic society and in supporting democracy more generally.

2.5 The Library Space and Its Users

Marie Palmer (2022), a library consultant hired by the Squamish Public Library (located in British Columbia), performed a literature review that examines future library trends, such as use of space and how the role of the library with regards to the collection is changing. This literature review was completed as part of a plan to develop long-term service decisions in response to challenges faced by the Squamish Public Library. Palmer's (2022) literature

review provides a useful summary of some of the current trends in public libraries. It also has the advantage of relating to the needs of a (reasonably) local library – Squamish is on mainland British Columbia, north of the city of Vancouver. I will begin this section by looking at the public library as a physical space, and Palmer's (2022) comments on that.

Like Klinenberg (2018a), Palmer (2022) points out the role the public library plays as a "community hub", as she refers to it (p. 2). Palmer (2022) states:

> Libraries build communities. They are the reflection of their communities. They provide space where anyone can gather to learn, share, work, reflect, study, collaborate, and socialize. Free of charge. They are the 'living rooms' of their communities with no financial, class, cultural or educational barriers. Libraries enhance lives, resulting in healthier and more prosperous communities (p. 2).

As technology has changed over time, so has the way we use the physical space in the library. As mentioned in Section 2.2 above, it is a space for the community to gather in and use. As such, many libraries are decreasing collection size to have more space to provide other services to the community (Palmer, 2022). Just as the technology used in libraries has changed, so too have library users. Among families, the elderly, or other library users, you will find some who are digital natives, or people who have had computers in their home since they were born (Palmer, 2022). According to Palmer (2022), these users tend to use social media regularly and have a different way of looking at and creating information than previous generations. With those digital natives come knowledge creators, who Palmer (2022) describes as people who create content, and share that content, both digitally and physically. Palmer (2022) refers to another group of library users, entrepreneurial learners, who use the library to learn what they need to grow their business or for personal reasons. Palmer (2022) highlights how these library users need assistance in accessing information, stressing the role libraries play in community education. Interestingly, with regards to younger generations (those brought up with technology and internet access), library usage has not lessened. Near the completion of this dissertation, I read a report from the American Library Association that concerns whether and how Gen Z and Millennials use their public libraries. According to Berens & Noorda (2023), Gen Z and Millennials do use the public library, and the breakdown of their findings is fascinating. Briefly, they (Berens & Noorda, 2023) found that:

- 54% of Gen Z and Millennials visited a library in the last 12 months.

- Even those who do not identify as readers still visit the library: about 23% of Gen Z and Millennials.
- 52% of Millennials and Gen Z borrowed from library digital collections (p. 2).

Even more interestingly, given the prevalence of technology today, print books are the preferred format for Gen Z, and the younger they are, the more print books they buy (Berens & Noorda, 2023). According to Berens & Noorda (2023), "browsing public libraries is Gen Z's 3rd most preferred place to discover books. Libraries are the 5th most preferred place for millennials to discover books" (p. 4). According to Berrens & Noorda (2023), teens like the teen lounges in libraries as they are places that support:

- Relaxation
- Mental and social well-being
- Learning untethered from school and educational mandates (p. 2).

Intahchomphoo & Vellino (2024) discuss the impact of COVID 19 on the digital divide. They state that "the pandemic revealed many social and economic inequalities within Canadian society, including computer and Internet access and affordability, particularly among Indigenous communities and people living in rural and remote areas" (Intahchomphoo & Vellino, 2024, p.38). Hider et al. (2022) also found in their research that being able to physically browse the collection was one of the activities patrons missed the most during COVID lockdown. Hider et al. (2022, p. 201) state, "...they could not 'inspect' or 'preview' ebooks in the same way they could printed books while browsing, and that ebooks were more suitable to source when they knew in advance the specific title that they were looking for. Several respondents referred explicitly to the pleasure of the serendipitous discovery that could result from browsing". McMenemy et al. (2023) also discuss the impacts of the loss of the library as community space during the pandemic. They stress the need to research further to understand "just how the lockdowns and lack of access to public library facilities impacted on citizens throughout the world. The loss of access to reading materials is clearly a significant issue, but so also was the loss of the physical space that communities value" (McMenemy, et al., 2023, p. 107). Along the same lines, Casselden (2023) examines how libraries supported older peoples' digital inclusion during COVID-19, in a study looking at a digital training partnership between a public library and social housing providers. As Casselden (2023, p. 716)

points out: “Partnerships between public libraries and social housing providers provide a mutually beneficial arrangement that enhances services offered and actively works towards greater social and digital inclusion”. Casselden (2023, p. 707) comments that “this role is underappreciated and there is a real need for central government and local councils to recognise this more fully, helping to support what public libraries do”.

I have mentioned how there are some library users who create content: those known as knowledge creators. This also speaks to one of the changing roles of libraries when it comes to content. While libraries have always worked to make content of all sorts available to the public, they are “now shifting toward support and inspiration for visitors to create and share knowledge... [that] the ‘knowledge economy’ is giving way to the ‘creation economy’” (Palmer, 2022, p. 3). As Palmer (2022) phrases it, libraries are no longer just “content warehouses... moving forward, [they] will be an enabler of content creation” (p. 4). This can be seen in how libraries are creating digital labs where patrons can access technology that allows them to create visual formats like art or sound formats like podcasts. I am currently working on creating and opening such a lab at the library where I work. Inayatullah (2015) published an article of his work with libraries in Australia where they worked on foresight planning to determine what direction libraries should take in the future. Through these sessions all the librarians realized that the changing times and technology required libraries to change how they operated. The question was what does that look like in theory and in practice? To summarize Inayatullah (2015), beyond just storage of content, libraries should provide the tools needed for patrons to create and share content.

2.6 Educational Role of Public Libraries

The public library is more than just an access point for content; it also has an important role as a community educator. Literacy education is very important, and a lack of literacy skills can have serious consequences for individuals. According to the Government of British Columbia’s (2022) statement on community literacy:

> Literacy is more than just reading and writing. It is a set of skills that can help solve fundamental societal issues and economic challenges. During all stages of our lives, literacy is about decoding information, events, and situations so that

> we can succeed and prosper. Now, more than ever before, literacy helps in making sense of the modern world (n.p.).

Public libraries are one of the major community educators outside the public school system and play an important role in teaching different forms of literacy and supporting lifelong learning. In this capacity they have a role to play in community education and skill building, including education and skills relating to technology, most notably with respect to information and access to information (digital inclusion).

This section focusses on the public library's educational role, starting from statements made by the American Library Association (ALA), which plays a significant role in Canadian Librarianship. The ALA is the approving body for Canadian Master of Library Science (or equivalent) programmes. As the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) states (2016), the basic educational requirement to be a librarian in Canada is a "master's level qualification" (n.p.). The CFLA (2016) accepts how the ALA defines what the qualification should be, specifically, a "master's degree programme from a programme accredited by the American Library Association… is the appropriate professional degree for librarians" (n.p.). A look at any number of the librarian positions listed in the Partnership Job Board, a popular Canadian library-related job bank, shows the requirement of an ALA approved master's degree for librarian positions.

The ALA has a strong focus on supporting and promoting lifelong learning and access to knowledge in whatever format it comes in for the communities they serve, including a strong focus on intellectual freedom. To show just how seriously the ALA takes education in libraries, I have included below a series of statements the ALA makes on the topic of education:

- "Libraries and library workers foster education and lifelong learning by promoting free expression and facilitating the exchange of ideas among users. Libraries use resources, programming, and services to strengthen access to information and thus build a foundation of intellectual freedom. In their roles as educators, library workers create an environment that nurtures intellectual freedom in all library resources and services." (American Library Association, 2007, n.p.)
- "ALA promotes the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of a learning society, encouraging its members to work with educators, government officials, and organizations in coalitions to initiate and support comprehensive efforts to

ensure that school, public, academic, and special libraries in every community cooperate to provide lifelong learning services to all."
(American Library Association, 2019, n.p.)

- "Libraries and library workers foster education and lifelong learning by promoting free expression and facilitating the exchange of ideas among users. Libraries use resources, programming, and services to strengthen access to information and thus build a foundation of intellectual freedom. In their roles as educators, library workers create an environment that nurtures intellectual freedom in all library resources and services by doing the following:
    - developing collections and services representative of multiple perspectives that empower individuals to explore broadly when pursuing their own interests
    - providing programming through a variety of formats that accommodates multiple methods of learning and expands opportunities to discover, respond to, and create ideas;
    - leading instruction framed around information literacy skills and critical thinking;
    - supporting the development of skills necessary to effectively evaluate the accuracy of content and identify false or misleading information" (American Library Association, 2009, n.p.)

These statements show the commitment the ALA has to education, and the advocacy role they take in promoting the educational role of libraries. The ALA highlights that this role includes freedom of expression, access to information, programming, and outreach to other organizations. The ALA, and consequently the CFLA, takes the library's role as a community educator seriously.

Looking at the national level in Canada, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (2019, n.p.) states that "libraries are a key institution in Canada for rendering expressive content accessible and affordable to all. Libraries are essential gateways for all persons living in Canada to advance themselves through literacy, lifelong learning, social engagement, and cultural enrichment". Similarly, at a provincial level, the British Columbia Library Association (BCLA, 2022) states that "it is the responsibility of libraries and librarians to give full meaning to intellectual freedom by providing books and other materials that enrich the quality of thought and expression" (n.p.). In 2020, the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) responded to a questionnaire conducted by the United Nations. The focus of the questionnaire was the impact of Covid on human rights. With regards to libraries and other similar institutions, the IFLA (2020) responded:

> [m]arginalised communities with limited resources and often limited internet access are disproportionately affected by the closure of educational and memory institutions. In the event of closed public spaces, participation in educational and cultural programs, as well as the ability to partake in services such as registering for unemployment benefits, likely depends on internet access. Those without it are unable to benefit. (International Federation of Library Associations, 2020, p. 2)

In their response, the IFLA focused on the educational role that libraries typically play in their community, as well as the support and equalizing role libraries normally play for marginalized communities by providing free access to information and education. The response also references the issues some communities have regarding accessing the internet, which was only made worse during the pandemic. The IFLA (2020) provided examples of how libraries attempted to compensate for COVID shutdowns and provide services to their communities in alternate ways. This included initiatives such as loaning laptops and wireless hotspots to community members and extending library branch Wi-Fi to the areas surrounding the library for easier community access (International Federation of Library Associations, 2020).

With COVID shutdowns, digital services became the main point of access the community had with organizations such as the library, thus putting those without access to the internet at an increased risk of exclusion from these efforts (as pointed out by the IFLA in their 2020 response). As discussed, libraries play a role in community education through access to knowledge and culture. With COVID shutdowns, the only way the community could access libraries was through the library website and digital platforms to which libraries provided public access. Libraries moved to increase their digital services as much as they could, including, as mentioned, attempting to provide access to the internet and devices for those who did not have it. The IFLA (2020) also points to examples where governments provided additional funding for libraries to increase their digital resources, including eBooks. Interestingly, according to the IFLA, libraries and teams of librarians worked to disseminate information on the pandemic, including "supporting global scientific effort to understand the virus, its effects, and the effectiveness of responses" (International Federation of Library Associations, 2020, p. 6). According to the IFLA (2020), this included The National Library of Medicine in the United States leading the creation of the Coronavirus Information Database, which was open access for researchers around the world to use. Again, libraries, be

they public or otherwise, play an important role in society by providing access to information, as demonstrated during the pandemic.

In the next section, I will focus on public libraries in British Columbia, the impact they make on local communities, and the strategic direction the BC Libraries Division, a provincial government department that focuses on public libraries in the province, is taking in their recent strategic plan.

2.7 BC Public Libraries

It is worth noting that there is no federal level legislation or department that focuses on public libraries. This is instead controlled at the provincial level. At the provincial level, the Government of British Columbia (2025, first two paragraphs) has library related legislation that largely focuses on governance, which is called the Library Act. The Act states:

> "...provides for the establishment and operation of library boards, mandates free basic library service and authorizes the provision of provincial grants for public library purposes.
>
> Public libraries share a common mandate under the Act for borrowing to be free of charge to residents of a library service area. There are four types of public libraries: municipal, regional library districts, public library associations, and integrated public library systems. Libraries are led by locally established, autonomous boards as legislated by the Act"

According to McDonald, et al. (2024), British Columbia, Canada's most western province, runs approximately 1,180 km from north to south, and approximately 1,030 km from west to east, and has a population of over 5 million, approximately. Regarding population, the province has strong immigration from both nationally and internationally, though the province is one of the least densely populated in Canada, with the highest levels of population living in a small geographic area (McDonald, et al, 2024). The following are key demographics about British Columbia:

- 52% of the population declared no religion and secular perspectives (Statistics Canada, 2021);

- 11% of the population is Chinese, followed by 9.6 being Southeast Asian, otherwise citizens reported being English (20%), Scottish (15.8%) or Irish (12.8). The rest are a mixture of German, French, and Indian, to name a few (Statistics Canada, 2021);
- 91% of all British Columbia English speaking students completed high school, 100% of French speaking students completed high school, and 75% of Indigenous students completed high school (Government of British Columbia, 2023e); and
- 30% of Canadians had upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, and 63% had tertiary education (Statistics Canada, 2024).

While I do mention our Indigenous population above, I did not include them as a distinct section of the research. This is due to both the complex relationships that library systems and communities in general have with local Indigenous communities, as well as the complicated nature of initiating such research with our Indigenous communities. I believe it would be better, and more effective, to have specific research that was looking at local Indigenous groups given how they have been isolated and repressed. My focus is on libraries in general and how they serve the community as a whole. The digital strategy is intended for everyone.

British Columbia has a diverse landscape, and is home to coastal islands, including Vancouver Island which is home to the provincial capital, Victoria; mountain ranges, including the Coast Mountains and the Rocky Mountains; and dense forests that include old growth forests and temperate rainforests (McDonald et al, 2024). The weather ranges from temperate and mild in the southwest of the province, to sever winters and hot summers in other areas (McDonald et al, 2024). Public libraries are spread across British Columbia, in both large and small communities. Below I have included some brief statistics summing up public libraries in British Columbia, including their service levels, to help give scope and understand to the level of coverage and service BC public libraries provide to their communities (Government of British Columbia, 2023a:

- 71 Public libraries, 249 service locations and 6 Federations, serving 99% of B.C.’s population
- 2.2 million active cardholders
- 10 million items available in physical format
- 45 million physical items borrowed per year
- 60 million annual library visits (in-person and virtual)

- 140 thousand items lent through provincial interlibrary loan programmes per year
- 74 thousand library programmes per year
- 1.7 million people attend library programmes per year (n.p.).

In 2020, highlights include an increase of 47% in digital checkouts over 2019, and approximately 8,700 new virtual library programmes (Government of British Columbia, 2023a, n.p.).

The BC Libraries division was part of the Ministry of Education and is now part of the Ministry of Sports, Recreation, Arts and Culture. The libraries division believes that public libraries are "at the heart of communities", stating:

> Libraries are the cornerstones of healthy and vibrant communities. People can come together and learn more about what matters to them. Libraries celebrate diversity and help create a sense of belonging through programs and partnerships. They help people by providing digital inclusion and ensuring ongoing access to information in its many forms. (Government of British Columbia, 2020, p. 5)

In the most recent strategic plan, BC Libraries states that one of their key objectives is to "support library services that are flexible, inclusive and responsive to people's needs" (Government of British Columbia, 2020, p. 9). One of the key outcomes BC Libraries is striving to achieve is "better access to digital resources", with the focus on improving access and building capacity (Government of British Columbia, 2020, p. 13). While there is sustained discussion of digital inclusion and the digital divide (with acknowledgement that libraries need to do more), there is no mention in the documents of what 'doing more' would look like. Objectives and outcomes are discussed without advice to public libraries on how to achieve them.

Given that libraries are a traditional location through which people access information, it is logical to see a role for libraries in digital inclusion, but there needs to be clarity on what this role is and should be, and how it will be supported centrally. There also needs to be consideration of what the future of digital inclusion in British Columbia's public libraries might be, how libraries arrive at that future, and what the barriers are to achieving their goals.

2.8 Conclusion

Public Libraries in British Columbia play a critical role in communities, providing opportunities to access knowledge, information, and culture, and are crucial pieces of social infrastructure in local communities. As discussed, libraries also play an important role in community education and lifelong learning. However, the role libraries play is changing with the new technologies being introduced into society. The future role of libraries is an important area of discussion, especially in a province as large and diverse as British Columbia. In the next chapter, I will discuss digital inclusion in more depth, looking at terminology, digital literacy in Canada in general, impacts of digital on libraries, internet usage and the influence of COVID-19.

Chapter 3 - Digital Inclusion

As mentioned in the previous section, British Columbia's public libraries have an important role to play with regards to digital inclusion. In this section, I will look at the digital inclusion and the digital divide in Canada, as well as British Columbia. I will establish the meaning of terms I am using, discuss some of the statistics around digital literacy in the country, and explore digital typology. It is worth noting that as early as 2002 there are examples of efforts to bridge the digital divide. One interesting example of this is Erickson's (2002) discussion of establishing Gates Foundation computer labs in the far north of Canada, specifically in the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut (which had just been established in 1999). One of the most interesting aspects of this article is the detail it provides about the communities in focus, and how the location of those communities greatly impacted digital inclusion. The communities are isolated and experience very extreme weather, making it difficult to build the infrastructure needed for internet access as the geography and weather affects our very ability to build the infrastructure needed. As Erikson (2002, p. 147) states, "data is easily corrupted by the vagaries of influences that other parts of the world hardly think of, such as sunspots". There are few permanent roads, most becoming ice roads in the winter (Erikson, 2002). How can we support digital literacy when it is difficult to even access the internet? Harsh weather keeps buildings small, making them easier to heat, but it is difficult to either connect to satellite or to upgrade landlines (Erikson, 2002).

The article also highlights the complex dynamic between Indigenous people and legacies of colonialism (Erikson, 2002). This dynamic centers on a lack of trust, with many First Nations people being reluctant to use any sort of government run facility. What becomes very clear when reading this article is that due to the size of Canada, and with its diverse geography, Canadians have diverse needs when it comes to digital inclusion. Baluk et al. (2020) also highlight the size and colonial past of Canada in their research as a factor in in their comparison of Canada with Australia. Baluk et al. (2020, p. 521) state that "Canada and Australia resemble each other in their cultural histories of colonialism, democratic political systems, free-market economies, immigration policies and histories, and the size and nature of their populations, which are spread across large geographic areas". Through their research on aging in a digital society, Baluk et al. (2020) found that Canadian and Australia had some similar approaches to overcoming programming challenges but found that these approaches varied when it came to how they marketed their programs.

3.1 A Word on Terminology

It is worth discussing terminology at this point to ensure that the terms I am using around digital inclusion and the digital divide are clear. Deloitte (2023a) highlights the shifting nature of how we have discussed digital equity over the years: understanding this helps us to consider how best to approach digital equity in the future. As Jaeger et al. (2012) also point out, the nature of the digital divide has changed with time, but the terminology around this has not always done the same. In this dissertation, I use terms such as 'digital divide', 'digital literacy', 'digital inclusion', 'digital transformation' and 'digital equity'. Below, I will define these terms more fully.

3.1.1 Digital literacy

The American Library Association (ALA), define digital literacy as "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills" (American Library Association, 2024a, n.p.). This definition is supported by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA)

(2024). British Columbia's Literacy Framework (Government of British Columbia, 2023c) defines digital literacy as:

> Digital literacy is a person's knowledge, skills, and abilities for using digital tools ethically, effectively, and within a variety of contexts in order to access, interpret, and evaluate information, as well as to create, construct new knowledge, and communicate with others (p. 3).

The NDIA (National Digital Inclusion Alliance, 2024) works to connect organizations across America in support of digital equity, which is defined as "a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services" (n.p.).

3.1.2 Digital divide

A very simple meaning for the digital divide is the divide between those who have digital access and know how, and those who do not (Jaeger et al., 2021; Huffman, 2018; Wavrock et al., 2021). According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2023), the term digital divide is defined as "the economic, educational, and social inequalities between those who have computers and online access and those who do not" (n.p.). This is similar to the definition provided by the NDIA (National Digital Inclusion Alliance, 2024), which states:

> the gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not. As technology constantly evolves, the digital divide prevents equal participation and opportunity in all parts of life, disproportionately affecting people of color, Indigenous peoples, households with low incomes, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, and older adults (n.p.).

I will use the NDIA's definition in my dissertation. However, it also needs to be acknowledged that, as Wavrock et al. (2021) point out, the digital divide now encompasses *how* people access the internet. Wavrock et al. (2021) discuss the ways that different devices can impact a person's ability to function in a technological environment. According to Wavrock et al. (2021), 24% of those with the lowest incomes in Canada access the internet via mobile devices. The digital divide therefore relates not only to lack of internet access, but also to the lack of sufficient devices to access the internet (combined with a possible lack of skills

to access or use devices and internet). The NDIA provides a beautiful, yet simple way of summing up how the digital divide, digital equity, and digital inclusion relate to each other. They state: “Digital divide is the issue. Digital equity is the goal. Digital inclusion is the work” (National Digital Inclusion Alliance, 2024, n.p.).

3.1.3 Digital inclusion

The NDIA (National Digital Inclusion Alliance, 2024) defines digital inclusion as ensuring that all members of society have access and ability to use information and communication technologies (ICT). According to the NDIA (National Digital Inclusion Alliance, 2024), there are five aspects to this:

- “Affordable, robust broadband internet service;
- Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
- Access to digital literacy training;
- Quality technical support; and
- Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration” (n.p.).

It is worth noting that there is a distinction between digital equity and digital inclusion. Siefer (2016, n.p.) comments that the “simplest way to think of the intersection of these two terms is that Digital Equity is the ‘what’ (goals) and Digital Inclusion is the ‘how’ (activities)”.

3.1.4 Digital transformation

I will be using the definition of digital transformation put forward by Garcia-Febo (2021), a past president of the ALA: digital transformation is the process organizations like libraries go through when they adopt digital technologies. According to Garcia-Febo (2021), the pandemic sped up the process of digital transformation in libraries. Therefore, to "meet the needs of library users and researchers accessing services only online, libraries faced a steep learning curve to implement elements of automation, AI, and machine learning" (Garcia-Febo, 2021, n.p.).

3.1.5 Digital Equity

For digital equity, I use the definition put forth by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (2024), specifically that it "is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. Digital Equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services." This definition is similar to the one put forth by Canadian Internet Registration Authority (2023), and the Centre for Digital Equity (2025) uses the same definition as the National Digital Inclusion Alliance.

3.2 Digital Literacy and Technology Use in Canada

One of the main difficulties with researching this topic in Canada is the lack of research with a Canadian focus. As the Canadian researchers Fang et al. (2019) state, most studies are situated in the American context. They comment that studies from the United States "can provide important direction for understanding the digital divide" but that the findings "may not be transferable to environmental and social contexts outside of America" (Fang et al., 2019, p. 12). Jaeger et al. (2012) agree, commenting that "different nations have taken differing definitions of and approaches to digital divides, digital literacy, and inclusion" (p.4).

However, there have been some Canadian studies that help illuminate the state of digital literacy in Canada. This includes a report by Statistics Canada (2013), and a more recent study conducted by Deloitte's Future of Canada Centre (2023a, 2023b, 2023c), which I will discuss in more detail below. The 2023 study focuses on digital equity, the digital divide, and the digital future in Canada (Deloitte, 2023a; Deloitte, 2023b; & Deloitte, 2023c). While Deloitte is not necessarily a neutral source of information, the report does have the advantage of being focused on digital equity in Canada. Deloitte's (2023a) goal seems to be to show the state of digital equity in Canada and argue why this needs to improve.

3.2.1 Technology and the Skills Needed

As Statistics Canada (2013) points out, technology availability and use has grown at a rapid rate over the last few decades. Statistics Canada (2013) claim that this growth has been "nothing short of transformative" (p. 5). With that growth, the nature of the digital divide is also changing (Fang et al., 2019; Huffman, 2018; Jaeger et al., 2012; de los Santos and Rosser, 2021). Jaeger et al. (2012) comment on the changing nature of the internet and digital technologies, and how the digital divide has widened as quickly as new technologies are developed. According to Jaeger et al. (2012), this divide is especially significant when looking at:

> socio-economic status, education level, geography, age, disability, language, and literacy, [leaving] large numbers of people underserved, disadvantaged, or underrepresented in technology access and their knowledge of how to use this technology (p. 2).

As Statistics Canada (2013) says, the impact that technology is having on our society is enormous. Technology affects:

> such broad domestic considerations as economic disparities between different groups; health outcomes; levels of political engagement; and the degree to which people feel integrated into, or isolated from, society. The skills a country's population possesses do not only foreshadow its future international economic prospects; they also illustrate the challenges it faces, and shape the way in which it adapts to change (p. 5).

As these studies note, technology - especially information and communication technology (ICT) - is unavoidable today, be it in our personal lives, at work, or in our communities (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Canada took part in a study conducted by the OECD called the *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC), which focused on the basic skills needed to adapt to digital technology.[1] The 2013 Statistics Canada study adds to previous international studies, and allows comparisons of data on literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments (PS-TRE), all areas considered to be key. Statistics Canada (2013) states:

> Given the centrality of written communication and basic mathematics in virtually all areas of life, coupled with the rapid integration of ICT, individuals must be able to understand, process, and respond to textual and numerical information, print and digital, if they are to participate fully in society — whether as citizens, family members, consumers, or employees. The three skills noted above are considered key to that ability: they provide a foundation for the development of other, higher-order cognitive skills, and are prerequisites for gaining access to, and understanding of, specific domains of knowledge. In addition, they are necessary in a broad range of contexts, from education, to work, to everyday life (p. 5).

Statistics Canada (2013) reports that Canada was average for literacy in OECD countries, below average for numeracy, and above average for PS-TRE. Overall, literacy scores were highest in people aged 25-34 years of age, and people aged 16-34 had the highest PS-TRE skills (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Not surprisingly, the Statistics Canada (2013) analysis links higher education with higher literacy, numeracy, and PS-TRE skills. In addition, the skill differences between younger and older people lessens with higher education or through having a managerial or professional occupation (Statistics Canada, 2013). With regards to occupation, employed people tend to have higher information processing skills than those not in the labour force, with managerial and professional people having higher skills than those in other types of occupations (Statistics Canada, 2013). Statistics Canada (2013) also notes that men and women have comparable skill levels with regards to literacy and PS-TRE, though men have higher levels with regards to

[1] This study took place in 2013, and has taken place again recently, though the data will not be available until 2024.

numeracy. On closer inspection, Statistics Canada (2013) notes that this is with older populations, whereas women and men in younger age categories are more equal in terms of numeracy skills. However, that said, Canada seems to demonstrate a more extreme position than other nations: it has a higher number of people in the highest levels for those skill areas, as well as higher numbers of people in the lowest levels than other countries in the study (Statistics Canada, 2013). This high level of individuals in the lowest levels for these three skill areas is of concern because they are the ones who may have the hardest time adapting to new technologies. They are more likely to be on the wrong side of the digital divide.

3.2.2 Internet Usage in Canada

Wavrock et al. (2021) analyze the typology of Canadian internet use, using data gathered from the 2018 Canadian Internet Use Survey. Based on this survey, they defined five user groups: non-users, basic users, intermediate users, proficient users, and advanced users (Wavrock et al., 2021). It is important to note that this information dates from before the pandemic; the COVID-19 pandemic will most likely have had an impact on statistics related to internet use. However, as of 2018, the typology of internet users breaks down as follows: approximately 9% of Canadians are non-users, 16% are basic users, 20% are intermediate users, 22% are proficient users, and 34% are advanced users (Wavrock et al., 2021). Wavrock et al. (2021) also point out the effect that age and education have on these statistics. For example, seniors make up 63% of non-users or basic users, while 40% of non-users and basic users are people who have only a high school education. Conversely, 76% of people with a bachelor's degree or higher fall into either the proficient or advanced user groups. Similarly, 77% of people aged 15 to 34 are proficient or advanced users (Wavrock et al., 2021). Fang et al. (2019) also draw attention to the connection between higher education and digital literacy, stating: "education is the primary predictive sociodemographic variable" influencing digital literacy, "and is clearly highlighted in population statistics" (p. e5).

Income also seems to play a role in both internet use and digital literacy: the higher the income, the more proficient the internet user (Fang et al., 2019; Huffman, 2018; Wavrock et al., 2021). According to Wavrock et al. (2021), only 16% of people with incomes less than $25,000 were considered advanced users, whereas that number increases to 48% for those

making more than $100,000. Some, according to Fang et al (2019), do not have the income necessary to be able to afford the equipment needed for internet access (as in computers, tablets, smart phones), or the cost of access to the internet (as in broadband, data). Employment also plays a role in this, with 41% of those employed being considered as advanced users, in contrast with 22% of unemployed people (Wavrock et al., 2021). Fang et al. (2019) draw attention to the role that perception plays in people's use of digital technology and in increasing their digital literacy. Fang et al (2019) state: "For many middle-aged and older adults, [information and communication technology] adoption and usage are perceived as daunting, with little or no added value" (p. e8). Older adults also hold perceptions of "lack of skills and familiarity, fear of cybercrime, and lack of interest" when it comes to information and communication technology (Fang et al, 2019, p. e7-e8). Fang et al. (2019) comment that these "detractors can demotivate an individual and impact one's enthusiasm and willingness to learn and acquire technology usage skills" (p. e8). They discuss the role that motivation plays, stating that many older people have little motivation to use digital technology, preferring actual copies of books or reading materials, or face to face contact (Fang et al., 2019). Gender, according to Fang et al. (2019), does not seem to play a large role in the digital divide.

It is worth noting that, according to Wavrock et al. (2021), the "differentiation between digital haves and have nots follows well-established dimensions of vulnerability and marginalization" (p. 21). This is a fact with which Deloitte (2023b) agrees: "Digital technology can exacerbate social inequalities, which in turn often drive digital inequity. We'll never achieve a fully equitable digital society unless we also address other forms of social inequity" (p. 9). This is one area in which the Capability Approach, which I discuss in the next chapter, is so useful in that allows us to strive to minimum standards for individual capabilities for all. Fang et al. (2019) point out the positive influence of children, grandchildren, and peers with regards to motivating older adults to learn the skills necessary to use digital technology. Fang et al. (2019) also highlight another interesting aspect to the digital divide, commenting that:

> some groups of retired, financially secure professionals who used computers during their career, minimized and/or took for granted the potential benefits of ICT use. Persons in elevated social positions have the ability to *choose* whether or not to use ICTs or to simply rely on 'traditional' modes of communication, information access... because it suites their lifestyle (p. e9, emphasis original).

In other words, financially secure professionals are in a privileged position and can choose if and how they want to use digital technologies.

Huffman (2018) also highlights the role mobile technology has played in helping bridge the digital divide, stating that it has done "so much to lift the poor, noting that in many impoverished countries, smartphones are by far the cheapest alternative for gaining access to the internet and all that now comes with it – banking services, communications, social media, etc." (Huffman, 2018, p. 3). While mobile has been extremely beneficial in many ways, it is not enough, especially with regards to education. As de los Santos & Rosser (2021) point out, "smartphones and tablets are inadequate when the total learning environment is online; research papers cannot be written on a smartphone" (p. 23).

3.2.3 The impact of the pandemic

Wavrock et al. (2021) comment on how the pandemic has sped up the changes made by digital technology in society, causing an even greater digital transformation in our everyday lives. De los Santos and Rosser (2021) comment that many had viewed the digital divide as having reduced over time, but during the Covid-19 pandemic it became very clear that the digital divide was still a major issue. The digital divide remains a significant barrier to equitable access to 21st century learning and services. Unsurprisingly, with the pandemic and associated lockdowns, society saw an increase in online communication, use of online entertainment, and online shopping (Wavrock et al., 2022). Deloitte's report, *Digital Equity: Spotlighting the digital divide* (Deloitte, 2023b), states:

> Every day our lives become a little more connected to the digital world, as technology transforms how we work, learn, shop, and access essential services. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this trend, condensing years of change into the space of a few months. As people sought to protect themselves by physically distancing from each other and staying home, the importance of digital connectivity – and digital connection – was amplified. Suddenly, many organizations and even entire economic sectors had to migrate to digital-first, or digital-only, offerings. And while Canadians can anticipate getting back to some semblance of "normal" as the pandemic abates, digital connectivity will continue to play an increasingly large role in our lives (p. 3).

To better understand this digital transformation, Wavrock et al. (2022) conducted a study comparing and analyzing Canadians' use of the internet before and during the pandemic using the 2018 and 2020 Canadian Internet Use Surveys. Overall, Wavrock et al. (2022) found that more people became advanced users during the pandemic. However, they also noted that the gap between basic users and intermediate users is growing (Wavrock et al., 2022). Basic users fell "further behind intermediate users, at least when measured in terms of activity prevalence rates" (Wavrock et al., 2022, p. 10). It is also worth noting from Wavrock et al.'s (2022) study that seniors and those with a high school diploma or less made up the highest figures in both the non-user and basic user categories in 2020. Specifically, seniors made up 64% of non-users and 49% of basic users, and those with high school level education or less made up 64% of non-users and 48% of basic users (Wavrock et al., 2022).

The pandemic therefore was an unexpected and powerful factor in digital transformation. It illuminated the inequity in our society (de los Santos and Rosser, 2021): some were able to adapt to digital life brought on by the pandemic, while others were not able to do so (Deloitte, 2023c). As the Deloitte study states: “as Canada becomes more digital, we’re leaving groups behind” (Deloitte, 2023b, p. 44).

3.3 Digital Inclusion and Libraries

As of 2020, approximately 7% of Canadians are categorized as digital non-users, and a further 11% are categorized as basic users (Wavrock et al., 2022). Combining this with Canada having some of the widest extremes of people falling in either the highest or lowest literacy/numeracy/PS-TRE skills categories (as per the study conducted by Statistics Canada, 2013), raises grave concerns. The situation becomes even more alarming when one considers Deloitte’s *Digital Equity* (2023a) report on the status of Canada’s digital equity, and why improved digital equity is so important not just for individual participation in society, but also for the growth of our economy. It helps to show why it is so important for Canada, including British Columbia, to focus on digital inclusion.

Fang et al. (2019) highlight the difficult nature of the digital divide, stating that it is “one that is complex in nature and often requires multiple solutions, transdisciplinary expertise, and knowledge from a variety of disciplines” (p. e2). Public libraries could be part of the solution, though they are at times overlooked. As Jaeger et al. (2012) state, many nations have failed “to involve librarians in the formulation of definitions, policies, or other aspects of the policy-making process” (p. 4). However, public libraries can play an important role in helping to bridge the digital divide and build digital equity. As I mentioned in chapter two, the International Federation of Library Associations (2020) contributed to a survey conducted by the United Nations on the impact Covid had on human rights. They stated that the equalizing role that libraries and other memory institutions play in society is critical (International Federation of Library Associations, 2020). To lose free access to education and information is detrimental to marginalized communities (International Federation of Library Associations, 2020).

According to the American Library Association (2010)[2], it is the "leading advocate" for the "value of libraries and librarians in connecting people to recorded knowledge in all forms" (n.p.). However, the American Library Association (2010) also advocates for a larger role for libraries. They state that the American Library Association (2010):

> promotes the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of a learning society, encouraging its members to work with educators, government officials, and organizations in coalitions to initiate and support comprehensive efforts to ensure that school, public, academic, and special libraries in every community cooperate to provide lifelong learning services to all (n.p.).

More than that, the ALA actively encourages libraries to help communities get the skills they need (American Library Association 2010):

> The ALA assists and promotes libraries in helping children and adults develop the skills they need-the ability to read and use computers-understanding that the ability to seek and effectively utilize information resources is essential in a global information society (n.p.).

The ALA is not alone in believing that libraries can play a central role in community education and access to information. As BC Libraries strategic plan states, public libraries can improve access for citizens by "supporting a connected library network that leverages its strengths and structure to deliver user-centred programs and services through the province" (Government of British Columbia, 2020, p. 4).

3.4 Artificial Intelligence and Libraries

Over the last year, as I have been analyzing the data and writing this dissertation, Artificial intelligence (AI) has come into prominence. According to the IFLA AI SIG (International Federation of Library Associations, 2024, section 1): 'Generative AI are systems that can produce new text, images or other media'. Will Douglas Heaven (2024), who writes for the MIT Review, describes AI as 'a catchall term for a set of technologies that make computers do things that are thought to require intelligence when done by people' (n.p.). There are, however, growing issues with AI, many of which revolve around the training data used to train AI,

[2] I discovered when confirming my references that the ALA had updated their Mission and Goals. The new are largely the same as the old ones, though the wording has changed and quotes are from the former wording.

specifically large language models. According to IBM (n.d.), large language models "are a category of foundation models trained on immense amounts of data making them capable of understanding and generating natural language and other types of content to perform a wide range of tasks" (para 1). IFLA AI SIG (International Federation of Library Associations, 2024) highlights a number of these issues that are emerging around the use of AI, including:

- AI reproduces the biases found in the training data used for AI
- AI can hallucinate, which means it can create information, including false references
- There are copyright issues as permissions where not sought when creating the training data [large language models]
- There are privacy issues if you share your personal information with it - or that of the company you work for
- While there is a free base level access, there is a paywall for the better versions

Even with these issues, AI is a powerful tool that will cause great change. The IFLA AI SIG (International Federation of Library Associations, 2023) notes that artificial intelligence "is said to be having a dramatic, even transformative effect on many aspects of society" (n.p.). They highlight that AI "will affect libraries in multiple ways, through its use in library services but also through changing the search landscape, and so information literacy" (International Federation of Library Associations, 2023, n.p.).

According to Matt Enis (2024), who writes for *Library Journal*, "a sea change is coming, but AI will still require people to function" (n.p.). Enis (2024) points out that several companies related to library services have embraced AI in their work. For example, Overdrive, a company that provides an e-book and e-audiobook platform for libraries (including an app called Libby), uses AI to improve workflows for: building and improving their products; analyzing trends; summarizing meetings; data analysis, and more (Enis, 2024). According to Enis (2024), the Libby app uses an AI chat bot to assist with customer service, providing support to their customers. Overdrive is not alone in their use of AI. OCLC, another library company, has also been using AI to improve their work. Enis (2024) notes that this includes potentially using AI in a "following the sun" model to give access to electronic resources such as interlibrary loans: "if it's nighttime in the United States, but someone is up late working on a paper, could an electronic resource request be fulfilled quickly by a WorldShare partner library in Australia...?" (n.p.). OCLC has also been beta testing using AI for book

recommendations and have found it to be very successful: people are clicking on 2.4 more resources than the average on WorldCat, the OCLC mobile app extension (Enis, 2024).

Clarivate, another library company, has also been creating AI resources that will be powerful tools in research, and will assist people in everything from finding resources using natural language, expanding on that research to find related resources, and guidance in other research steps (Enis, 2024). As Enis (2024, n.p.) states: “as the use of tools such as ChatGPT becomes more prevalent, and as library vendors continue to create AI tools of their own, librarians will need to find ways to keep up, both for their own work and to help patrons navigate these emerging technologies”.

While it may not make sense for libraries to, for example, develop a new form of AI for the public, they could arguably have a role in educating the public in how AI can affect their lives, or how AI uses algorithms and how these algorithms can affect their lives, for example. As the ALA (American Library Association, 2019) states, “AI may become one more development that libraries help communities better understand”, including in the contexts of algorithmic literacy and the biases manifesting in AI (n.p.). Again, the roles libraries potentially take with regards to AI should be looked at through the lens of the Capability Approach, as I will discuss, and library staff should ask if what they are aiming to do makes sense within the context of the role of the library and the promotion of the relevant capabilities they promote.

3.5 Conclusion

We are in the midst of a digital transformation. If we want all members of society to have equal participation in that society and economic growth, we need to have digital equity. I included this statement above, but I will include it again here: our situation is summed up concisely by the NDIA when they say "Digital divide is the issue. Digital equity is the goal. Digital inclusion is the work" (National Digital Inclusion Alliance, 2024, n.p.). All members of society need to be able to interact with textual and numerical information if they want to be full participants of society (Statistics Canada, 2013), and libraries are uniquely qualified to help support this learning in society. In the next chapter, I will discuss Martha Nussbaum's (2006) Capability Approach, and how I will use it as a theoretical framework for the research. I will also discuss how closely the Capability Approach relates to the work that libraries do.

Chapter 4 - The Capability Approach and Public Libraries

The Capability Approach, specifically relating to Nussbaum's work, provides the theoretical framework for the research. In this section, I will discuss the origins of the Capability Approach, particularly as it relates to the work of Amartya Sen, before I discuss Martha Nussbaum's version and its appeal. I then discuss how the Capability Approach relates to public libraries, followed by a discussion of some of the criticisms that Nussbaum's approach faces.

4.1 The Development of the Capability Approach

According to Robeyns & Fibieger (2021), the Capability Approach (CA) "entails two normative claims: first, the claim that the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance and, second, that well-being should be understood in terms of people's capabilities and functionings" (n.p.). The terms *capabilities* and *functionings* come with specific meanings in relation to the Capability Approach. Robeyns & Fibieger (2021) describe capabilities as what people can do or achieve - things they desire to do, whereas functionings refer to what people actually do. As Robeyns & Fibieger (2021) put it, "whether someone can convert a set of means - resources and public goods - into a functioning (i.e., whether she has a particular capability) crucially depends on certain personal, sociopolitical, and environmental conditions" (n.p.).

The Capability Approach was originated by Amartya Sen, and further developed by Martha Nussbaum. Robeyns & Fibieger (2021) note that Sen developed the Capability Approach based on his criticism of standard economic models and their limited information bases. Clark (2005) writes that Sen's Capability Approach (CA) has become a popular alternative to standard, or traditional, economic frameworks examining poverty, human development and inequality. More specifically, Clark (2005) connects the beginnings of CA with "Sen's critiques of traditional welfare economics, which typically conflate well-being with either opulence (income, commodity command) or utility (happiness, desire fulfillment)" (p. 3). Amartya Sen (1985) believes there is a difference between having well-being and

being well off, which he connects to John Rawls' idea of primary goods. According to Sen (1985) being well off "is really a concept of opulence - how rich is she? what goods and services can she buy?" (p. 195). This, he writes, refers to "a person's command over things outside - including what Rawls calls 'primary goods'" (Sen, 1985, p. 195). He continues:

> Having 'well-being,' on the other hand, is not something outside her that she commands, but something in her that she achieves. What kind of a life is she leading? What does she succeed in doing and in being? Being 'well off' may help, other things given, to have 'well-being,' but there is a distinctly personal quality in the latter absent in the former. (Sen, 1985, p. 195)

In the articles he wrote during the development of CA, Sen (1985) discussed the question of what would be reasonable criteria for wellbeing. He (Sen, 1985) questioned how well-being could be assessed. Sen (1985) states that "the primary feature of well-being can be seen in terms of how a person can 'function', taking that term in a very broad sense" (p. 197). Sen (1985) refers to the "various doings and beings" that come into an assessment of wellbeing as "functionings" (p. 197).

Functionings can be both "activities (like eating or reading or seeing)" as well as "states of existence or being" such as "being well-nourished" (Sen, 1985, p. 197). Sen refers to "the set of functionings a person actually achieves as the functioning vector" (p.198). Sen (1985) believes that "the primary feature of a person's well-being is the functioning vector that he or she achieves" (p. 198). From there, one needs to move from functionings to capability and change the focus from what people are doing to what they can do (Sen, 1985). The relationship between functionings and the Capability Approach is important as it speaks to an individual's freedom in society in that it shows what freedoms they actually achieve. Sen (1985) points out that concepts like Rawls' primary goods can have uses, it cannot show the well-being of individual people within society. Sen (1985) argues that this is, in part, due to the two influences of "biological, social, and other parameters" that influence an individual's ability to use primary goods (p. 200). Sen (1985) argues that looking at what capabilities are accessible by an individual "has the effect of taking note of the positive freedoms in a general sense (the freedom 'to do this', or 'to do that') that a person has" (p. 201).

Sen (1985) provides two examples to illustrate his points about well-being. The first concerns being disabled, and how a disabled person who has the same amount of money is generally not able to achieve the same things as an able-bodied person (Sen, 1985). Many of the disabled person's needs and activities are shaped by their disability, something the able-bodied individual does not have to accommodate (Sen, 1985). Sen (1985) points out, though, that this example could potentially focus on more exceptional circumstances and provides another that illustrates how lives can be affected by the ability or lack of ability to choose. This example involves food and being well nourished. Sen (1985) claims that many of the food intake figures are biased and tend to skew in favour of men. Sen (1985) states:

> "The comparisons are usually made with some arbitrarily assumed sex-specific nutritional requirements, and there is some evidence that the most widely used requirements norms… not only are inappropriate in a great majority of cases but also involve a systematic sex bias, helping to conceal the extent of the relative deprivation of women in many of these countries" (p. 199).

The concept of functionings, Sen (1985) argues, gives a better understanding of well-being - one can ask, are they well nourished? Are they undernourished? This helps one see levels of well-being in a more authentic light (Sen, 1985).

4.2 Nussbaum's Capability Approach

Martha Nussbaum (1997), along with Amartya Sen, pioneered the Capability Approach. Like Sen, Nussbaum (1997) developed the idea of using capabilities in relation to human development to assess human well-being and quality of life.

4.2.1 Nussbaum, Capability and Flourishing

While Nussbaum's (1997) and Sen's (1985) approaches were developed independently, according to Nussbaum (1997), they merged. Nussbaum (1997) states that her version of the approach reflected:

> the fact that Aristotle used a notion of human capability (Greek dunamis) and functioning (Greek energeia) in order to articulate some of the goals of good political organization. But the projects soon became fused: I increasingly articulated the Aristotelian idea of capability in terms pertinent to the

> contemporary debate, while Sen increasingly emphasized the ancient roots of his idea... (p.275).

According to Shields (2022, n.p.), human flourishing for Aristotle "is achieved… by fully realizing our natures, by actualizing to the highest degree our human capacities, and neither our nature nor our endowment of human capacities is a matter of choice for us". However, like Sen, Nussbaum (1997) felt that other methods of assessing societal wellbeing were too basic and did not give a full account of the situations people were facing in their lives. Nussbaum (1997) felt that an approach that gave a clearer, more in-depth, picture was needed. The question was what should that approach look like?

Both Nussbaum (1997) and Sen (1985) agree that the concept of human satisfaction is not a useful guide to assessing wellbeing. Nussbaum (1997) explains why:

> Wealthy and privileged people get used to a high level of luxury, and feel pain when they do not have delicacies that one may think they do not really need. On the other hand, deprived people frequently adjust their sights to the low level they know they can aspire to, and thus actually experience satisfaction in connection with a very reduced living standard (p. 282).

Nussbaum (1997) continues, quoting Sen: "Quiet acceptance of deprivation and bad fate affects the scale of dissatisfaction generated, and the utilitarian calculus gives sanctity to that distortion" (Sen, in Nussbaum, 1997, p. 282-3). Nussbaum notes that Rawls' approach of looking at primary goods (basic resources and who has access to them) is an improvement on the "utilitarian calculus" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 283). However, she argues that it is still unclear who is better or worse off using Rawl's approach, because people vary in their needs regarding resources (Nussbaum, 1997). Factors such as age, occupation, and sex also play a part in assessing need (Nussbaum, 1997).

Nussbaum (1997) claims that:

> An approach focusing on resources does not go deep enough to diagnose obstacles that can be present even when resources seem to be adequately spread around, causing individuals to fail to avail themselves of opportunities that they in some sense have, such as free public education, the right to vote, or the right to work (p. 284).

This is where the Capability Approach is so useful, because, according to Nussbaum (1997), it provides a better way to assess wellbeing and helps determine what people can do in their

lives (Nussbaum, 1997). Nussbaum's approach (1997) is to consider "a variety of functions that would seem to be of central importance to a human life" and then ask: "Is the person capable of this, or not?" (p. 285). She argues: "This focus on capabilities, unlike the focus on GNP, or on aggregate utility, looks at people one by one, insisting on locating empowerment in this life and in that life, rather than in the nation as a whole" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 285). By creating a list of capabilities, Nussbaum (1997) argues that this becomes a "list of political goals that should be useful as a benchmark for aspiration and comparison" (p. 291). I will discuss this list more fully below in Section 4.2.3.

4.2.2 Nussbaum's Capability Approach and Human Rights

Martha Nussbaum (1997) discusses how the Capability Approach provides a framework for a theory of human rights theory. As Nussbaum (1997) points out, there are questions around human rights language that the Capability Approach helps answer. Some of these questions concern what an individual has rights to - a certain type of treatment? A level of wellbeing? Certain resources or opportunities (Nussbaum, 1997)? Nussbaum (1997) argues that a theory is needed to help answer these questions, to provide a framework with which you can ensure that people's rights are met, and they have the capacity to live their life fully - and this is what the Capability Approach does for human rights. Unlike Sen, Nussbaum (1997) provides a list of the basic capabilities that should be met, stating, "most central capabilities that should be the goal of public policy. The list is continually being revised and adjusted, in accordance with my methodological commitment to cross-cultural deliberation and criticism" (p. 279).

Centred in human rights, the Capability Approach provides goals or benchmarks to which governments can strive to ensure the rights and wellbeing of citizens (Nussbaum, 1997). Nussbaum (1997) describes the relationship between rights and capabilities as that "to secure a right to a citizen in these areas is to put them in a position of capability to go ahead with choosing that function if they should so desire" (p. 293). In other words, basic human rights are much like basic capabilities in that at a basic level (being human) we are all entitled to it (Nussbaum, 1997). More than that, though, Nussbaum (1997) connects having both the right and ability to use it as a goal for public planning. Nussbaum (1997) claims that using both rights and capabilities together in such a way helps show the complexities involved in

achieving them. It is easy to say something, but much harder to do it - as Nussbaum (1997) states, “thinking in terms of capability gives us a benchmark in thinking about what it is really to secure a right to someone” (p. 294).

4.2.3 Nussbaum’s List of Capabilities

Like Sen, Nussbaum (1997) argues that to maintain freedom of choice, capabilities, not functions, should be the political goal. Nussbaum (1997) argues that each item on the list is important and non-fungible. She states (Nussbaum, 1997), “Practical reason and affiliation… are of special importance because they both organize and suffuse all the other capabilities, making their pursuit truly human” (p. 287). Nussbaum’s (1997) list contains three types of capabilities:

- basic, which is “the innate equipment of individuals that is the necessary basis for developing the more advanced capability”
- internal, which is “states of the person herself that are, so far as the person herself is concerned, sufficient conditions for the exercise of the requisite functions”, and
- combined, which is “as internal capabilities combined with suitable external conditions for the exercise of the function” (p. 289-90).

According to Nussbaum (1997), “the aim of public policy is the production of combined capabilities”, or, in other words, the ability to do a function as well as the capacity to choose to do it (p. 290).

In her book *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, nationality, species membership*, Martha Nussbaum presents the Capability Approach even more thoroughly, including looking more closely at people with disabilities and non-human rights (2006). Nussbaum (2006) creates a political theory that focuses on human dignity, overlapping consensus, and, according to Richardson (2002), a government more concerned with an individual’s ability to do something (fulfilling a capacity) than what those citizens are doing. Nussbaum’s Capability Approach is centered around a non-exhaustive and non-fungible list of capabilities that Nussbaum feels are necessary to living a life with dignity. The ten central capabilities she outlines are:

1. life;

2. bodily health;
3. bodily integrity;
4. senses, imagination and thought;
5. emotions;
6. practical reason;
7. affiliation;
8. other species;
9. play; and
10. control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2006, pp. 76-77).

Nussbaum (2006) stresses the value of having one list for all citizens, and states that it "provide[s] the philosophical underpinning for an account of core human entitlements that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations, as a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires" (p. 70). The value of the list is its focus on human dignity - it changes the focus from individual advantage to all having the capacity to live life fully. In *Frontiers of Justice*, Nussbaum (2006) gives an example of this that focusses on individuals with disabilities. She states that an "entire encounter with such a person is articulated in terms of the stigmatized trait, and we come to believe that the person with the stigma is not fully or really human" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 191). As Nussbaum (2006) points out, we can move to different states, but we cannot change the body we have.

Nussbaum (2006) notes that "the list is open ended, and subject to on-going revision and rethinking, in the way that any society's account of its most fundamental entitlements is always subject to supplementation (or deletion)" (p. 78). Nussbaum (2006) believes that societies should focus on a minimum threshold with regards to these capabilities, stating that the Capability Approach "provide[s] the philosophical underpinning for an account of core human entitlements that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations, as a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 70). Nussbaum (2006) argues that society's goal should be that an individual has the capacity to exercise a right - or the capability, instead just the act of doing something - or functionings. This difference in focus allows individuals to choose how they want to live their lives.

4.2.4 The Appeal of Nussbaum's Approach

A key appeal of Nussbaum's (2006) approach is that it is a theory of social justice that focuses on human dignity. People - both men and women - are treated as an end, not a means to an end (Nussbaum, 2006). Nussbaum (2006) keeps the Capability Approach free of any metaphysical ideas or goals. In other words, it is a non-religious theory that focuses on human dignity and how individuals can live a life with dignity. As Nussbaum (2006) states, the Capability Approach "is a political doctrine about basic entitlements, not a comprehensive moral doctrine" (p. 155). This is ideal in that it makes the approach compatible with many viewpoints, as it is focused on providing common ground on how all in society can live freely together with universal minimum rights (Nussbaum, 2006). As Nussbaum (2006) states, "living with and toward others, with both benevolence and justice, is part of the shared public conception of the person that all affirm for political purpose" (p. 158). This focus on human dignity and basic human entitlements makes Nussbaum's (2006) approach useful for my research on the role of public libraries regarding digital inclusion.

The approach goes beyond just a focus on human dignity, it also focuses on the idea of overlapping consensus - or the idea that to have respect for others means that all individuals need space to make their decisions (Nussbaum, 2006). Nussbaum (2006) presses the point that while one does not necessarily agree with those around them at what it means for an individual to flourish, it does mean that you should agree with the value of choice. She states, "the list is designed to be the basis of an overlapping consensus in a pluralistic society…" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 182). In other words, while you may not agree with the specific capability, you agree that people should have the right to choose for themselves (Nussbaum, 2006). In a way, it is to have two standards, as an individual. One is personal, which are one's own person ethical views. The other is political, and the principles one supports in that sphere are a more general version of one's own ethical views. Again, it goes back to respect for human dignity, Nussbaum (2006) stresses that if society is to achieve the goals of the Capability Approach, then that respect for the individual is of the utmost importance.

Martha Nussbaum (2006) recognizes a significant potential issue with the Capability Approach - how are groups of individuals supposed to achieve having these capacities available to all citizens? This is where the role of the institution comes into play. She

(Nussbaum, 2006) argues that a major part of social cooperation is to create institutions and principles that allow people to have the capabilities she lists above. Specifically, institutions should focus on individuals in our society that are disadvantaged, those who have a low quality of life (Nussbaum, 2006). Nussbaum (2006) states, "it is possible to argue… that institutions have both cognitive and causal powers that individuals do not have, powers that are pertinent to the allocation of responsibility" (p. 308). In other words, by setting up institutions with the resources and mandate to help those in need, we can more successfully achieve our goals of having minimum capabilities levels than if we were to attempt to do it on an individual level - we can do more as a collective. Also, by having institutions with mandates to help all people have the minimum level of each capability, then individuals are then freed to more fully live their lives as they see fit (Nussbaum, 2006).

4.2.5 Criticisms of the Capability Approach

Nussbaum's (2006) Capability Approach is not without criticism. Clark (2005) discusses several of the criticism Nussbaum's approach has faced. First, Clark (2005) references criticism about the paternalistic nature of her approach, especially considering she is a white American woman who is referring to other cultures but did not take a participatory approach in her research. Clark (2005) quotes Gaspar (2001), saying "her case studies 'may be rather thin in both number (two) and depth (perhaps from single meetings reliant on interpreters), for Nussbaum's ambitious project'" (p. 4). Richardson (2000) neatly lays out some of its other problems. First, with the Capability Approach, as mentioned, it helps governments focus on citizens' capacity to function versus what those citizens are doing (Nussbaum, 2006, and Richardson, 2000). Richardson (2000) argues that there are times and circumstances where governments do need to look more at the functionings (or actions) of citizens. He, too, mentions being paternalistic, but in his argument, this can be a positive. Using the example of getting people to not smoke, Richardson (2000) argues that paternalistic approaches can be justified. He claims that while he respects the individual's right to decide, he does argue "that the normative basis for such practices, and for determining whether they have succeeded, should often be individual achievement, not individual capability" (Richardson, 2000, p. 317).

Richardson raises an interesting issue with some of Nussbaum's (2006) listed capabilities by claiming that there are important rights that the Capability Approach cannot support. He claims that to be effective, the listed capabilities should be focused solely on the actions of the individual, and not require actions from those around the individual or else the capability become meaningless (Richardson, 2000). An example of this is the capability that focuses on non-discrimination. According to Richardson (2000), for one to live without discrimination requires those around them to act accordingly. He claims that it is not truly a capability, but rather "a social condition the promotion of which may directly form an aspect of the public good" (Richardson, 2000, p. 323). Richardson (2000) argues that Nussbaum's approach has the potential to be interpreted in a bigoted or negative manner – points out that so long as all citizens have access to the capabilities, what do you do when that society is happy in their bigotry? Nussbaum's (2006) approach leaves room for local specifications, and here, according to Richardson (2000), is where the issue lies. Richardson (2000) feels that Nussbaum should "insist that a more abstract level of interpretation... has normative priority over any of the more concrete local specifications that might arise" (p. 329).

4.3 The Capability Approach and Public Libraries

The Capability Approach, as presented by Nussbaum in her 2006 book, provides a useful lens with which to examine digital inclusion and public libraries. This is largely due to the commonalities between Nussbaum's (2006) list and the values promoted by public libraries and associations. To illustrate this point, I will compare #6 and #7 on the list of capabilities to some of the stated goals of public library. Starting with #6, "Practical Reason", concerns "being able to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 77). #7 on Nussbaum's (2006) list, "senses, imagination, and thought", which focuses on being "informed and cultivated by adequate education, including... literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training", including "[b]eing able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech..." (p. 76). Both these capabilities are clearly reflected in library doctrine, and I will illustrate this through statements made by both the American Library Association (ALA), as well as the Greater Victoria Public Library (GVPL), to give a national as well as local light. It

is important to note here that, while I live and research in Canada and not the United States, the ALA has a strong influence on Canadian libraries as in order to qualify as a librarian in Canada, one must obtain a Masters in Library and Information Sciences (or equivalent) through an ALA approved university (Canadian Federation of Library Associations, 2016). This means that the ALA has a strong influence on Librarianship in Canada.

To begin with, below are three separate quotes from the ALA regarding libraires:

1. "The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution mandates the right of all persons to free expression and the corollary right to receive the constitutionally protected expression of others. A person's right to use the library should not be denied or abridged because of disabilities. The library has the responsibility to provide materials "for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves;" (American Library Association, 2010a)
2. "ALA promotes the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of a learning society, encouraging its members to work with educators, government officials, and organizations in coalitions to initiate and support comprehensive efforts to ensure that school, public, academic, and special libraries in every community cooperate to provide lifelong learning services to all" (American Library Association, 2010, n.p.)
3. "We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources;" (American Library Association, 2021, n.p.).

When looking at the Nussbaum's (2006) role for institutions in achieving her capabilities, there is a very interesting parallel to two of the stated values of the ALA:

- "ALA recognizes its broad social responsibilities. The broad social responsibilities of the American Library Association are defined in terms of the contribution that librarianship can make in ameliorating or solving the critical problems of society; support for efforts to help inform and educate the people of the United States on these problems and to encourage them to examine the many views on and the facts regarding each problem; and the willingness of ALA to take a position on current critical issues with the relationship to libraries and library service set forth in the position statement" (American Library Association, 2010, n.p.).
- "Libraries are essential to democracy and self-government, to personal development and social progress, and to every individual's inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To that end, libraries and library workers should embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion in everything that they do" (American Library Association, 2007, n.p.).

It is noteworthy that, like Nussbaum (2006), the ALA is acknowledging and elevating the role and responsibility of the library to society in much the same way that Nussbaum (2006) lays out for institutions.

For a more localized example of the similarities between the role of libraries and Nussbaum's (2006) capabilities list, these following quotes are from GVPL's strategic plan (2021):

> "1.CULTIVATE the development of 21st century skills to bridge the digital divide in Greater Victoria;
>
> 2.OFFER new tools and learning opportunities that support the creativity and self-expression of individuals in our community;
>
> 3.CONTINUE investing in programs, services and collections for early learning and family literacy; and
>
> 4.INCREASE use and awareness of existing learning opportunities, leisure opportunities and resources the library has to offer" (n.p.).

These goals listed above from the ALA and GVPL are some of the same ideas Nussbaum (2006) espouses in her list of capabilities, specifically regarding freedom of expressing oneself and access to education. Essentially, public libraries are working every day to accomplish capabilities listed on Nussbaum's (2006) list. These commonalities and common goals mean that Nussbaum's (2006) approach can potentially provide a well-defined framework and lens through which to look at the work libraries and librarians do for their communities.

It is worth noting that there is very little library-related research using the Capability Approach. I found one article by Heather Hill (2011) that uses Sen's approach to look at accessibility for people with disabilities. There is one other article by Fisk et al (2022) that I recently came across that connects the digital divide and digital inclusion with the Capability Approach. Fisk et al. (2022) look at how the digital divide affects vulnerability, how the digital divide can be improved through service inclusion; and how service inclusion practices enable human capabilities for digital inclusion. Fisk et al (2022, p. 556) argue that "enabling human capabilities can reduce the detrimental effects of the digital divide, encourage digital inclusion, and enable healing processes for service employees and service customers".

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the Capabilities Approach as developed by both Sen and Nussbaum, and how that approach could be beneficial to libraries by helping them achieve their mandate. As I have discussed, there are many overlaps between the approach and what libraries aim to achieve making it a useful framework for conducting the research. In the following chapter, I will discuss the other research methods I used to conduct the research, including a constructivist approach, the use of critical future studies to develop the interview questions, and thematic analysis to analyze my data.

Chapter 5 – Methodology

For this research on digital inclusion in British Columbia's public libraries, I used a combination of critical future studies and a constructivist paradigm to guide this research. I also used Martha Nussbaum's Capability Approach as the theory to inform the research and provide a lens through which to examine the topic. I then used thematic analysis to analyze the research data. In the first section, I will discuss my decisions to use critical future studies and the constructivist paradigm. I will then discuss the Capability Approach and thematic analysis in the following two sections.

5.1 Constructivism and Critical Future Studies

Pretorius (2024, p. 2698) states that "sound methodological design is not merely a technical requirement, but the backbone of any successful research project". Pretorius (2024, p. 2698) continues by stating that paradigms "serve as a lens through which the researcher views the world, impacting their understanding of reality (ontology), their beliefs about how knowledge is generated (epistemology), and their stance on the role of values in research (axiology)". According to Mills et al. (2006, n.p.) researchers need to choose a paradigm that is in accord with their world views. Given that I believe that our views on our world are deeply rooted in our experiences, constructivism makes sense for my research specifically because of its focus on reflection and on how knowledge is created. The ontology, epistemology and axiology of constructivism all revolve around subjectivity and personal experience (Pretorius, 2024). The constructivist paradigm, according to Pretorius (2024, p. 2701) has a relativist ontology based on the idea that "reality is subjective, constructed by individuals through personal experience." Constructivist epistemology views knowledge as socially constructed "based on their experiences and interactions", according to Pretorius (2024, p.2701). With regards to axiology, constructivism is value-laden because, according to Pretorius (2024, p. 2701), "values influence knowledge construction. Subjectivity is embraced and reflexivity is encouraged".

Related to these points, Arruda (2016) describes constructivism as a theory that looks at human agency, specifically a theory that values the use of self-reflection. Splitter (2009) states that constructivism is "primarily, an epistemological and psychological thesis about how we learn, viz. by actively and self-consciously bringing our past experiences and understandings... to bear, in a collaborative exercise with other[s]" (p. 139). Guba and Lincoln

(1994) also discuss the nature of knowledge in constructivist research. They write that knowledge is created through the interactions between the researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that there can be many forms of knowledge based on differing situations – as in the circumstances of one's life can influence one's understanding. The aim of research for them is "understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). This creating and building of knowledge on a subject based on understanding the contexts of those involved, seemed to make sense for this research - especially when combined with critical future studies - because I believe that for libraries to successfully achieve digital inclusion, we need listen to, and take into consideration, the perspectives and experiences of both staff and patrons. Using the perspectives and experiences of staff whose role directly involves ensuring digital inclusion in my research means that knowledge of digital inclusion is built from their understanding.

I decided to use Critical Future Studies after encountering it in one of my doctoral courses and had the opportunity to interact with the theory. Future Studies spoke to my professional experience in terms of exploring and understanding the realities and challenges of library work that I - along with many other library workers – had been facing, particularly in relation to technologies. Professionally, I kept wondering what the role of libraries in society should be in the face of technological change. I was drawn to the idea that we could have foretold and planned better for some of the challenges by thinking in a future-oriented way. It was the sheer practicality of it that appealed - I saw how I could apply Future Studies to my own work. Rather than being reactionary in our planning, and encountering what might have been avoidable issues, we could instead use Critical Future Studies to help us plan for a preferred future and potentially build resiliency amongst staff even in the face of great change[3]. I found that Critical Future Studies also seemed to amplify what libraries were hoping to achieve through the different community-focused approaches that had been developed (something I discuss in section 7.3).

[3] AI, which I discuss in section 3.4, is just one example of technology causing dramatic change in my profession – and libraries are struggling to meet the challenges of this change.

Inayatullah (2013) states, “future studies is the systematic study of possible, probable and preferable futures including the world views and myths that underlie each future” (p. 37). He developed six pillars to help do so. They are:

1. Mapping the future—searching for the critical pushes, the emerging images of the future, and the historical weights.
2. Anticipating the future—searching for emerging issues that challenge the current map of the future.
3. Timing the future—a search for macrohistorical patterns.
4. Deepening the future—analyzing core metaphors and myths of current and future libraries, using Causal Layered Analysis.
5. Creating alternatives through scenario planning.
6. Transforming the future through visioning and backcasting (Inayatullah, 2015, p. 26).

Given the change brought about by digital technologies, and the division it is causing, public libraries, as community educators, need to take an active role if they intend to meet the challenge caused by technology. According to Inayatullah (2013, p. 49), “change comes through new technologies. They change how we do what we do... technology creates new economies, and the tensions result when society lag behind, when power relations do not change”. Digital technologies have created significant change in society, from how we communicate, conduct business, and even maintain – or create – relationships. However, as discussed in previous chapters, we have a deepening digital divide in our communities. Inayatullah (2013, p. 41) argues that “muddling through... is not useful during times of turbulence since incremental policy change does not help the organization or nation transform to meet dramatic new conditions”. Critical Future Studies is useful because it helps the researcher (or organization) to see a bigger picture, to look at the different factors that cause us to be where we are now and start to look at different ways our future could be (Inayatullah, 2013). With more timely information, organizations – or governments, for that matter – can make better decisions for the future (Inayatullah, 2013).

Future Studies is a useful approach for my research as it is focused on attempting to create a desired future; it is not interested in attempting to predict it (Inayatullah, 2013). The Futures Toolkit (UK Government Office for Science, 2017, p. 77) states that “a futures process may aim to challenge existing mental models and suggest new ways of doing things”. According to Inayatullah (2013), future studies is a social movement that can often challenge

and disrupt our society. It does this by helping to shine a light on why society is a certain way, that there are often political influences on most situations (Inayatullah, 2013). Inayatullah (2013, p. 44) states that it is "merely the victory of one discourse over another...". In other words, future studies can help to disrupt power structures by attempting to create alternative futures. That is why future studies will be useful for this research on the future of digital inclusion – it helps us focus on creating new ways of making decisions.

However, critical futures research should not be done just by those individuals in charge or in positions of power – it should be conducted by all levels of an organization (Inayatullah, 2013). As List (2006, p. 674) says, "people should be involved in the decisions that influence them". Inayatullah (2013) points out how future studies take a variety of individuals, or stakeholders, and explores their views on the topic being researched. Future studies work by asking stakeholders about their vision and how to achieve it, because, as Inayatullah (2013, p. 45) states, "the future is created through deep participation". List (2006) agrees, commenting that many organizations have realized the value of having stakeholder participation.

Regarding my research, I decided to use an approach based on Future Studies for several reasons. First, as stated in the Futures Toolkit (UK Government Office for Science, 2017), future studies can help gather qualitative research to "identify the long-term issues and challenges shaping the future development of a policy area and to explore their implications for policy development" (p. 2). Beyond this, future studies help to identify gaps in knowledge, build consensus; clearly identify the benefits and challenges of difficult policies; and it tends to develop resilient strategies as these strategies are adaptable to external conditions (UK Government Office for Science, 2017). According to the Futures Toolkit (UK Government Office for Science, 2017), one can increase their understanding of the driving forces on a topic, help identify some of the gaps in knowledge and identify some of the difficult choices or issues that might be present in the future. According to Inayatullah (2013), "futures research... attempt[s] to envision novel ways of organizing how decisions are reached and who is eligible to participate in those decisions. It does this by asking participants to envision their ideal organizational world and then it aids in creating strategies to realize that world" (p. 42). Given that this research focuses on public libraries in British Columbia, and how they are

struggling to find a way forward with regards to digital inclusion, future studies provide a pathway for gathering data.

5.2 Interview approach

I used the 7 Questions method - as found in the Futures Toolkit (UK Government Office for Science, 2017) - to guide the interview process. This style of interview aims at gathering information on the future, helps to identify challenges and future conflicts, and stimulates thinking on the topic (UK Government Office for Science, 2017). The 7 Questions method is scalable, depending on the size of the project, which was ideal given my smaller sample size, and provided a way for participants to discuss opportunities and threats that they, or their organization, face. (UK Government Office for Science, 2017).

The 7 Questions method is one of the initial steps that can be taken when one first starts to gather information for research (UK Government Office for Science, 2017). Interviews using this approach generally last about 60 minutes, and while participants can be quoted, the recommendation is that this should be done anonymously. According to the Futures Toolkit (UK Government Office for Science, 2017), the method focuses on seven areas:

- "The critical issues for the policy or strategy area being considered
- What a favourable outcome is
- What an unfavourable outcome is
- The key operational, structural and cultural changes that need to be made to deliver the favourable outcome
- Lessons from the past
- Decisions which must be prioritised
- What the interviewee would do if (s)he had absolute authority" (p. 30).

Ideally, the 7 Questions method should help develop "your understanding of the different issues and opinions to be addressed in the project", and "extract deep information about underlying concerns" (UK Government Office for Science, 2017, p. 29). The questions themselves are open ended to encourage conversation (UK Government Office for Science, 2017). There are two versions supplied in the Futures Toolkit (UK Government Office for Science, 2017), which are below. The first version was developed by the company Shell, and

the second, according to the Futures Toolkit (UK Government Office for Science, 2017), is a modified version it claims is better when a less formal tone is needed:

Version 1 (Shell):

1. "If you could speak to someone from the future who could tell you anything about [this venture], what would you like to ask?
2. What is your vision for success?
3. What are the dangers of not achieving your vision?
4. What needs to change (systems, relationships, decision making processes, culture for example) if your vision is to be realised?
5. Looking back, what are the successes we can build on? The failures we can learn from?
6. What needs to be done now to ensure that your vision becomes a reality?
7. If you had absolute authority and could do anything, is there anything else you would do?"

Version 2:

- "What would you identify as the critical issue for the future?
- If things went well, being optimistic but realistic, talk about what you would see as a desirable outcome.
- If things went wrong, what factors would you worry about?
- Looking at internal systems, how might these need to be changed to help bring about the desired outcome?
- Looking back, what would you identify as the significant events which have produced the current situation?
- Looking forward, what do you see as priority actions which should be carried out soon?
- If all constraints were removed and you could direct what is done, what more would you wish to include?" (UK Government Office for Science, 2017, p. 31).

Using these two examples, I created a modified version of the 7 Questions method based on my research topic (see below). My aim was to use these questions to spark conversation. While I intended to ask each question, I would also allow the conversation to wander to different topics, even if they only loosely related to this research. I wanted these questions to be a springboard for conversation and information gathering during the interviews with participants:

Modified Version - 7 Questions Interview (UK Government Office for Science, 2017)

1. If you could speak to someone from the future who could tell you anything about digital inclusion in public libraries, what would you like to ask?

2. What is your vision for success with regards to digital inclusion in public libraries?
3. What are the dangers of not achieving your vision with regards to digital inclusion in public libraries?
4. What needs to change (systems, relationships, decision making processes, culture, for example) if your vision for digital inclusion is to be realized?
5. Looking back on what has been done with digital inclusion in public libraries thus far, what are the successes we can build on? The failures we can learn from?
6. What needs to be done now to ensure that your vision of digital inclusion in public libraries becomes a reality?
7. If you had absolute authority and could do anything, is there anything else you would do?

As these questions demonstrate, the 7 Questions method asks participants to look at the future, the past, and consider changes that need to be made. The last question also gives participants scope to use their imagination and discuss the potential for the future. As I mentioned, while these questions give a starting point and some scope for discussion, they also give room for the conversation to diverge onto related topics.

I then contacted a couple colleagues in senior library positions for recommendations on who to interview and was able to follow up on their suggestions of who to contact for this research. I wanted a group of individuals who came from different areas of the library world to assist me with my research, but specifically in areas of leadership. Areas of leadership could include those running libraries or library associations, department heads, or those focusing on leading community engagement. They ranged from being employed at public libraries and library associations in British Columbia, in a range of positions as I wanted a variety of perspectives, but specifically perspectives from those who had planning and decision-making within their role. I wanted to include participants who were more likely to have a strategic perspective, along with hands on experience, as much as possible, rather than someone who was focused only on a particular aspect of the job or was in a purely administrative role. I will not give further details about the participants as the library world in British Columbia is small, and there is a risk they will be identified.

The interviews were difficult to arrange. At this point, near the end of the COVID 19 pandemic, people were still very nervous about meeting in person. Also, my library, like many other organizations, was short-staffed, so arranging time to interview was challenging. Being able to offer both in-person as well as virtual options for the interviews gave the flexibility

needed to interview participants. It also gave them the flexibility in meeting me due to their own work schedule, because they lived a long distance away, or due to their COVID anxieties. The interviews went well, the interviewees appreciated having the questions in advanced and had spent time considering their answers before we met, which made for a more robust conversation, and no real lulls or awkward pauses – something that had concerned me. The 7 Questions interview, modified for this research, sparked a great deal of interesting conversation. I appreciated how it both sparked conversations, while still giving those conversations something of a focus. I felt that the casual phrasing of the questions helped the conversation flow as it made it less formal and more approachable. The interviews achieved what I hoped, resulting in rich conversations with enough participants from different library-focused areas to give broad perspectives and knowledge of the issues I wanted to explore. In the following sections, I will discuss the interview process, and the methods I used to analyze the data I gathered from the interviews, specifically Braun & Clarke's (2006) version of thematic analysis.

5.3 Thematic Analysis

Braun & Clarke (2006) define Thematic Analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). Thematic Analysis can be used across many frameworks and paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2017) and is a very flexible approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, Braun & Clarke, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022; Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is particularly effective in helping researchers develop themes across the data, connecting viewpoints, perspectives, thoughts and feelings (Braun & Clarke, 2017). According to Braun & Clarke (2017), thematic analysis "can also be used within a 'critical' framework to interrogate patterns within personal or social meaning around a topic, and to ask questions about the implications" (p. 397). In addition, as Byrne (2022) states, "inductive analysis tends to be aligned with constructivist approaches" (p. 1397). I therefore considered this to be an ideal analytic approach for a research topic that focuses on how to proceed in the future using a constructivist paradigm and critical future studies to conduct the research, and Nussbaum's (2006) Capability Approach as a framework to guide libraries in fulfilling their mandate to the public.

Braun & Clarke (2006) do stress the need to be clear in one's research – including what you are doing, why you are doing it, and how you are analyzing your data. This last piece is often forgotten, according to them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I chose an inductive approach for the analysis, grounded in and reflective of my data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022). Nowell et al. (2017) describe inductive analysis as "a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a preexisting coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconception. In this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data-driven" (p. 8). I also considered both semantic and latent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun & Clarke (2021) note that there is more than one type of thematic approach; reflexive, codebook, and coding reliability thematic analysis. I will be using reflexive thematic analysis, as "it emphasizes the importance of the researcher's subjectivity as analytic *resources,* and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, n.p.). Specifically, the analysis is data-driven, though the findings will be examined in the context of the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

According to Braun & Clarke (2021), reflexive thematic analysis is situated in an "interpretative reflexive process" (n.p.). Coding is "open and organic with no use of any coding framework. Themes should be the final 'outcome' of data coding and iterative theme development" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, n.p.). Byrne (2022) describes reflexive thematic analysis as "an easily accessible and theoretically flexible approach to qualitative data analysis that facilitates the identification and analysis of patterns and themes" (p. 1392). Byrne (2022) stresses that the researcher has a critical role in knowledge production. Byrne (2022) and Braun & Clarke (2019) agree that themes are not uncovered during analysis, but that the researcher plays an active role in developing those themes. Byrne (2022) goes so far as to say that codes and themes developed and interpreted by one researcher may be interpreted differently by another.

Braun & Clarke (2008) provide six phases of thematic analysis to aid researchers, which I have summarized below:

1. Familiarize yourself with the data
2. Create initial codes
3. Search for themes

4. Review themes
5. Define and name themes, and
6. Produce the report (p. 87).

The following section will describe my journey in analyzing the data I collected through the 7 Questions method, using reflexive thematic analysis to develop the themes and codes.

5.4 Data Analysis

In the end, I conducted eight interviews, which produced a significant amount of data to analyze once the interviews had been transcribed. As I conducted the interviews, I noted down key words and patterns in the responses. Due to these key words, I had some general ideas on potential codes and what might be possible themes when I started analyzing the data, as suggested by Nowell et al. (2017). This was due to noticing the same thread of ideas or topic running through the interviews, in part because the interviewees discussed some of the same topics. It did, in fact, make it easier to identify codes as I analyzed the data more formally. When it came time to analyze the data, I followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) phased approach, which I mentioned above, though I was cautious when analyzing the data to not let these impressions on potential codes and themes drive the coding process. The first phase of the approach was to familiarize myself with the data, though, as Braun & Clarke (2006) mention, this is not a linear process. I found myself going back and forth from analyzing the data to reviewing it again.

Braun & Clarke's (2006) second phase calls for creating one's initial codes, which, with eight interviews, was a significant task. Following the advice of Byrne (2022), I started coding the interviews by highlighting terms and phrases that I found to be striking or of interest and making notes in the margins. As I mentioned, through the course of the interviews, I had started to see certain potential themes and codes emerging, which helped, but I tried to ensure I was reading each interview without expectation in order to develop themes that were supported by and came from the data. As I made notes in the margins, I noted possible codes as I went, or, if I was uncertain, to include enough information that it was easy to refer to quickly as I developed the codes and themes, always ensuring it was based on what

the data said. It was an iterative process carefully based on and supported by the data. I found that as I went along analyzing the interviews, I used many of these notes to develop potential codes. Once I was partway through analyzing the interviews, I started creating a master list of all the terms. This list was then colour coded based on subjects, and using a mind map, I started grouping the terms together by subject, which essentially turned into themes. Mind maps are a method suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006) and Byrne (2022).

Mind mapping proved to be very useful in refining the themes and codes. Mind mapping was a way to both organize my thoughts and write them down in a manner that was logical and thoughtful. These mind maps also provided a way for me to organize my thoughts and notes in a way that allowed me to connect those thoughts and literature to the research. It helped me delve more deeply into the data, and draw connections across the research, and develop themes that I may not have noticed otherwise. As I mentioned, some themes and codes were as I expected based on my notes from interviews along with my experience interviewing. However, I found that as I analyzed the data, I identified interesting codes, subthemes and themes that I was not expecting. Looking more closely at the data, I found that some of the themes were discussed from a variety of perspectives, which I found fascinating.

While some codes and themes were developed easily, I found there were some codes that did not fit into any theme, or that might fit into a theme, but the theme ended up being too small. This caused me to ponder on how I had developed the themes, which were the main ones that seemed to work very well to reflect the data, and which if any should be discarded, as discussed by Braun & Clarke (2006) and Byrne (2022). Alternatively, I could potentially keep all the themes at this early stage of analysis, as they might provide some useful insights, for two different reasons. The first reason is that while some of the themes/codes are small, and not mentioned often, they were still very interesting and potentially relevant. The second reason is, as Nowell et al. (2017) state, “themes that seem marginally relevant may play a significant role in adding to the background detail of the study” (p. 8). In other words, these seemingly random or less significant themes could prove useful in providing context as I reported the research findings.

As Braun & Clarke (2021) suggest, one should think of themes as stories that we are telling about the data. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), “you consider the validity of

individual themes in relation to the data set, but also whether your candidate thematic map 'accurately' reflects the meaning evident in the data set as a whole" (p. 91). Beyond this, one should link the themes to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun & Clarke (2008) suggesting asking oneself questions such as:

- "What does this theme mean?"
- "What are the assumptions underpinning it?"
- "What are the implications of this theme?"
- "Why do people talk about this thing in this particular way (as opposed to other ways)?"
- "What is the overall story the different themes reveal about the topic?" (p. 94).

They believe such questions will help guide the researcher in developing a full understanding of the themes and how they tell the story of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To tell the story of the data, I sometimes combined themes, such as two potential themes relating to change and looking at the future. It made more sense as I interpreted the data to combine them into one theme called "the changing future". Conversely, I had one theme that I decided made more sense to be an overarching theme, with some subthemes. This was the "Role of the Library", with the subthemes of "staff", "library promotion", and "spaces & services". The development of this theme was an interesting process. First, I decided I needed to split it into two themes, "staff" and "role of the library". Then I realized that it made sense based on the data to include something about the public face of the library, so I added "library marketing", but was not happy with the fit of that subtheme. With some rearranging, I had the "roll of the library" as the overarching theme, with three themes under it: staff, library promotion (which I felt was a better description), and spaces & services (which sums up nicely what libraries are doing for the public). I eventually decided that I did not need "role of the library" as an overarching theme as it seemed redundant, so I removed it. I then decided that "library promotion" was likely too thin, as Byrne (2022) termed it, so I collapsed it into "discovery of services" and added it to the theme "spaces & services". I similarly collapsed the theme "money" into a code, "funding", which I included under the theme "services & spaces".

After many mind maps, arranging and re-arranging different codes into potential themes, I finally decided on a version that I thought would work well to tell the story of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). Included in this process were the notes I kept in a

journal, to record my thoughts and capture the process of conducting the research. Braun & Clarke's (2006) fifth phase, defining and naming the themes, was an iterative process that happened throughout all the previous phases, as was the sixth phase, which is producing the report. However, I must say that I found that I largely ended up combining phases four and five, as the analysis developed more organically. At this point, I decided on the following themes and codes, their names being working names in case I decided at a future point the names needed to be adjusted or changed:

1. The Human Factor (overarching theme) - subthemes:
    - Aging – codes:
        - Reluctance using tech
        - Understanding tech
    - Relationships – codes:
        - Partnerships and collaborations
        - Municipal relations
        - Relationship between physical and digital space
        - Inclusion/isolation
        - Community engagement
    - Challenges with technology – codes:
        - Digital divide
        - Fear of tech
        - Understanding the tech situation
        - Trust
2. Role of the government (overarching theme) - subthemes:
    - Democratic equality and Libraries – codes:
        - Public goods, including internet
        - Digital life
        - Political state
        - Advocacy
        - Polarization
        - Empowerment
        - Cultural awareness

    - Governance and Libraries – codes:
        - Essential service and integration
        - government services
        - Standards, regulations, and mandates
        - Privacy
3. Access – codes:
    - Right of access
    - Socio/political access
    - Cultural access
    - Physical access
    - Access to services
4. Library Staff – codes:
    - Staff engagement
    - Staff empowerment
    - Tools for staff
5. Services & Spaces – codes:
    - Physical/digital spaces
    - Types of service
    - Going digital
    - Discovery of services
    - Funding
6. The Changing Future – codes:
    - Future planning
    - Innovation
    - Evolution of the library
    - Change management/forced change
    - Changing technology

It was at this point that I wondered if I should narrow the themes further, and after some consideration thought I could have the following:

1. The human factor – elements:

    a. Aging
    b. Relationships
    c. Challenges with technology
2. Services & spaces – elements:
    a. Library staff
    b. Socioeconomics
    c. Changing futures
3. Role of the government – elements:
    a. Democratic equality
    b. Governance
4. Complexity of access – elements:
    a. Right of access
    b. Socio/political access
    c. Cultural access
    d. Physical access
    e. Access to services

However, my concern with this option is that the themes and codes are perhaps too large and unwieldy, though, on further consideration, it does give a very concise overview of the data. It was at this point that I decided to follow Braun & Clarke's (2006) advice, "...a word of warning: as coding data and generating themes could go on *ad infinitum*, it is important not to get over-enthusiastic with endless re-coding" (p. 92). I decided at this point that I would be better off creating a summary of the findings in preparation for the discussion chapter. As mentioned above, this is an iterative process, and I can always return to previous phases and adjust the codes and themes if necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The summaries will be included in the Findings chapter.

5.5 Ethics

Before this research was conducted, ethics approval was granted by the University of Glasgow (College of Social Sciences - College Research Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research involving Human Participants/Data). The research was considered low risk, with no

vulnerable groups involved. The interviewees were all adult professionals capable of giving informed consent. The one difficulty was that given the small scale of the project, it would be difficult if not impossible to guarantee anonymity to the participants. This, however, was fully explained to the participants, and de-identification was undertaken with care. As interviews were done via telephone or digitally, there was again some risk. Participants were advised to use a screen background, and when they were not alone, to use headphones for privacy.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the research methods I used to conduct the research and develop my thoughts on my dissertation topic. Especially, I discussed how I used thematic analysis to analyse the research data and identify themes. In the following chapter, I will discuss the findings through the lens of the themes. I will also discuss how the themes connect to related published research.

Chapter 6 – Findings

As mentioned in the previous chapter, through working with the key words and phrases that where highlighted in the interviews, four themes were created. This chapter will discuss each of the themes and provide examples from the interviews to support the interpretation. I will also take the opportunity to have a conversation with the data, beginning a discussion which I will deepen in the Chapter 7. The goal is to show the process of making sense of the data and begin to develop the connection to Nussbaum's (2006) Capabilities Approach. While this approach is grounded in data, I wanted the more reflexive element to be evident. As noted in the ethics section in the previous chapter, some quotes may be paraphrased to protect individual identities. For the sake of anonymity, I refer to the participants as: P1.... P8. I have removed repeated words, hesitations and filler works like 'umm' and 'ah' from the quotes for clarity.

Included below are the themes and elements, for ease of access:

1. Complexities of access – elements:
    a. Right of access
    b. Socio/political access
    c. Cultural access
    d. Physical access
    e. Access to services
2. Role of the government – elements:
    a. Democratic equality
    b. Governance
3. Services & spaces – elements:
    a. Library staff
    b. Socioeconomics
    c. Changing futures
4. The Human Factor – elements:
    a. Challenges with technology
    b. Relationships
    c. Aging

6.1 The Complexities of Access

This is the one theme that became clear very quickly during the interviews. It was interesting, and not surprising, to see this theme emerge here. What was interesting about it – and maybe this aspect is a little surprising – was how complex this theme turned out to be. The way access is so clearly a defining feature of a library, much the way books are, but also it was surprising how many different types of access there are concerning libraries. The connection between libraries and access is large and complex. In simple terms, libraries provide access. As one expects, this access could be in the form of access to information, knowledge, or culture – some of Nussbaum's (2006) basic human capabilities. However, it also concerns equitable access, and why the right to that access is so important to a community. Access can revolve around more socio-political elements in that there are issues with control of information, disappearing content, and a need for access to quality information, and the role libraries play on that front. Ideas that connect into human rights – but that is where the Capability Approach is so valuable. As Nussbaum (1997) discusses, the Capability Approach is a theory that helps society understand and provide those rights. It is very clear in these interviews that libraries are an important access point for their communities, and libraries and librarians are working hard to provide quality access to their communities. In this section, there will be a discussion of the different elements that emerged in this theme: cultural access, access to services, physical access, as well as socio-political access. While these different elements are placed in sections they are very much intertwined within this theme.

6.1.1 Right of Access

The right of access focuses on the right to access information, knowledge and culture, and security of access. Again, this is a right that ties in closely with one of the basic human capabilities contained on Nussbaum's (2006) list. To begin, there will be a discussion of the right to access information, knowledge and culture, and the conversations that helped develop this element. Then, there will be a discussion of the different aspects of this sub theme, including giving examples from the interviews that help illustrate it. This element also connects to the element of funding and changing futures (both under Services and Spaces

theme), given the impact of cost and changing technologies on access to content and services. Essentially, this element revolves around the patron's right to access, and the role libraries play in supporting the communities they serve. This type of access was mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews.

First, will come a discussion of the right of access in the context of content rights, or, in other words, who owns the content, who can access it and how they access it. There will also be a discussion on licensing and ownership, as well as cost. P8, who works in a library leadership role, highlighted the issue:

> electronic resources are priced to give as much profit as possible to corporations behind them... which is crappy for the public... then there is the whole process of the locks that are on digital content. You know, in terms of how much it can be used, how much a copy can be used for what period of time, all that stuff, stuff that would never ever been even considered possible with a physical purchase of a book. [P8]

Public libraries, especially small rural libraries, have limited budgets. Companies, which are largely looking to maximize profits, are making it harder and more expensive for libraries to access their content. P4 and P5, who both work in the context of digital resources and libraries, also pointed out some of the issues with digital content and licensing. Both P4 and P5 are concerned with the cost of digital resources like eBooks or eAudiobooks, especially when libraries are purchasing a license and do not own the digital copy. So many digital resources are behind paywalls, as P5 and P4 point out. P4 explained the issue with digital licenses: "most of the time for eBooks and the audiobooks, we're only renting it for a couple of years or something like that. And then we have to pay again". P4 highlighted: "we're losing that ownership concept". P5 also found ownership problematic and stressed the need for libraries to own content rather than just leasing it: "That's one of the biggest barriers right now, the only way we can provide that content is through platforms provided by the vendor". McMenemy (2009, p. 79) highlights how not having physical copies can be problematic, stating:

> If the purchase does not include a physical copy that the library can store alongside the electronic product, then essentially the library is buying access to a database rather than a physical item. This means that the library will no longer have an archive of that particular work and can only continue to provide access if it pays the appropriate fee. If for any reason the library can no longer,

> or chooses not to, sustain the subscription fee then it may also lose its archive of the publication.

P4 discussed the cost implications of digital resources: “digital stuff is so much more expensive for a library to buy than physical, but also than what you would pay as an individual for digital... Oftentimes, we are paying ridiculous prices for a limited amount of access”. P4 pointed out another issue with vendors and digital content: “There’s a lot of stuff, like Audible or exclusive Kobo Originals, stuff like that, that we literally cannot get. As a library... Amazon in particular has actually just said, there are things that libraries are not going to get”. As P4 goes on to say:

> I think it’s not digital inclusion if libraries can’t have access to things as well... And that’s not libraries getting to make that choice, because it’s so easy now, it’s so easy for a company like Audible or like something like Netflix to get their stuff out to the public themselves that they don’t need libraries to the same extent. [P4]

Though these platforms do provide access to this content for the public, it generally is not free. As has already been mentioned, this right of access, and the role of libraries in providing it, forms a parallel to Nussbaum’s (2006) capabilities and the role institutions play in promoting those capabilities. Though, in this case, the institution is struggling to fulfill its mandate in promoting those capabilities, as the participants discuss. The community can access significant amounts of information and content for free via certain platforms, but not paying for a subscription comes with other costs, specifically in time. P8 states that “if you decide not to pay that, or you can’t afford to, then more of your lifetime has to be given over to corporate crap to wade through to get the content you want as opposed to just being able to watch it”. P8 ponders the cost of time, stating: “what is the context of the free information in terms of having to consume ads or what those sorts of digital barriers are, who controls that information and then how it’s packaged and shared with us.”

Another aspect that should be considered when looking at the right of access is accessible formats for those with disabilities or who speak different languages. P8 wondered about the future of accessible formats, as well as information accessibility, which is also important: “Maybe we get to a point where AI and technology can automatically just go back and make everything and back catalogues accessible.” However, P3 summed up the need for

digital inclusion quite simply: “I mean, it’s basically the lowest common denominator for a lifestyle capability.” As McMenemy (2009, p.42) states, “The public library acts as a social equalizer by providing the public with access to books and information, which many people cannot afford to buy themselves”.

6.1.2 Socio-Political Access

This element includes ideas such as the importance of access, equitable access, disappearing content, controlling content in a political manner, access to quality information and sources of information, and the need for policy on these topics. P8 comments on inclusion and division within our community and how access to quality information plays into this. With regards to inclusion, P8 said: “it’s more about inclusion more broadly so that you can get the information that you need when you need it, where you need it.” P8 pondered information literacy and the community’s access to quality of information and the division that poor quality information or misinformation can cause. P8 said:

> We can see it on social media in terms of how the algorithms are feeding folks, and that is contributing to some of the stuff we are seeing, some of the behaviors we’ve seen through the pandemic, the Antifa stuff, the truck convoy that hit Ottawa, all that stuff for me is partly connected to, it’s partly a result of segregations and divisions. What sort of access do all those people have to digital information? I don’t know, I can make guesses, but it’s hard to see how further stratification will benefit us. [P8]

When it comes to access to information, P2, who works in a library leadership role, asked an interesting question: “how much of the information is owned or how much is the information used to control people or to enlighten people?” Control of information, especially information in a digital format, is increasingly an issue, though sometimes in ways society is not thinking about in general. P5 highlighted: “every year that list of vendors is getting smaller and smaller because this one acquires that one, venture capitalists acquire a bunch of them and, you know, they don’t have interests in libraries in mind”. P5 here illustrates the dangers of such ownership:

> I think it just kind of, you know, becomes more monopolistic. And when does owning information become that slippery slope of controlling information. I

> feel like there's a lot of risk with democracy, if I want to get really big... what if [someone] bought out all the library databases and suddenly said, you can't say this or whatever. I feel like at some point it gets into this danger of who's controlling the information. [P5]

Beyond controlling information, there is also an issue with content disappearing. P5 points out that "[companies have] licenses and all of them expire, and that's why we lose content there... I think that's a really big danger around loss of content". As P4 states: "We don't own anything digital. It's all licensed. It all could just very well be taken away". As P8 argued that it "seems like a fundamental right to be able to access information that you need." P1 also commented on equitable access, hoping that our future holds equitable access for our patrons. And finally, P3 pointed out, without digital inclusion, "It just means like a less informed citizenry, that it means a poor citizenry. It means a less healthy citizenry..."

Again, this element ties in closely with number 4 on Nussbaum's (2006) list of capabilities, specifically how people should be able to experience knowledge and culture. Libraries play a role in providing these types of access to the community. As mentioned in previous sections, the library, through providing access to information and knowledge, supports democracy and community dialogue. The library, through access to information, knowledge and culture, supports and connects its community. Thus, it is important that there is consistent and equitable access to quality information and information sources on a wide and varied range of topics.

6.1.3 Cultural Access

The community can engage with local culture through their public library. One of the goals of public libraries is to shine a spotlight on their local communities. This can take many forms, from accessing materials from local authors to attending special events hosted by libraries. It also gives patrons the chance to connect with digital communities via access to the internet and computers, and skill building. As P4 says: "It's about breaking down those barriers. If everything is digital and you must pay for it, then your experience within our culture will be different than everyone else's experience within our culture... we don't want people left out of the conversation." P7 also pointed out issues that come without digital access, saying:

> I feel like you're left out a little bit, right? You might not get all the dog and cat memes – that won't be the end of the world, but like staying in touch with

> family and friends, that you need your support network, by being able to use email. Facebook, whatever it is and whatever it's going to be, helps people stay connected. [P7]

P3 commented that "If you're engaged in the world, you have to be online." P6 voices a similar sentiment here, along with a concern:

> So, it is interesting to think the level of access that libraries provide at this point is probably the bare minimum of digital inclusion. It's not full inclusion, and, quite honestly, in the future, I would be curious to know, have libraries found a way to keep up with what they need to be offering in order to be fully engaging people and keep them at the level that they need to be to fully contribute to society or are they just barely providing the service? [P6]

P6 also discussed issues of isolation and division regarding community:

> We talk about the fact that we are more divided now than we have ever been. That people are living in different realities and different bubbles. I guess there's sort of the right and left bubble, and then there's bubbles within those. But you have some people who are not in any bubble at all... And as our world becomes like you're in this bubble or that bubble. If you're not in a bubble, like you kind of don't even exist... Like, where do you fit in society?

Libraries play a role in giving a voice to members of the community and provide a location for people to connect to each other, as well as local organizations, authors, artists, and even performers, which, again, connects to number 4 on Nussbaum's (2006) List of Central Human Capabilities. The library also provides access to materials that people can use to learn about their community.

6.1.4 Physical Access

Another form of access the public library provides for their community is access to space. They also provide access to physical devices that patrons might not have access to otherwise. As P1 points out:

> if the only gathering place to hang out is a place that is constantly reminding you that you have no money, that you can't participate, you're there but not really there exactly. And that's why it's so important that we really push to get better spaces, because digital or not, you need the space. [P1]

This is in line with Klinenberg's (2018a) thoughts. He states: "Spending time in a market-driven social setting – even a relatively inexpensive fast-food restaurant or pastry shop –

requires paying for the privilege" (Klinenberg, 2018a, p. 44). P1 also pointed to what other public libraries across the country are doing, stating: "[Halifax Public Library] put so much into beautiful, usable spaces that are for everybody." However, smaller communities do not have the same budget to devote to libraries as larger communities do. P6 notes this, commenting: "It's interesting because when you start thinking things like the maker space in Vancouver, versus like how would you ever even deliver that somewhere that is remote and rural?" It is important to note that, while British Columbia has larger cities and communities notably in the south of the province, there are many parts of the province and many communities that are very far from these cities and located in very inaccessible locations. Some can only be reached by flight or by boat. And for some that are reachable by road, some of those roads are logging roads, not public roads. The impact of the physical space that libraries have on the community should not be underestimated. Klinenberg (2018b) sums it up nicely, writing:

> It's worth noting that "liber," the Latin root of the word "library," means both "book" and "free." Libraries stand for and exemplify something that needs defending: the public institutions that — even in an age of atomization, polarization and inequality — serve as the bedrock of civil society. If we have any chance of rebuilding a better society, social infrastructure like the library is precisely what we need (n.p.).

These noncommercial spaces, often referred to as a third space, are very important to communities (Klinenberg, 2018a). As Klinenberg (2018a) points out, libraries and other community spaces are free and accessible to all, as opposed to a space that requires a purchase in order to use. Klinenberg (2018a) states, "not everyone can afford to frequent them, and not all paying customers are welcome to stay for long" (p. 44). Libraries, on the other hand, welcome everyone to use their space, and actively support patrons in using that space through a variety of programs and services.

6.1.5 Access to Services

An important part of access, regarding digital inclusion, is access to services that can assist the community. This could be in the form of skills training for computers or using a digital resource, reference services when doing research on a topic, or learning how algorithms affect what we see online. Access to digital resources, while important, is not enough on its own. Along with having the tools to access those resources, there also needs to be access to training

to help people build their skills using these resources. This training can be as simple as teaching a patron how to access digital resources, as often it takes many steps to access library resources. As P5 points out:

> people don't know... how to use their PIN or whatever. There's all these sorts of things online that people have to figure out before they can actually use any of the resources, like logging in authentication and all of that... Libraries in general, I think, are not approachable in that way. [P5]

However, P6 thought that "one of the successes of libraries has been sort of continually reinventing what a library is and what it provides access to and what access is. You kind of evolve to meet community needs and to be an equalizer." P3 pointed out that where you live affects what you can access free at your library: "There's a huge disparity between rural and urban." P6 made a similar comment, stating: "If you start looking at smaller libraries and libraries with less funding, are they offering all the software that people need and is it up to date?". Providing access to services also connects with number 4 on Nussbaum's (2006) list of Central Human Capabilities, in that it helps to cultivate "an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy" (p.6).

6.2 Role of the Government

It became evident that the type of relationship the library has with government, be it municipal, provincial or federal, is important, specifically regarding maintaining democracy. As Fessenden (2022) comments,

> Democracies are built on the ability for citizens to educate themselves and make informed decisions. Public libraries are one of the only places where information is readily available to anyone who might seek it out, and they often exist separately from the ever-changing nature of electoral politics (n.p.).

Part of what the Capability Approach does is provide guidance and a path forward for human rights (Nussbaum, 1997). According to Nussbaum (1997), the Capability Approach helps society determine what those rights are – looking at equality of wellbeing, resources, or opportunities. This, combined with Nussbaum's (2006) role of the institution highlights a way for libraries to work with the government in providing access to capabilities to society. It came through clearly in the interviews that public libraries have an important - and growing - role in

the community as a source of community, knowledge, education and culture. It also became clear that libraries need to fill a bigger, more stable role in the form of an essential service, which will be discuss further below. This section contains a discussion of the two elements that surfaced in this theme: democratic equality and governance. The interviews explore the government's role in legislation around issues such as privacy or licensing and how much more needs to be done on these fronts. There will be also discussion on the role that libraries play within communities, and how that role could be expanded to better support the communities they serve. Libraries play a large role in advocacy, cultural awareness, and empowerment. They can also assist in combatting polarization within our communities.

6.2.1 Democratic Equality

The role libraries play in the community as a community educator and a community leveler was clear in the interviews. P2 saw libraries as a very radical space, stating that:

> That's pretty radical because you're serving people of all ages, all economic levels, all education levels, all physical ability levels. All of this is not what the rest of the world does... we serve all in either directly or through partnerships or through supports or through events, programming, education, workshop, resources, access. For me, that's very radical. [P2]

P1 also feels that libraries play a special role within the community:

> [The] American Library Association did a book on sacred places, and they basically compared being a librarian and libraries to being religious and churches, that they have similar mandates. It is the primacy of the preached word and everything's going to be free and open and equal to everyone. We do have that sense of higher purpose. I found this really fascinating because I think, personally - I've actually said most of my career - that we are the most democratic, most open place, even more than a church because you don't have to be a particular denomination. Anybody coming into our spaces is treated equally, given the same level of service, no judgement. That's remarkable.

P2 also commented on the importance of libraries:

> ...because there is no other institution that provides such socialist, democratic, equal, diverse, inclusive you know... it removes race, it removes gender, it removes class. It removes everything because everyone is treated equally in terms of provision of service.

However, there was a strong concern about access to information, and the detrimental effect of not having free access to information. P8 stated: “There’s the core danger of information gatekeeping and further segmentation of information, which we’re already seeing. We’re seeing some aspects of that in terms of polarization, segmentation, different kinds of segregation.” P8 goes on to say that without that access, you have “stratification, segmentation, a less rich public conversation, a less fertile, I think, and diverse in all of its ways, community structure and construct.” P2 expressed a similar concern, asking “How much of the information is owned or how much is the information used to control people or to enlighten people, right?” P2 also commented on the growing digital divide, saying, “that goes right back to the beginning question of where are we at in the terms of class, society, who has access and who doesn’t. If we don’t, the digital divide gets bigger and bigger between the haves and have-nots...”. P6 was also concerned with the digital divide, stating that “We talk about the fact that we are more divided now than we have ever been. That people are living in different realities and different bubbles. I guess there’s sort of the right and left bubbles and then there’s bubbles within those. But you have some people who are not in any bubble at all.”

P6 discussed the unique role libraries play in the community, in this case using story times in libraries versus bookstores as an example: “It’s because [libraries are] not a commercial space. And so, there’s no expectation or no request for you to buy. So, if you are a low-income family... then you’re not in a space where you’re confronted with that and where your kids are being encouraged to do that.” P2 agreed about the importance of space in a different context, connecting it to the importance of access: “We need to provide space. We need to provide access. It’s the same as print, something in print, they’re starting to have the same understanding of necessity. So will that necessity be for democratic purposes or for control purposes?” P2 goes on to say: “You require the access to have some civic engagement in the world.”

Libraries play a bigger role than just providing space or services, though. P2 highlights this, saying that “the biggest thing for me is advocacy for the essential nature of public libraries, and that is for me the most important success factor for digital inclusion.” Again, this is a sentiment that is parallel to Nussbaum’s (2006) thoughts on the crucial role institutions

play in promoting capabilities within society. P6 here points out the dangers of not achieving digital inclusion:

> I think if we don't achieve [digital inclusion], I think we end up in a world kind of like *The Hunger Games,* where there's the capital and they have all the fantasy technology and all the money and everything. And then there's the worker bees to just work, to exist and have nothing. I also think that I do worry about libraries not being relevant to a broad swath of people. I think that libraries are in danger of being just for the people who don't have any other options. [P6]

Again, connected to the access piece that libraries play, which will be discussed in the next section, libraries play a crucial role in promoting equality and democracy. As Nussbaum (2006) states, "the purpose of social cooperation is not to gain an advantage, it is to foster the dignity and well-being of each and every citizen" (p. 202).

It became clear that the interviewees believed that libraries play a crucial role in their communities. As Giroux (2005) states: "The challenge of hope for [our] generation poses the important question of how to reclaim social agency within a broader struggle to deepen the possibilities for social justice and global democracy" (p. 216). In many ways, this element revolves around one of the capabilities on Nussbaum's (2006) list, specifically "*4: Senses, Imagination, and thought*" (p. 76). This capability focuses on "being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth", though it connects mostly with the experiencing part of this quote (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 76).

6.2.2 Governance

It seems that libraries have become a type of essential service to their communities, and that the role libraries play needed both more support and guidance, including assistance in providing the resources the community needs. P8 commented: "there's a whole conversation of, do you actually want a provincial library service, and I think a lot of people would say no, but there's a lot of benefits to a provincial public education service in terms of known standards, known systems of certification, all that kind of stuff." Later in the interview, P8 continued with this theme, saying: "I think we almost need to acknowledge and sort of treat

libraries much the way we do treat these utilities, or we treat schools, or we treat medical systems, that this is an integral part of our community and community service." Again, these types of organizations – schools, hospitals, and libraries – are all providing access to different capabilities and connect to the list of central human capabilities that Nussbaum (2006) developed. Further to this topic, P8 said:

> That's the other strange thing I find about the public library system and the province [of British Columbia]. Health is provincial, education is provincial, we're talking about a provincial police force. Ambulances, provincial; fire departments are local, but yeah. And then libraries are these strange things.

This is of interest given that within British Columbia, there is the Public Libraries Act that governs all public library systems in the province. Also, significant public library funding comes from local municipal property taxes. Both cause strong connections to two levels of government in the province.

P1 felt that, while the role of libraries will change in the future, they:

> will still be an essential community resource, because... if you look at how libraries have evolved and your library history, it's not about simply being container for shelves and books...I think that the government is starting to have a better handle on how critical public libraries are for digital inclusion and what the consequences are. [P1]

These thoughts, in many ways, connect to critical future studies, in that they are looking at the current situation and towards potential futures. To use Inyatullah's (2013) term, interviewees were looking at preferable futures for libraries. However, there are issues at the government level where libraries can help. P1 commented: "I literally said out loud, have you talked to this ministry? He actually wrote it down – like what a good idea... the ministries do not talk to each other. And so, then here's the library that could knit things together." To succeed on this front, though, libraries need more guidance on where we are going and how to get there as P2 highlights: "If we do not understand where we are going, we will no longer remain an essential service, and the government will look elsewhere if they don't understand that or people will find it themselves."

Along the same lines, P6 highlights another gap: "In most cases, the actual requirements for any individual library and library board are fairly limited. I do think you get into the point where if there are standards, then you can hold people accountable, including the

province." P8 made a similar comment: "once there's expectations of their standards of regulation, then people have to figure out how to get there." I think that to develop the government and library relationship in this way would be to develop what Nussbaum (2006) referred to as "independent administrative agencies, whose expertise is essential to protecting capabilities" (p. 312).

Beyond library governance, P8 commented on the need for government assistance with access to digital resources and the internet:

> even the stuff around copyright, licensing restrictions and all that stuff, I would love... government to actually muscle into that territory... we just changed our copyright laws to match that of the US. What is it? 75 years now, which we are upping copyright on certain works... That's not an author protection from what I've read, that's about protecting the profits of the corporate, all the corporations. [P8]

With regards to internet access, P8 stated: "Like thinking about access to the internet as a public good, as opposed to a private... I think we should have public utilities for internet." Along similar lines, P4 commented on the need to work together with regards to digital resources: "I think that the more we can do that, the more we can work as a province, the better off we're going to be, because then we have a bit more buying power with the vendors." In the course of the interviews, it became clear that the crucial role libraries play in the community had grown to a point where there needs to be more governance in order for libraries to fulfill their role as a supporting institution along the lines that Nussbaum (2006) has discussed.

6.3 Services & Spaces

This theme reflects what the library does within the community either by programming and support provided by staff or the space the library provides to bring community together, again relating to Nussbaum's (2006) role of the institution within the community. In this section, the interviews will be used to discuss the main elements in this theme: library staff, socioeconomics, and changing futures. This theme includes the need to support library staff and the work they do; the role funding plays, and the inequalities associated with it; and the future of libraries.

6.3.1 Library Staff

In all these discussions on libraries and how libraries support their communities, build community connections and support democracy, it is important to remember a very crucial aspect of libraries – namely, the staff who make up the library. Library staff are crucial to libraries fulfilling their mandate within the community. Lai (2011) points out the importance of staff training, especially with regards to digital training. Lai (2011, p. 87) states:

> the public libraries recognised the importance of staff training in order to provide efficient [information literacy] instruction for the public, so various training programs were given to the staff. However, some staff members apparently were hesitant to embrace their teaching roles... this study revealed an important truth that library staff lacked appropriate guidance in understanding the theories of [information literacy] and adult learning while teaching library patrons.

Lai's (2011) study is valuable in that it helps build information and insight into an area that is, as Lai (2011, p. 87) states, "is still a relatively uncharted field for research... this study expands the understanding of these training programs by providing explanations for some key issues that need solutions".

Nussbaum's (2006) view of the institutional role regarding the Capability Approach depends on people working within these institutions. Though there is a danger of stating the obvious, it needs to be said for clarity: people have the freedom to live their life, which includes, generally, a chosen profession. This, obviously, leads to people working in these institutions that support capabilities within our society. However, when society is changing so quickly due to changes in technology, and we are suffering from tensions caused by technology, as mentioned by Inayatullah (2013), we need to consider the staff of those institutions. The staff of any institution promoting capabilities also needs support and access to those capabilities (Nussbaum, 2006). Let us consider libraries - without competent and engaged staff, how will libraries succeed in digital inclusion? Library staff need ongoing training and support in their work, including the tools to do their job. As P1 states, "I would say, we still have our own haves and have nots within our staff, right?" P1 also notes the need for skilled staff, saying, "it's having staff who are capable of creating and spending the time that they need to execute something." This element concerns engaged and empowered staff,

staff dealing with changing technologies, lifelong learning, and providing them with the tools they need to succeed in their work. As P2 highlights, "there's a lot of internal education needed, not just external." More than that, it is a matter of access for libraries, too: "How do we achieve digital inclusion in libraries when some of our libraries, like their staff don't have access?" [P6].

Library staff also face significant changes that require ongoing training. P6 points out that "it's many library staff... and this is for many areas, but you see it in public libraries... people who they did not get into the job to deal with technology and suddenly that really should probably be at least 50% of their job." P6 also raises the question of how to provide that training to staff:

> Libraries are not investing in their staff in terms of giving them space to learn and develop, particularly when it comes to technology, because that's probably the biggest area that they need to be learning and growing in... I think libraries also need to move beyond the very strictly scheduled, controlling everything that staff do...they're very procedure based, and schedule based... It should be sort of competencies and outcomes and you should have a certain amount of [time]. You have three hours a week... of pro time where the technology is there, you can watch something on LinkedIn, you can talk to colleagues, whatever – it's up to you as a professional... We give you the time, we give you the material and then we make sure you have it. And if you don't have it, then there has to be some kind of follow-up. [P6]

P1 commented: "Everybody's just on a constant learning curve...", with one of the biggest barriers to achieving digital inclusion being staff training and ongoing staff development. P1 said: "I worry sometimes that we need to just ensure that our staff are being as proactive as they can... I think there are still a number of our employees that don't feel very secure themselves with technology, right?" P7 agreed, stating: "I wonder about that training for staff because I don't think it's there for us. I think we are kind of self-training and figuring it out on our own."

P2 provided further insight into staff training and the role of librarians and the challenges they are facing: "There's a need to understand the role of libraries and the role of librarians in all of this... we are in a profession that is devaluing that and devaluing that role as educators and as community builders and community providers" [P2]. However, along with the recognition of the need for more formal staff training, there is also acknowledgment of the

resourcefulness and thoughtfulness of staff with regards to training and lifelong learning in staff. P3 discusses potential ways of supporting staff in learning: “politically and culturally you’re trying to say to a staff member – it's okay and I’m going to give you the resources to support you... It’s a kind of mantra – how can I support you? It’s all about emotional and educational support basically.” With regards to lifelong learning in staff, P7 said: “I think that’s one of the strengths of the library being involved in this is that lifelong learning, wanting to learn that kind of curiosity I think is championed here. And I think that people who feel that way are drawn to the profession on top of that.”

Though there are challenges with staff training, staff have a strong desire to work with their community. Again, this highlights the value of having institutions working to promote capabilities, leaving people free to live their lives (Nussbaum, 2006) – though this is a rather circuitous way of stating it, by providing both that freedom and that access, people have the potential to choose work in an area they have are more interested. P3 said, “I love just riffing on what could we do that would help the community”. P7 thought that “a huge part of our technological training is just that customer service piece, which is how do we speak with our patrons so they feel supported and feel like they’re talking with someone knowledgeable, even when I’m learning, too.”

6.3.2 Socioeconomics

There is a close connection between this element and the theme of access. In section 6.1.1, I discussed the cost in connection to access; this element, however, focuses on money and funding in a different context. It is worth mentioning here, and in the access section, one aspect that came through in the interviews: the need for stable funding. Not only does stable funding allow libraries to provide access to content to the community, but it provides the funds needed to hire and train staff and create community spaces. P6 lays out the issue clearly, stating: “It’s a budget issue... I think the inequity between libraries and thus between the communities they serve is more extreme than many of us in the more privileged areas and with access to more privileged libraries.” P1 noted: “It’s those one-branch little guys that what’s going to happen when they’re very dependent on their provincial funding. They’re not getting the same municipal funding base the way we are.”

P2 points out how working together can help libraries cope: “That’s necessary, that’s a partnership understanding of bridging the digital divide. You know, navigating the information-rich world in which we live, but it’s also putting the money towards it as well or else that chasm of people that are poor remain, you know?” However, P3 points out one of the challenges, stating: “It’s the financial capacity and the political willingness and in treating or education people” Again, this is one of the values of Nussbaum’s (2006) institutional approach, it allows society to pool resources – including money – to better serve the community. However, there is more to discuss regarding money than just these things. It concerns how socioeconomics is related to digital inclusion and the role libraries play in that. It also concerns how the division of resources, as in library funding, can affect library systems across the province, and the need to pool resources. This in turn affects how well libraries can serve their communities.

6.3.3 Changing Futures

Changing futures is an element within the Services & Spaces theme that concerns topics from the interviews such as libraries planning for the future, being innovative, dealing with changing technology, change management and forced change, and how libraries will evolve. This element concerns the uncertainty that libraries are facing, how situations change, and what can potentially be done in the future. This is where critical future studies, as discussed by Inayatullah (2013) can provide insight. As Inayatullah (2013) states: “Future studies is the systematic study of possible, probable and preferable futures including the worldviews and myths that underlie each future” (p. 37). In other words, it is a method that helps one look at the past, what is happening currently, and at where one wants to be in the future. Based on that information, critical future studies helps one create a plan moving forward (Inayatullah, 2013).

The interviewees had many thoughts and questions about the future of libraries, and what should be done. P2 stressed the need for future planning: “We need to understand the landscape we want to get to, what is that we want to provide in five years, ten years, two years, one year, and be able to have those goals in mind.” P2 elaborated on this, stating: “This is about inventing where we’re going... [librarians] are visionaries for doing that, especially on the digital front.” P2’s thoughts on planning very much align with critical future studies in that

there is a desire to look to create their vision of the future, much like Inayatullah (2013) suggests. P5 also feels there needs to have more thought put into future planning, commenting that "every time I have that conversation [concerning digital licensing], I think that I'm doing this because this is what the libraries want, need in the moment. But I feel like there's no vision in that, in going down that road". As Inayatullah (2013) states: "The identification of alternative futures is thus a fluid dance of structure (the weights of history) and agency (the capacity to influence the world and create desired futures)" (p. 37).

Many questions were raised about the future of libraries. P4 asked: "If physical [materials] were to go away, would it be still a library if it was all digital, all digital and a space and some programming and outreach? Or would the physicalness of libraries just go away entirely? Would it be all outreach and digital?" P4 followed this up with the question: "Is digital enough? Is the world outside libraries offering enough infrastructure that the digital library service can be good enough?" P2 wondered along a similar vein, asking the question "has the digital lifestyle become fully ingrained?". With regards to adapting to technology, P6 asked "have libraries found a way to keep up with what they need to be offering in order to be fully engaging people and keep them kind of at the level that they need to be to fully contribute to society or are they just barely providing the service?".

Changes in technology have been difficult for many over the years, and libraries are no different. P4 discussed the changing nature of audiovisual materials and the changing technology needed to use them: "When you talk about AV, is there a point where every time you switch formats, it's that question of are we leaving people behind when we move to CDs from LPs or something like that. I think it's a slightly bigger one for digital because it requires not only a device but also the access piece." P2 commented on the role of libraries balancing these changes, stating:

> You have got to step back and go, okay, if the concept is, I want to listen to my music, I want to listen to it easily. Or I want to watch this show or read this book or whatever the heck it happens to be, whatever that action is, looking back and going, how can I do that? And looking at it maybe in a different way than, oh, I must play it from here... we're planning by experience, so that experience is the same, it's just enhanced now. [P2]

As Inayatullah (2013) argues, change "truly has become the norm. Dramatic developments in digital, genomic, nano and neuro technologies point to more disruptions" (p. 39). With

disruption, as Inayatullah (2013) suggests, being the new norm, libraries will need to learn how to adapt in changing environments.

There are many questions on how to proceed, though, but P2 stresses that "it has to be applicable to what our community wants. We need to know, so where would our failures come is that we don't know that." P2 believes that:

> There needs to be an understanding of the roadmap, what the needs are. There needs to be that community engagement piece... we need to have people who understand that mandate... If we don't provide things that are relevant to people's lives and create that experience, researching whatever... finding out the news... sharing a story, sharing a podcast, like all of that is all part of the same experience thing that libraries need to provide. Relevancy to people's lives. [P2]

With regards to helping patrons, P3 commented that "there's knowns and then there's known unknowns and then there's unknown unknowns. And it's always the latter camp, the unknown unknowns that always screw us up." P3 followed this by saying that there are methods of dealing with these types of unknowns: "basically you're trying to tease all those quadrants out to try to determine how can we best serve this person. Essentially, it's like an audit." On the struggle libraries are having determining the path forward, P6 said:

> Now the libraries are kind of struggling with what is the library's role in community and what and where are the boundaries to it? I think also [libraries are] struggling with the idea that there have to be boundaries, and that we have to be okay with that. With saying that's actually not the library, it's important, it's essential, we support our partners dealing with this, but that is not our role. [P6]

This is where critical future studies is helpful. Inayatullah (2013) writes that:

> "future studies has moved from focusing on the external objective world to a layered approach wherein how one sees the world actually shapes the future one sees... While many embrace future studies so as to reduce risk, to avoid negative futures... others actively move to creating desired futures, positive visions of the future" (p. 37).

The Capability Approach also has a role to play in this. Nussbaum (1997) points out that "the most illuminating way of thinking about the Capability Approach is that it is an account of the space within which we make comparisons between individuals and across nations as to how well they are doing" (p.279).

6.4 The Human Factor

This theme focuses on aging, relationship-building within the community, and the significant challenges faced by people regarding changing technologies. This theme considers how technology affects people, especially older adults, causing isolation. This theme also looks at community engagement, and the partnerships libraries form to promote inclusion. As Klinenberg (2018a) points out, "social infrastructure provides the setting and context for social participation, and the library is among the most critical forms of social infrastructure that we have" (p. 32).

6.4.1 Challenges with Technology

Though technology comes up through all the themes, it was worth highlighting it as an element within this theme given the challenges technology can have for people, regardless of access. This section shows how the changes that come through technology can cause many issues and tensions, as Inayatullah (2013) highlights. There are challenges around using technology; accessing technology, especially new technology; making technology more sustainable; and the fear of falling behind. One librarian, P3, who spends significant amounts of their working hours helping patrons with their technology issues, highlighted how the speed with which technology has grown and changed can make it challenging for patrons to describe any issues they are having. P3 commented: "It almost becomes linguistically difficult for patrons to describe something when they don't have the linguistic capabilities of actually describing it... they don't know what an operating system is, or whatever." Technology is changing so rapidly that people are not keeping up with the terminology around it, which further complicates helping them when they have challenges. That changing technology also means that devices are becoming obsolete far more quickly, which is also a problem due to both cost and sustainability. P8 discussed the future of tech, like smart phones, and what has been happening in other places outside Canada, concerning "creating devices with interchangeable parts". In other words, you can prolong the life of your device by replacing parts as necessary. P8 noted how, in Europe, "it's a fair-trade phone with many components that are fair trade certified... So over time you keep the same unit, but upgrade different

components as is necessary". There would still be an outlay, "but it does change how long that particular device stays really usable" [P8].

The participants had many concerns about learning to use new technology. For example, P4 commented: "I just think there's like a sort of natural barrier around digital where if there's a feeling that it's complicated and a sense that it's going to be a lot - and sometimes it is - but also sometimes that's just people putting that in their heads because they don't know yet." P4 followed this up with the hope for a future where "a perfect sort of digital inclusive world would be something where people felt really comfortable with things and knew what was available to them and knew what they could access." P4 was concerned with the rapidity with which technology can change, stating that "I think the danger is that if we are not continuing to look at what is out there, we'll fall too far behind."

On a different front, P7 struggled with when and where to use technology in the library, specifically due to competing needs of patrons. P7 said:

> I'd like to have conversations about having technology in the kids' department. So, I feel like professionally, I know that that is important for digital inclusion. It gives families from all walks of life a chance to play with these toys... and so that we are building those tech, those digital skills so that we can move forward and be part of the world that in which these digital tools are in. Yet so many families have said, I hope you never bring those things back to the kids' area because a lot of people come to the library for screen free time.

With a growing digital divide, there are difficulties in how to balance the physical space within the library to meet the needs of all patrons. P8 also discussed another challenge patrons face with technology, mentioning how difficult it is to access digital material. P8 pointed out that patrons go through many hoops to access simple things, and face long hold lists with many materials. P8 would like to see easier access with less hold times on materials for patrons.

6.4.2 Relationships

Library relationships are varied and include not only partnerships with local organizations and local governments, but also the relationship that the library and librarians have with patrons. Also included in this category is building community connections, as libraries are a place to

build connections in the community, be it between patrons or organizations. Relationships also include the relationship between library systems, as well as between individual librarians, and the challenges libraries face in these relationships. On this note, P1 discussed the challenges in meeting community needs. P1 stressed the need for cultural awareness to help build connections with patrons coming into the library: "The last thing you want is a member of the community coming in and think we are out of touch." P2 made a similar point, saying, "If we are community connectors for everyone, all ages, then we need to know what that want is, what that need is." There was also concern around how we promote and share our resources with patrons. P5 said: "I don't think libraries are currently doing a great job at being able to connect people with digital information that they need." On the same topic, P4 believed a different strategy is needed, that we need to better communicate with the community the resources the library has to offer. P4 commented: "We need to change how we are reaching out to patrons in order to let them know what they can get through us." However, even with the challenges, there are successes, as P7 points out: "One of the other successes, I would say, is knowing about what other organizations in town are offering and being able to point people to that."

The library plays an important role within the community as both an access point and a community connector – again, as an institution that helps provide capabilities to the community (Nussbaum, 2006). P1 discussed how an out of province library worked with government partners to help the community:

> When I was [with another public library in another province], we did a lot of partnering with the provincial government and the federal government. We had newcomer workers working at the library, we had resource centers for them. The logic was that people will come to the public library. There's no scrutiny. You don't have to feel like you're accessing a social service. You just come to the library like everybody else is. We had employment, job discovery... and things like that. It was always pointed out to us how important it was for individuals who had, you know, they just didn't want to be feeling that they were somehow second class, by going to one of these government buildings. [P1]

Libraries in British Columbia also work together. P1 noted: "I think that if you were to look at British Columbia, I think partnerships have been very good. I think the sharing of information has been very helpful." P4 made a similar comment, with regards to library systems working

together. P4 discussed one of the benefits of libraries working together regarding LinkedIn Learning's launch, commenting; "So, enough libraries together went to them and said, no, this isn't working..." and how it was an example "...where libraries can work together to make the digital world better for our patrons". Again, this is an example of how an institution, a series of institutions for that matter, can work collectively to promote capabilities within society, as Nussbaum (1997, 2006) discusses. However, those relationships do not happen just between libraries and organizations. Individual librarians also develop professional relationships to better serve their patrons. P7's comment illustrates this: "So, we've built that community of our colleagues, sharing information, learning together and feeling supported and feeling like I've got someone else to ask."

As Nussbaum (2006) points out, institutions play a significant role in promoting capabilities within our communities. She states that one "central purpose of social cooperation is to establish principles and institutions that guarantee that all human beings have the capabilities on the list or can effectively claim them if they do not..." (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 274). Nussbaum (2006) continues this idea with regards to institutions, writing that it "is possible to argue... that institutions have both cognitive and causal powers that individuals do not have, powers that are pertinent to the allocation of responsibility" (p. 308). Essentially, Nussbaum (2006) stresses the idea that we can do more collectively than individually – that institutions can do far more in our society than any one individual could. As Nussbaum (2006) says, it makes sense "to assign the responsibility for promoting others' wellbeing (capabilities) to institutions, given individuals broad discretion about how to use their lives apart from the sphere in which institutions exact duties" (p. 309-10). In other words, people can live their lives, and institutions can do the work of providing capabilities. Libraries are a prime example of the type of institutions Nussbaum (2006) is referring to and, as previously mentioned, there are many parallels between the mission and vision of public libraries and Nussbaum's (1997, 2006) list of capabilities.

6.4.3 Age

Age emerged as a subtheme that was less frequently, yet still consistently, mentioned throughout the data. As previously noted, aging populations are one of the sections of society most affected by the digital divide. While age was mostly mentioned by P1, it was an element

in the other interviews. Near the start of the interview, P1 commented on aging and technology in general, in this case referring to how quickly technology is changing: “They’re talking a lot about this in the banking industry that they have got to slow down because people in a certain age group do not want to do online banking. They don’t trust it.” Shortly after commenting this, P1 also marks how they are on the cusp of this generational divide, saying “I’m kind of creeping into that generation space that some of this I am so excited about, but some I’m not...”

P1 also notes the difference that income makes between older people and the digital divide:

> I think it’s also becoming more and more apparent a lot of older people who are affluent, they’ve got laptops, they’ve got devices, they’re hooked up, but people who don’t have that kind of access are like, look what happened again during COVID. I mean, [the library wasn’t] open and how cut off a lot of people were because they did not have access to a public computer. [P1]

However, P1 was not alone in mentioning age. P8 raises it in another context, specifically with regards to accessibility: “When we have close to 10% of the population has a print disability of some kind, and that’s probably going to increase as the population ages.” P2 discussed older populations with regards to COVID and technology, stating “Those seniors who were like, well, I don’t even know what a device is. What are you talking about? Well, that changed their world. When they came to the library.” P6 also mentioned age in connection with leadership: “I do wonder, too, whether, and maybe this is a piece that more coordination can help, just the nature of life and organizations and career trajectory is that many of the people in charge are older. In many cases, maybe less tech savvy.” P7 spoke about how difficult it can be for seniors, especially since COVID:

> there’s a senior who comes in and sees me quite often over at [my library branch] … One day she had a really big cry in the library. She doesn’t have a computer, she just has her telephone, and she talks about how lonely she is. Then she talks about how much worse COVID was, at the height of COVID, where she couldn’t go out and do all the things that she was doing to kind of have that mental health she needed, you know, going to the gym and feeling better because she exercised. Whatever she comes to the library for – that kind of social connection. The library does provide that, online communities provide that, too. [P7]

As these quotes demonstrate, these changing technologies are difficult for older members of society. Goulding (2016, p. 140) discusses the improvements made by initiatives in England, the challenges of "reluctant users" remains, stating that "some challenges remain including persuading reluctant users, particularly the socially excluded and elderly, that there are benefits to the technology". Casselden (2023) also highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital divide, saying that it has been "exposing and intensifying the digital exclusion that exists, particularly among those sections of the population who are older... and more likely to have previously been internet nonusers" (p.704).

Inayatullah (2013) makes an interesting point regarding technology, and the difficulties society can have with it. Referring to Marshall McLuhan, Inayatullah (2013) comments: "we create technology and then it creates us...Technology creates new economies, and the tensions result when society lags behind, when power relations do not change" (p.49). These tensions are apparent now in the communities that are being left behind in the digital divide. In the chapter discussing the Capability Approach, there will also be a discussion of Nussbaum's (1997, 2006) views on the Capability Approach, assessing societal well-being, and her list of Central Human Capabilities. Nussbaum (1997) points out that one of the issues with other methods of assessing well-being, is that it can be challenging to tell who is better or worse off. People have different needs, and age is something that can influence those needs.

6.5 The Role of the Library

As discussed in previous sections, libraries are a shared community hub, a place meant for all the community to be able to use and enjoy. It is one of the few free community spaces available in our society today. However, with technology changing and developing, digital inclusion is a major concern, with communities suffering from a digital divide - where some have access to tools and knowledge necessary to navigate the digital world, and those who do not. Libraries are traditionally viewed as places to access books and reading, and an understanding that they promote literacy and reading in our communities. However, libraries fill greater roles in the community than just that. These roles come through in the interviews, through the themes that emerged in the thematic analysis. As discussed above, four main themes, each with several elements, emerged from the interviews after conducting a thematic

analysis. The themes were: Complexities of Access, Role of the Government, Services & Spaces, and the Human Factor. This section will focus on the role of the library, and how that connects to these themes using Nussbaum's Capability Approach as a lens.

The theme that stood out the most strongly was *Complexities of Access*. The interviews were fascinating. The interviewees filled very different roles within the library world: in discussing one topic, through different lenses they brought to light varied ideas, thoughts and concerns. Between the participants, it seemed as though the full spectrum of the topic was discussed. This is especially true with the theme *Complexities of Access*. The term access, on its own, seems very simple - provide patrons with access to books and other materials. However, when looked at from the viewpoints of the different interviewees, the topic takes on a complexity that is surprising. It was amazing to see how something as simple as access could be so layered and complex when applied to libraries. It quickly became clear that access is about much more than just being able to access books and other materials. It is about how to access materials, where you access them, understanding how to access them, having the right to access them - and so much more. Access is a deceptively simple topic - the reality is that access in libraries is a very complex and difficult topic. It is also incredibly important when considering the role libraries play. Libraries provide access on many fronts and in many ways. This could be from accessing knowledge in the form of books or research, accessing educational training, or cultural access in the form of communities coming together for programs. Each of the interviewees connected to access in some manner, which strongly supports the idea that one of the main roles of the public library concerns access.

The theme *Role of Government* has a strong connection to the theme of Access and seems to support it in an interesting way. As mentioned, libraries provide access, but with that access, within the theme of role of the government, comes two elements: democratic equality and governance. In other words, libraries support their communities by supporting democratic equality. They do so by acting as a leveler within communities by providing access to knowledge and training through the collections, both physical and digital, and services staff offer to support their communities. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, libraries are taking on a greater role within their communities with the support they offer and need support and guidance in doing so. This is where the element of governance comes through. As

mentioned, libraries are providing what could be termed as an essential service in their communities, and those communities would benefit to have libraries that have stable funding and a provincial mandate who provide consistent service regardless to where one is located. As mentioned, funding can vary, with bigger communities, like those in Vancouver and Victoria, having more funding to provide better access to their communities than some of the smaller, more remote communities found in the northern part of the province, for example.

When combining these two themes with the themes of *Services & Spaces* and the *Human Factor* an interesting pattern emerges. Library staff are thinking about their role, and the library's role, in their communities and what that means. There is a lot of concern, not just about digital inclusion, but inclusion and access in general. These themes are made up of many different elements, many different aspects and points of view. While there is clear concern about what the future holds, from these interviews, it seems that libraries and library staff are being pulled in many different directions. The question became, how can these different topics be brought together in a more meaningful way, a way that helps libraries focus on their specific role and mandate in the face of an ever-changing world? And with that changing technology, what is the role of British Columbia's public libraries with regards to digital inclusion? How can libraries and library staff determine the barriers and what they need to accomplish to achieve digital inclusion? To do this, library staff need to reframe how they look at the role of the library, to determine the goal of the library within the community, and to filter their decisions through that lens. One way of doing this is to look at the library through a theoretical lens, and Nussbaum (2006) provides a useful way of doing so in the Capability Approach. As discussed in the previous chapters, Nussbaum's Capability Approach has much in common with the work libraries do, as demonstrated by the commonalities between her list Central Human Capabilities and the stated mission and vision of libraries. In fact, when looking at Nussbaum's (2006) role of the institution in building capacity to achieve the capabilities within communities, it can be argued that the library fits well as one of those institutions, and that the service libraries provide, specifically with regards to access, are actually some of the capabilities found on Nussbaum's (2006) list.

6.6 Conclusion

Complexity of access and the role of the government are two of the most significant themes from the findings. Complexities of access revolve around library services and what the library does. Access weaves through everything that the library does within its community. Libraries support access to collections and to culture. They also play a vital role in providing access for individuals to the community they serve, supporting connections within the community. The role of the government relates to the relationship that libraries have with municipal and provincial governments. This relationship is about more than just funding, though funding is important: it concerns the vital role libraries play in supporting democracy and an informed citizenry. However, another important relationship that the Public Library has with the government is in the context of their role as a community connector. A well-defined and integrated relationship with both municipal and provincial government can help libraries focus on the services they should be delivering. This relationship allows libraries to focus on their role in the community, while still being able to act as a community connector. By being integrated with government, libraries can connect patrons to those services they need but fall outside the role of the library. The other two themes, Services & Space and the Human Factor, both speak to what library staff are doing within the library for their community. To an extent, it could almost be described as the first two themes, Complexity of Access and the Role of the Government, are what the community looks to the library for. The other two themes, Spaces & Services and the Human Factor, are what the library staff are looking to do for the community.

In this chapter, the goal was to demonstrate how the different themes in the research were identified and developed, using quotes from the interviews as evidence to support the argument. I have discussed how Critical Future Studies spoke to me on a professional level (section 5.1) and the appeal of the Capabilities Approach (section 4.2.4). Now having used both together for my research, I can see the wider applicability of them individually, but especially together, and how they could be used more broadly. There is a powerfulness in the connection between Critical Future Studies and the Capabilities Approach when they are used together. They are a very practical and useful combination for both academic research and in a professional setting. The next chapter will contain a discussion of the complexity of the different themes identified, along with what seem to be the most significant themes. Chapter 7

will also include a discussion of some of the challenges and the barriers libraries are facing, as they emerged from the themes. From there, there will a discussion on how libraries act in the role of the institution as it is set out by Nussbaum (2006), along with a discussion on setting standards for libraries. Finally, there will be a discussion on how libraries can use Future Studies to move libraries forward in achieving their mandate.

Chapter 7 Looking at Libraries and Digital Inclusion

Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan & Fiore, 2001) said: "Our technology forces us to live mythically, but we continue to think fragmentarily, and on single, separate planes" (p. 114). Amusingly, and possibly with a degree of accuracy, he also stated that the "future masters of technology will have to be light-hearted and intelligent. The machine easily masters the grim and the dumb" (McLuhan, 1954, p.14). On a serious note, McLuhan highlights the need to think differently and to be creative in our thinking about technology. This is especially true in a world that has been changed by a pandemic in its relationship with technology. Technology is far more pervasive today, and that technology is continuing to change and develop rapidly. Libraries should think creatively about how they adapt to these changes in technology.

The research suggests that to determine the library's role with regards to digital inclusion, one must first determine the library's role in general as both are very much tied together. As the interviewees mentioned, to improve digital inclusion, we must first improve inclusion. For libraries to be successful in this endeavor, they must define what the role of the library is within the community – they cannot be everything to everyone because this leaves them spread too thin to be successful. However, based on the findings, the discussion should shift from libraries reacting to new technology and how they incorporate technology into the library, to a discussion of how libraries can use technology to provide access to information, knowledge, culture and learning to the community. Essentially, framing the discussion in this way means that libraries are still serving their role in the community, but in a way that is focused on the capabilities to which they provide access. Thinking like this change the nature of the discussion from discharging a generic goal to taking an approach that focuses not only on the role of the library, but also on the community and the patrons that use the library. This community focused approach, that uses the Capabilities Approach as a lens, could help libraries best use resources to develop patron capabilities. The question then becomes: how do libraries accomplish this? To respond to this, a further question needs to be asked: What does the community need from the library to be successful in accessing the capabilities that the library can support? Framing the problem in this way focuses on what libraries and library staff do – or should do – for their communities. Taking an approach like this, combined with a

use of critical future studies, potentially allows libraries to plan for their preferred future in an uncertain world, and might better allow them to cope with the continuous change that technology brings to libraries and their communities.

This chapter will discuss how libraries could use the Capabilities Approach to anticipate and address some of the challenges that they face while enabling them to meet the needs of their communities. There will also be a discussion about the development of agreed standards, and the capabilities that libraries provide, along with how libraries can use future studies to narrow their focus. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on helping communities access the capabilities libraries provide, and how libraries can look to the future.

7.1 The Capabilities Approach and Challenging Times

This section will focus on how the Capability Approach can provide a method for reframing the challenges libraries face, and how future studies can be incorporated to help provide future direction for library planning. In order to answer the question of how libraries might work with the Capabilities Approach to refresh and focus their role in relation to their communities and digital inclusion; the challenges the research identifies as key among those that libraries are facing will be revisited briefly. These cluster around access, governance and building community. From there, there will be a discussion on how a clear set of agreed standards, drawing on the Capabilities Approach, could help give libraries a more inclusive and focused approach from which to plan and operate.

7.1.1 Access

As can be seen from the findings, access is a complex topic in the context of libraries. Libraries provide different types of access for the community: access to information, access to culture and community, physical access to spaces and devices, and access to services to assist the public. As note earlier, Nussbaum (2006) discusses the necessary role of institutions in providing access to the resources that provide conditions that support and develop the capabilities necessary for the public to thrive. She argues that it is impossible for a single person to be able to provide the resources necessary to provide access to the capabilities a society needs - it requires a collective effort since “there is no magical superhuman who will

shoulder the work" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 307). Discussing Nussbaum, Crocker (2003) comments that the government has a role to play in ensuring that citizens have both the internal capacity and the external resources necessary to take advantage of their capabilities if they so desire. Crocker (2003) states:

> "Nussbaum's account appropriately emphasizes that good societies and good development promote, through various institutions and practices, good human development. Responsible institutions promote the formation, exercise, maintenance, strengthening, and restoration of certain good human powers" (n.p.).

Essentially, people individually cannot provide or produce the resources necessary to support the capabilities that would allow them to live a good life in the context of the Capability Approach (Crocker, 2003). As McMenemy (2009, p. 39) states, "providing equity of access could... be defined as a core mission for public libraries... Equity of access is about all members of a community having the right to use the information and books that they need regardless of their ability to afford them or without undue influence or prejudice...".

Ideally, the capability that Libraries provide is access to information and knowledge, a task that is becoming more difficult especially with changing technology. If libraries, as an institution of the sort discussed by Nussbaum (2006), are to achieve their goal of providing access to the resources that support and develop capabilities relating to digital inclusion, certain challenges must be addressed. First, there is the cost of content and having access to the platform where digital information is stored. The licensing fees are costly, and, unless libraries pool resources, smaller or more remote libraries have difficulty paying for access. Once libraries do have access to those platforms, there is a growing issue around ownership. When a library purchases a physical copy of a book, that book belongs to the library. When the library purchases a digital copy of a book, they generally only purchase the use of the book for a specific period or a specific number of checkouts. When they run out, the library needs to acquire that license again. Libraries do not actually own the digital copy the way they do with a physical copy. So not only is digital access costly, but the concept of ownership has become more complex.

Access challenges can also relate to accessing culture and community, and services that help train and educate. This can include access to programmes that bring the community

together, promoting local authors, access to space to meet, or access to devices and the internet to engage in the digital world. Also, libraries provide access to knowledgeable staff who can help educate their patrons on different types of literacy, or research. These types of access connect to the challenges around training and educating staff, appropriate space and funding, and community building. In other words, many of the challenges libraries face all connect to their roles in providing different types of access.

7.1.2 Governance

The role libraries play within the community has grown to an extent that it would be beneficial for libraries to have clearly articulated and formal partnerships with all three levels of government: municipal, provincial and federal. By working together in this way, with specific and clearly articulated roles and goals, libraries – and those governments – can better meet the challenges that our communities are facing. That said, it is about more than just working together. While libraries do need to work effectively with the government to meet community needs, there also needs to be a level of governance, along with attached funding, that guides the work of libraries. As was mentioned by the interviewees, libraries have become an essential form of service and should be recognised as such by government and supported in this role. In the role of a community educator and in providing access to information and knowledge, libraries can support the development of an informed citizenry and so support democracy and greater equality in society. This is recognised by the Government of British Columbia (2020) which states that libraries are "the cornerstones of healthy and vibrant communities" (p. 5) because of their role as "vital community and learning hubs" that provide "trusted information and services" (p. 3). These are key reasons as to why it is so important for government to support libraries to provide the various types of access discussed above.

While there is a certain level of governance for public libraries by the provincial government, it focuses on basic structure of the library (via the library act), and some funding that is often directed at specific initiatives. Library funding mostly comes through local municipal taxes, and library systems usually have budget presentations of some form or another to their local governments. This does vary from location to location. The result is a lack of structure and consistency for libraries. To address this would require changing the current form of governance to one that focuses on specific standards that guide libraries,

ensuring that they meet the challenges they are facing and deliver access to the library-specific capabilities to the community. This requires changing the current form of governance to one that focuses on specific and clear library standards, then building the necessary connections with other aspects of government. Basing the standards on the Capabilities Approach would help focus libraries on providing access to those capabilities which their communities most need. As Nussbaum (2006) states, "If people are below the threshold on any one of the capabilities, that is a failure of basic justice, no matter how high they are up on others" (p. 167). Building connections could take the form of something as simple as a knowledge of the library's role or other government organization's role in order to refer people back and forth as appropriate. Conversely, it could take the form of formal, defined partnerships between libraries and other government organizations that allow both organizations to achieve aspects of their mandate. This could enable libraries to act as community connectors in a meaningful way for the community, not only better serving the community in their specific capacities, but also by connecting people to organizations who could help them when the library cannot. As Nussbaum (2006) comments, an "important feature of a modern nation protective of human capabilities will be independent administrative agencies, whose expertise is essential to protecting capabilities... and whose independence from partisan control is therefore an important structural feature of a nation adequately designed to protect capabilities" (p. 312). Appropriate integration with other services and agreed standards could strengthen and define libraries within their community, better enabling them to fulfill their mandate even in challenging circumstances. It is interesting to note that England has also struggled with library governance, with many feeling that libraries had lost their way (Goulding, 2016). In an attempt to remedy this, England enacted the *Framework for the Future* which, Goulding (2016, p. 276) states, provided "a common understanding of role and purpose for public library services in England... [giving] public libraries something tangible to organize around". It seems clear that while they may vary, standards and frameworks can be helpful for organisations, supporting them in meeting their mission and mandate.

7.1.3 Community Connections

The ALA stresses the library's role as a community educator, stating that libraries "are leaders in the adult literacy movement", and the important role librarians play in that context (American Library Association, 2006b, n.p.). The library connects its community to

information, knowledge and culture, and helps build the skills necessary to access and assess that knowledge and information (American Library Association, 2007; Canadian Federation of Library Associations, 2019; British Columbia Library Association, 2022b). The CFLA (Canadian Federation of Library Associations, 2019, n.p.) refers to libraries as "essential gateways for all persons living in Canada to advance themselves through literacy, lifelong learning, social engagement, and cultural enrichment". Digital technology increases the importance of the library in providing access to skills and knowledge, and, according to the ALA (American Library Association, 2006a), libraries should provide equitable access regardless of the platform. However, this role leads to another challenge for libraries relating to the education and training of staff who support community education and access. Much like the wider community, library staff can also experience a growing digital divide. Staff can find it challenging to keep up with technological changes: they need to learn about the new digital platforms available and the latest devices. For libraries to fulfill their role as an institution, it is important to have staff who are well trained and educated in this area. This sentiment is also reflected by the ALA (American Library Association, 2006b), when they state: "For librarians, continuous learning is critical to renewing the expertise and skills needed to teach and assist members of the public in the new information age" (n.p.).

This relates to two other challenges libraries face, as demonstrated in the interviews: having appropriate funding to create and support digital services and spaces. Libraries must have stable and sufficient funding that allows them to create and maintain appropriate technology, digital collections, and well-trained staff. Library budgets are struggling to keep pace with the cost of having digital collections. Libraries must have spaces for the community to come together, to learn, and to have access to technology. While larger library systems are more likely to offer a broad selection of digital materials, small communities with smaller libraries cannot have the same access to digital collections. This raises significant issues around access to, and potentially control of, information. As one interviewee pointed out, this can cause a divide within different communities in that some have better access to information than others, leading to more segmentation and segregation of society. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the Deloitte (2023b) study recognises that, "as Canada becomes more digital, we're leaving groups behind" (p. 44).

It is worth noting again that all these challenges are closely connected to each other, and especially to the challenges around access. As access is one of the core capabilities that the library provides, there needs to be better, more consistent access across the province, and developing baseline standards using the Capabilities Approach, at a provincial level with attached funding would assist with this. Libraries are ideally placed in communities across the province. Even in some of the smallest communities in British Columbia, you will find a library. However, while 99% of British Columbia's population has access to public libraries (Government of British Columbia, 2023a), not all libraries can provide the same level of access. Libraries should be treated like an essential service, much the way schools and hospitals are. Having a funding structure and governance that enables this essential service would help libraries fulfill their role and purpose in the community. As Nussbaum (2006) argues, "we should insist that the whole public order be designed so as to prevent gross inequalities of access and power" (p. 312). To address inequalities of access and power, the government could assist libraries more with a provincial mandate and funding structure that considers barriers to access such as remoteness and population size to provide additional funding and resources.

7.2 Developing an Agreed Standard of Service

To summarise, for libraries to fully fulfill their role to provide access to the capabilities to the community in a meaningful way, this study suggests three things will be needed to achieve this. The first is acknowledgment of the work libraries do for the community since without suitable recognition, it is difficult to argue for the necessary support. This also includes recognizing them as essential services within a community. Second, libraries should have appropriate integration with the government and other government organizations to better serve community needs. Third, libraries should have agreed standards to provide a minimum level of service that libraries should be providing to the community. Ideally, these standards should be developed by the library community, based on their knowledge of the library's role, in conjunction with the government. In many ways, this information already exists, in one location or another. In a broad way, organizations like the ALA or IFLA discuss the role of the library, ways libraries can accomplish that role, and even advocate for libraries. The issue is

that there is already more than enough information, but it is either too disparate or too generalized. What is necessary is for it to be formally organized and adopted in a way that is focused on and useful for the libraries in British Columbia. Having an agreed overarching standard based on the Capabilities Approach would support British Columbia's libraries to have a level of autonomy to figure out how best to achieve this standard based on the needs of the community they serve. This will help focus the work libraries do within the community and help to address libraries being overstretched in their commitments. In turn, it would help libraries focus on what is relevant to them with regards to any new technologies. As already stated, libraries have a role in building capacity with regards to access - access to knowledge, learning and culture. Standards would provide guidance on, and parameters for, what services libraries offer with regards to this capacity.

To create an agreed standard of service using Nussbaum's Capability Approach as a theoretical guide, we would have to develop a fuller understanding of what the capabilities that connect to libraries mean in a library context. Library staff should understand those capabilities and what that means for the library and then consider and modify existing services, or justify new services, in the context of the Central Human Capabilities List. (For an example of how this could work, see Appendix A.) This is particularly important with respect to digital inclusion. It is important to remember that - despite a growing digital divide - digital technologies are potentially inclusive because they provide remote access to those who otherwise would not have access. Libraries in remote locations might have basic computer classes to help people get started, but these libraries could also partner remotely with other organizations to provide some of the same services that people in larger urban areas can access. In other words, the idea is for libraries to develop specific capabilities, which means that libraries and library staff can then focus on what they do best and do a better job of providing access to information, knowledge, culture and lifelong learning, to their communities. This will be discussed more fully in section 7.3 by suggesting that libraries focus on the capabilities they are best placed to support.

This would all take province-wide cooperation, which is, without doubt, difficult. However, it would assist libraries overcoming other barriers, beyond funding, as they could present as a united front when it comes to paying for access to platforms or advocating to the

government with regards to issues around such topics as copyright or privacy. Having libraries integrated throughout the province would also help balance some of the access issues small libraries are facing in other ways, as well. Beyond a united front and pooled resources for accessing digital platforms, it could provide a way for libraries across the province to share information and resources more thoroughly, from staff training to programmes and services. In other words, small libraries could benefit from the greater capacity of bigger library systems through shared resources. This change of focus helps limit reaction to a situation, and provides an opening for future planning, which will be discussed further in section 7.3. As Inayatullah (2013) said, digital technologies are likely to cause more disruption in the future. If organizations like libraries are to anticipate and respond to this disruption, then having timely information can help them to make better decisions.

There are examples of Standards in use elsewhere. For example, New York Public and Association Libraries Minimum Standards (New York State Library, 2023) provide an excellent example of how libraries can work to achieve appropriate services for the community through planning. The Standards instruction on what libraries are expected to offer, with the following goals (New York State Library, 2023):

- "Promote quality local public library service in all communities of New York State,
- Empower libraries to strengthen community relations and promote public support for quality library services, and
- Support a culture of transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement" (n.p.).

These standards outline what libraries are expected to do, from having a board of directors to providing programmes in the community (New York State Library, 2023). They guide libraries to create long range plans, what these plans should entail, and how to create them. Guidance is also provided on staff education levels and hours open in connection with population size served and establishing community partnerships (New York State Library, 2023). The goal is to provide, as the title suggests, minimum standards that improve library services across the state. While the main New York State Library (2023) document is fairly short, about two pages, the supporting documentation, titled *Helpful Information for Meeting Minimum Public Library Standards,* provides a wealth of information on everything from researching community needs, bylaws, budgets, evaluating effectiveness, to creating a long-range plan (New York State Library, 2023). The New York State Library (2023) standards and

supporting documentation provide very good guidance on community services, and it provides a good starting point for general library standards for libraries, and more specifically to this research, standards for digital services in libraries.

The British Columbia Public Libraries Branch, which administers the Public Libraries Act, also provides guidance to public libraries on governance, setting up a library, and specific programs, though it is not as robust as New York's (Government of British Columbia, 2023b). What both the Minimum Standards (New York State Library, 2023) document and the British Columbia Public Libraries Branch overlook is a discussion about the core role of libraries and how all programmes and services branch out from that. Also, in the case of British Columbia, the guidance they provide is given as more of a suggestion, it is not a firm structure. Ideally, standards such as this would give a high-level definition of what libraries should strive to offer as defined by the capabilities discussed below. However, caution should be used when creating the minimum standards, in that the terms in them should be high level and broad enough not to be dated by trends or technology currently in use in libraries. Ideally, these standards should help libraries achieve a minimum standard in the capacities to which they provide access to the public, with support in how to achieve them, and how to plan for a changing future. One of the advantages of such a system is that it highlights what libraries are capable of, and what they can achieve in the community, thus demonstrating their value. Additionally, by highlighting what they can do for the community, it provides a way for libraries to define – and decline – services that fall outside their mandate. As Crocker (2003, section 1.1) states, "a focus on functioning enables us to keep very clear about the constant ends and the variable means of development".

7.3 Considering which Capabilities Libraries Best Support

This section will focus on an argument that libraries play a key role in the supporting and developing the following capabilities: 4 (*senses, imagination, and thought*), 6 (*practical reason*) on Nussbaum's list, as well as how it relates to capability 10a, (*control over one's environment*), and 7 (*affiliation*) (2006, pp. 76-77). Developing an overarching standard that is based on these four capabilities would provide libraries with a clear and focused starting point where they could then develop them based on their community needs.

As mentioned in chapter four, Nussbaum (2006) discusses the role of institutions, and how they can provide access within the community to the capabilities she lists. Nussbaum (2006) argues that institutions should provide access to capabilities for four reasons. First, there is collective action; as Nussbaum (2006, p. 307) illustrates, using her example of there being "no magical superhuman" available for this. In other words, we cannot expect people to do this individually; we must work together as a society to create the institutions we need to provide access to the capabilities. Second, there is an element of fairness to this – while it is not realistic to expect one person to accomplish much in providing access to capabilities, it is also not fair to place such a burden on them (Nussbaum, 2006). As Nussbaum (2006) discusses, we are more likely to be successful in our mission if we work collectively. Which brings us to the third reason, which is capacity. An individual does not have the same ability, or capacity, as an institution to provide access to capabilities (Nussbaum, 2006). Finally, the fourth reason takes the first three reasons into consideration in that the goal is for people to live a good, full life. As such, Nussbaum (2006, p. 309) argues that it makes sense to allocate the responsibility to provide capabilities to institutions, "giving individuals broad discretion about how to use their lives apart from the sphere in which institutes exact duties".

7.3.1 Capability #4

Developing the senses, imagination and thought is supported by an individual being free to think, imagine, reason, and create (Nussbaum, 2006). To develop Central Capability 4, it is important to have access to education to a level that develops a range of literacies, not just in terms of reading, but in terms of understanding of information and media literacy, sciences, arts, history, and culture. It is also about being able to use one's creativity, to "use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 76). Nussbaum (2006) stresses the necessity for freedom of expression – which is one of the library's values and mandates. This connects to the theme of the Complexities of Access: access is vital because when a community member visits the library it enables free access to an extensive collection of resources that can support the development of a person's senses, imagination and thought. Libraries enable access to nonfiction collections, to journals and magazines, and to music collections. Library fiction collections include everything from classics to mysteries or

romances. People can access collections in other languages, in audio formats, and digitally. The community can also access the internet, use computers, take courses, and have staff help with researching any topic, or with job hunting, or trying out new technologies. Libraries often partner with other people or organizations within the community to provide programmes and services on other topics, including seed exchanges for gardening and repairing everyday items around the house. Libraries, in idea, embody what Nussbaum's (2006) Capability 4 hopes to accomplish, though in practice they lack a formal, cohesive structure. The connection seems so strong that it is surprising that Nussbaum did not mention it herself when discussing this capability. As the Canadian Federation of Library Associations states, "libraries are a key institution in Canada for rendering expressive content accessible and affordable to all" (2019, n.p.).

7.3.2 Capability #6

The other capability strongly connected to libraries is 6: *practical reason.* This concerns the ability to "form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 77). Capability 6 connects to the element of democratic participation discussed above in that libraries work to provide their communities with access to information that helps them make informed decisions. It also connects to the discussion in the findings of services and spaces, the human factor, relationships, and aging. While the discussion of Capability 4 focuses on access to library collection, Capability 6 focusses more on how people access and use the collections and services the library offers. Library staff work to provide collections and services that will help their communities not just to access entertainment but to learn about new topics, to learn about information literacy to better understand and make informed decisions about what they see in the media or on social media, and find ways to connect to isolated members of the community to this knowledge and information (American Library Association, 2007; Canadian Federation of Library Associations, 2019; British Columbia Library Association, 2022b). Libraries also work to help build literacy skills around more than just reading, but such topics as financial literacy or, particularly relevant here, digital literacy (American Library Association, 2006b). The elements that surfaced in the interviews, specifically changing futures and challenges with technology, speak to this role.

7.3.3 Capability #10a

Related to central capability 6, libraries also play a role with regards to capability 10a (Control over One's Environment) which concerns "being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life" and highlights the importance of protecting "free speech and association" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 77). The library has a role in ensuring free speech within the community in the context of access to information and knowledge. As the CFLA (Canadian Federation of Library Associations, 2019) states:

> all persons in Canada have a fundamental right, subject only to the Constitution and the law, to have access to the full range of knowledge, imagination, ideas, and opinion, and to express their thoughts publicly. Only the courts may abridge free expression rights in Canada (n.p.).

That is why libraries have statements on access to information and freedom of expression, and often find themselves resisting attempts at censorship. In 2023 alone, the American Library Association counted 4,240 attempts to censor materials at libraries as reported to them – a figure that is up 65% from 2022 (American Library Association, 2024b). According to the ALA (American Library Association, 2024b), these challenges came from pressure groups that target both public and school libraries; groups and individuals who listed tens and even hundreds of titles to be censored; titles with LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC elements. According to the ALA report, there were many organized campaigns focusing on banning books at public and school libraries (American Library Association, 2024b). On a side note, in response to the significant increase in challenges, the ALA (American Library Association, 2024b) has launched *Unite Against Book Bans* initiative, devoted to "a national initiative to empower readers everywhere to stand together in the fight against censorship" (para 6).

7.3.4 Capability #7

Libraries also play a role in supporting Capability 7 (*affiliation*) (Nussbaum, 2006). This capability concerns community in that it focuses on "being able to live with and towards others… to engage in various forms of social interaction… (protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech)" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 77). This is one of the roles libraries play within the community – they are a community gathering place and

connector. The importance of this aspect is recognized in the interviews for my dissertation research, and includes elements like cultural access, physical access, and relationships, which all revolve around those forms of affiliation. As discussed in earlier chapters, libraries play a vital role in this area and are one of the few remaining organizations that provide a free gathering place for the community (Klinenberg, 2018a), as well as providing access to materials that promote knowledge and culture.

7.3.5 The Role of the Library in the Community

The sentiment that libraries have lost their focus has been present for some time (see Usherwood, 2007; Goulding, 2016). Usherwood (2007) discusses at length the challenges libraries face in meeting society's demands, while still remaining true to their values. Goulding (2016) goes into detail on the context of England's public libraries, how they fit with local government, government attempts made to help public libraries find their focus, and the pull between local and centralized governance. If the role of institutions is to provide access to specific capabilities, as Nussbaum (2006) suggests, then the Capability Approach as a theoretical framework provides libraries with a way of articulating their role and a way of saying when something falls outside that role. That is not to say that libraries should turn their back on those in need, but instead it helps them to suggest where other services are more appropriately placed to help where help is needed.

To give an example, many libraries are struggling with issues encouraging those who are unhoused to use the space peacefully. There are currently approximately 11,000 people experiencing homelessness in Toronto (Hune-Brown, 2023), many with significant mental health and addiction issues. Nicholas Hune-Brown (2023) discusses these issues, along with the dramatic change libraries have been experiencing, at length in his recent article *Have you been to the library lately?* In this article, he discusses the challenges Canadian urban libraries have been facing in recent years, and how they are struggling to meet those challenges. Many libraries are adding social work type services into library services. As one librarian Hune-Brown (2023) quotes says (referring to the social services that library system offers): "People really do seek this out, because it's the last truly public space"(n.p.).

Hune-Brown (2023) discusses how "the social safety net has frayed, and libraries have found themselves filling in the gaps" (n.p.). Some of the challenges are extreme, even leading

to library employees striking due to working conditions (Hune-Brown, 2023). Hune-Brown (2023) states:

> On Vancouver Island, some workers went on strike for nearly two months over workplace concerns and a lack of wage growth. In a letter to library trustees, they argued that 'management has refused to agree to many important proposals—including solutions to workplace violence and mental health impacts.' Library workers across the country report being attacked, spat on, threatened, sexually assaulted. They describe the emotional toll that results from not having the necessary resources to help the people who come to them, day after day. They talk about picking up the phone to call for help and realizing that nobody's coming. (n.p.)[4]

Hune-Brown (2023) highlights the need for guidance moving forward, acknowledging that there are no real answers for these very serious societal issues libraries are facing. He comments, "What is the next step? Where does the library go from here? Because it's clear that being 'the last public space' isn't a privilege. It's a sign that something has gone terribly wrong" (Hune-Brown, 2023, n.p.). Unfortunately, resources that libraries would be using for initiatives that align more with library work are instead being used to help deal with these serious societal issues – and it is provoking a lot of discussion in the library world in North America, as Hune-Brown's (2023) article suggests. It is beyond the role of the library to provide health care or housing, however, it is within the role of the library to provide information on other services found within the community, to be able to connect people with organizations outside the library who could help an individual find medical help, mental help or otherwise.

Communities need strong libraries with good collections, knowledgeable staff, and welcoming spaces; and libraries need to have a strong understanding of what they are and what their purpose is. In his article, Hune-Brown (2023) draws on an interesting quote which speaks to the value libraries bring to the community. The quote he uses is from Andrew Carnegie, an individual who made a significant contribution to libraries in both Canada and the United States. Hune-Brown (2023, n.p.) quotes Carnegie, saying:

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[4] On a personal note – and very casually put, this statement hits home. I worked with the striking library system years ago, in one of the branches that struggled significantly with these issues. I have encountered some of these issues personally and know many library staff who have dealt with many, if not all, of these challenges.

> "'There was no use to which money could be applied so productive of good to boys and girls who have good within them and ability and ambition to develop it, as the founding of a public library,' Carnegie wrote in his autobiography".

Essentially, this highlights an essential role that libraries play within the community, acting as an access point to information and knowledge. Klinenberg (2018a) also stresses the importance of libraries, stating that "social infrastructure provides the setting and the context for social participation, and the library is among the most critical forms of social infrastructure we have" (p. 32). The Capability Approach, as discussed, can provide libraries with a way of justifying their role and what they should be providing their communities, and community needs are an extension of that. Libraries, as discussed by Klinenberg (2018a), are a third space - a free space meant to be used by and for the community, and to bring that community together. It seems beneficial for libraries to understand the needs of their community, and support those needs in the context of the role they play in supporting community access to capabilities. With all this, what does our community need from the library to be successful in accessing the capabilities that the library can support? As technology changes and its use grows, the needs of the community change. How libraries provide access to capabilities for the community changes in response, as do the needs of staff if they are to be successful in fulfilling the library's mandate. Looking at the interviews, a number of barriers became evident, which I discussed above.

It would be beneficial to libraries to consider more fully how to bring it to the public's attention that they are a valuable resource. A better understanding of what the library can offer to an individual could potentially increase the likelihood that people will make use of what the library has to offer. For those who are more at risk, this could potentially lead to an improvement in their situation in that they are now accessing what the library has to offer, or they benefit from the library acting as a community connector and connecting them to another organization that may be of benefit to them. Through the research process, it became clear that there is more that libraries could do to support public understanding of how libraries are a valuable resource. More awareness could be fostered by the advocacy work that libraries do to maintain and continue access to key services. This is useful in that more people would learn about the role the library plays within the community, linking that vital role with the necessity of stable resources.

Libraries also face institutional barriers that make it difficult for them to provide the community with full access to digital resources. Libraries provide physical resources like space, equipment and internet access to the public, but an important message from the findings is that there are major barriers in providing digital access as fully as it could be provided. As argued above, the Capability Approach could provide a way of discussing these barriers and clearly defining what libraries need to overcome them and why it is important. With community needs being so strong – and sometimes desperate – it can be easy for libraries to be pulled in many directions, as Hune-Brown (2023) illustrates. Future studies could also help libraries determine what a preferred future would be, and how to achieve that preferred future. The next section will look to the future and discuss how libraries can achieve their mandate. As Simon Sinek, an author and thinker on leadership, states, "When we know WHY we do what we do, everything falls into place. When we don't, we have to push things into place" (Sinek, n.d.). The Capability Approach can help libraries determine the 'why' – why do libraries do what they do, to draw on Sinek. Future studies could then help them navigate the 'how' - how do libraries do what they do and how they might do them better.

7.4 Using Future Studies to Anticipate and Respond to Challenges

The title of the IFLA Trends Report captures well the problems caused by the rapid changes that society is facing now and in the future with its reference to "riding the wave" or being "caught in the tide" (International Federation of Library Associations, 2013, n.p.). Or, in other words, they comment on libraries' ability to either be prepared for the future or being caught in a position where they are reacting to their situation. Changes and growth in technology are hitting libraries – and society in general – in waves, and libraries are being buffeted by them. Libraries must consider how to ride those waves effectively, and future studies could provide useful approaches and viewpoints to accomplish that. This section looks at how Future Studies could help libraries determine their future strategies. There will be a discussion about why Future Studies would be useful for libraries, and how a community focused approach can amplify the effects of Future Studies.

7.4.1 Using Future Studies

Future Studies provides libraries with a practical method for identifying and achieving their goals. Section 5.1 discussed the value of Future Studies, referencing Inayatullah's (2013) thoughts on the value of Future Studies in the face of dealing with change and difficult times. Inayatullah (2013, p. 38) suggests that "planning seeks to control and close the future, while future studies seeks to open the future, moving from 'the' future to alternative futures". Inayatullah (2013, p. 41) states, "muddling through… is not useful during times of turbulence since incremental policy change does not help the organization or nation transform to meet dramatic new conditions". "Dramatic new conditions" is a very apt way of describing what society is facing with regards to new and changing technologies (Inayatullah, 2013, p. 41). While the Capability Approach is useful in helping the library determine their purpose and thinking through what decisions might be based on that, Critical Future Studies supports organizations in looking at their current situation, goals, and decision-making differently in a way that helps them to plan for a preferable future. As Inayatullah (2013, p. 42) states, Future Studies is concerned "with attempting to envision novel ways of organizing how decisions are reached and who is eligible to participate in those decisions".

As Inayatullah (2013, p. 42) states, Future Studies is concerned "with attempting to envision novel ways of organizing how decisions are reached and who is eligible to participate in those decisions". Beneficially, and as is demonstrated in the interviews, it also does this by "asking participants to envision their ideal organizational world and then it aids in creating strategies to realize that world" (Inayatullah, 2013, p. 42). Given how rapidly technology is changing society, organisational planning can be difficult. Libraries could use Future Studies in combination with agreed standards to focus more clearly on their and their community's preferred library future. Future studies could aid libraries in finding a way to navigate the future, moving from a slow, reactionary position to a planned, considered approach. The Futures Toolkit (UK Government Office for Science, 2017) discusses how futures approaches, such as the 7 Questions Interview that I used, are useful for gathering information on the future, for generating strategic insights gathered both internally and externally, and for stimulating thinking on a topic. As the Futures Toolkit (UK Government Office for Science, 2017, p. 9) states, these approaches help "identify challenges, future conflicts, [and] underlying concerns". This is much like Inayatullah's (2013, p. 38) fourth approach, which

focuses on participatory action, learning and research. It is important to note, though, that future studies is not about the "orthodox future" (Inayatullah 2013, p. 4). Inayatullah (2013, p. 41) states that it is through "challenging the orthodox future" that we open "the possibilities of alternative futures". He continues: "Once alternative futures are created, then futures studies as practice seeks to develop individual and organizational capacity to invent the desired future" (Inayatullah, 2013, p. 41).

7.4.2 Community-Focused Librarianship and Future Studies

Across Canada, there has been a recent trend for public libraries to have community-focused approaches. These approaches could work well with Future Studies: with a community focus, Future Studies can more effectively "identify the long-term issues and challenges shaping the future development of a policy area" and "explore their implications for policy development" (UK Government Office for Science, 2017, p. 2). Two examples of a community-focused approach are the Greater Victoria Public Library's (GVPL) Community-Inspired Librarianship model (2016), and The Community-Led Toolkit developed by the Vancouver, Halifax, Toronto, and Regina Public Libraries (Vancouver Public Library, 2024). This approach aims to use "community development techniques in order to develop a more inclusive approach to public library service" and has a strong focus on marginalized communities (Vancouver Public Library, 2024). The focus of this approach is as follows:

- "Through establishing ongoing relationships with socially excluded people, work collaboratively with socially excluded communities to articulate and respond to their library service wants and needs.
- Identify and examine systemic barriers to library use for socially excluded people and propose policy and procedural change to address these barriers, including the development of an inclusive service planning model" (Vancouver Public Library, 2024, p.7).

The Greater Victoria Public Library's (2016) Community-Inspired Approach is similar to The Community Led Toolkit in that it is also their goal "to inspire and be inspired by all areas of community life" (p. 4). GVPL (2016) states:

> "GVPL understands that the communities we serve inspire GVPL to create, develop, and implement new services. Our community inspires our service model. Our service model recognizes that developing and providing inspiring library services is tied to the vitality and quality of library engagement,

> expression, dialogue, and celebration in the community" (Greater Victoria Public Library, 2016, p.4).

It is apparent that The Community-Led Toolkit is a response to the growing needs of different communities that libraries serve, and, in many ways, GVPL's Community-Inspired approach is a continuation of that, but with a more general community focus. While these models and toolkits are useful resources in determining community needs, it is important to note that they would benefit from a more focused look at what libraries should do and what their core services should be. Ideally, libraries should research as broad a group as possible within their communities to gather information about the services the library provides regarding the capabilities on which libraries might focus. Future Studies provides a structure that would allow for such collaborative research through open discussion and decision-making between library staff and community members.

7.4.3 Future Studies use in Libraries

Interestingly, there is little research available that looks at using Future Studies and libraries. Along with the IFLA Trends Report (2013), mentioned above as well as the most recent version, *Facing the Future of Information with Confidence* (International Federation of Library Associations, 2024a) that discussed the trends libraries are facing, the ones that stood out include one from The Canadian Urban Libraries Council (Garrido et al., 2021), one from *Teach the Future, Libraries Importance to Future Studies by* Peter Bishop (2023) and two articles from Inayatullah (2007, 2015) on an experience he had working with libraries in Australia. In his article, Peter Bishop (2023, n.p.) asks an important question: "Why include the future in libraries?". Bishop (2023, (n.p.)) follows up with this response:

> "Futures thinking is an excellent way to introduce a major reform in education, such as shifting the emphasis from learning facts (what's in the text) to acquiring skills. Why spend years learning facts that they can look them up on the Internet in 20 seconds? It's more important to learn what do with those facts, such as how to critically think about them, how to communicate them, how to work with others to use facts to improve their world".

Inayatullah's (2007) article focuses on how he worked with libraries in Brisbane in 2006, using scenario planning to look at the challenges libraries could be facing in the future. Inayatullah (2015) sums up these four scenarios as:

> "1. The lean, mean, information machine, focused on market needs even at the risk of becoming the McLibrary.
>
> 2. Return to community, to civilizing citizens—a place of meeting as opposed to an information distribution center...
>
> 3. The center for knowledge expansion, with librarians becoming highly skilled knowledge navigators.
>
> 4. The offshore call center, essentially the death of the library, swallowed up and outsourced by the market of global digital content suppliers" (Inayatullah, 2015, p. 25).

These scenarios are fascinating to look at now, so long after they were developed. It seems that we now have a combination similar to scenarios two and three, which, based on the findings, speaks to the value of Futures planning. This is supported by the fact that libraries have been developing models and methods that are community focused, which supports his second point. His third point is supported by how libraries help patrons to navigate the online world, and libraries' work to bridge the digital divide. In Inayatullah's (2015, p.25) article about library futures, he referred to this 2006 planning session he held with Brisbane libraries, and further discusses how "as both the location and creation of knowledge become democratized and decentralized, libraries and librarians are rethinking their relationships with the communities they serve and the knowledge they help preserve—and produce". Inayatullah (2015) highlights the usefulness of Future Studies in helping libraries do so.

One other approach is worth mentioning. The Canadian Urban Libraries Council (Garrido et al., 2021) is an organization made up of the largest urban libraries across Canada. The Council created a document focused on future planning in libraries called *The Future of Libraries* (Garrido et al., 2021). This document aims to support libraries to plan for the future. While it does not explicitly use Future Studies, there are many commonalities with Future Studies in their method. Garrido et al. (2021, p. 9) state:

> Efforts invested in analyzing and sense-making the past and present ultimately provides a shared understanding of the forces shaping the near and long-term future ahead of us. This enables us to design and develop forward-thinking and resilient strategies beyond present problems and build organizations fit and ready for the new and possible realities. Audits, interviews, surveys and participatory workshops helped inform the data collection and synthesis required for trend scanning, ideation and scenario planning work. The

> techniques, tools, and scenarios developed are explored in further detail in this report's futures work section.

Garrido et al. (2021, p. 30) comment that "while all library needs and challenges seem to be generally similar and aligned, they impact and affect various library systems differently".

Future Studies allows for individuality, which is necessary given that community needs vary between communities – and there are many communities, from small to large, that make up British Columbia. As Dezuanni & Osman (2024, p. 37), in the IFLA Trend Report Literature Review, comment about the importance of community focused solutions:

> "Global non-profit consulting firm FSG considers the role of tailored place-based solutions to issues noting that stakeholders, 'can't apply a generic national approach to communities shaped by a long history of place, more funders are taking a placebased approach in their philanthropy, making deliberate and direct investments into specific places and regions, working across issue areas, and convening local stakeholders'".

Future Studies enables libraries to focus on providing capabilities to their communities, and having a community focused approach to service amplifies this. Future Studies, using a community focused lens, provides libraries with a practical method to achieve their goal. While libraries could effectively use only Future Studies to find a path forward on issues like digital inclusion, even without standards, the results would be better when using the Capabilities Approach. Based on the Capabilities Approach, each province or county should have a standard that focuses on their communities as it provides a goal and consistency to libraries. Future Studies provides libraries with a practical method that allows for their individuality. Garrido et al. (2021, p. 33) sum it up nicely, stating that "futures activities [helps] us to understand the global landscape that libraries will be up against in the upcoming decade and enable us to use these insights to build strategies that stand the test of evolving trends and needs".

7.5 Conclusion

One of the most fascinating parts of this research has been to see how the same topic could be viewed in so many ways and from so many different angles by the different participants. It shows how a topic can seem deceptively simple but actually be complex. The different

interviews showed how complex public libraries are, and how they are about more than just books and reading. This complexity connects to one of the issues libraries face, beyond the obvious ones like funding: as technology changes our world, it also changes what libraries do – though their goal remains the same. This raises the question of how libraries should adapt, and help their communities to adapt, to new technology. The research suggests that library staff and library leaders, in the face of this change, should consider what is within the role of libraries and what is beyond their scope. The Capability Approach, as discussed by Nussbaum (2006) allows us to focus on the core role of libraries and define that role in a way that does not depend on current trends or technology. Along with future studies tools, the Capability Approach gives libraries a way of articulating and justifying what they hope to achieve, and a way of framing discussions on how to proceed in the future. Using a capacities approach-based minimum standards provides libraries a way of articulating their role and impact on a community, and future studies helps libraries navigate the path forward. Not only do they provide a focus for libraries and library workers in the work they do, but they also provide them with a means of justification. The Capability Approach and Future Studies help libraries strengthen their argument in the library's importance and influence on their community, and it assists libraries in being adaptable to achieve their goals and planning for the future. Future Studies and the Capability Approach give libraries a way of talking to partners and the government – or any potential funder – to, again, provide a focus and justification to the library's work and path forward. Essentially, it helps library workers to not only speak to the value of libraries and what libraries do, but also gives them a way to talk about the work of libraries, a way to frame that work to promote libraries and build the connections they need to achieve their goals.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion

When I started this research, I was curious about the role of British Columbia's public libraries with regards to digital inclusion and the barriers they might face in achieving it. Through the research, I have found that the challenges are daunting, but I think I have developed a better sense of how to respond. Using Nussbaum's (2006) Capabilities Approach as a theoretical framework, and drawing on Future Studies for my research, I gathered information on the current challenges libraries are facing, and what alternative futures could look like. My research question was:

> What is the role of British Columbia's public libraries with respect to digital inclusion? Within that role, what do we need to do to accomplish digital inclusion, and what are the barriers that may prevent us from accomplishing it?

Based on interviews with participants, and on the reading I undertook, I found there to be significant barriers faced by British Columbia libraries with regards to digital inclusion. These include:

- Threats to funding: libraries, like many institutions, need stable funding. This funding, along with supporting general library operations, also helps libraries provide access to the community to new technology. There are many costs with technology, from equipment costs; training to staff and public; cost of provide access to digital platforms; and how often technology needs to be replaced (due to wear and tear, theft, as well as it becoming outdated).
- The lack of an overarching standard and being pulled in too many directions: while there are many associations that provide much guidance, British Columbia's public libraries should have a new method of governance that would better support them, especially in times of change. This includes having overarching standards and associated funding that applies to public libraries across the province.
- The effects of rapid change in technology: rapid change in technology is causing many issues for both libraries and society in general. It is difficult for society to keep up with the change. Technology is changing how both libraries and society operate. It is also changing how libraries provide access and to what they provide access.

- A digital divide amongst staff: Library staff are also struggling with change as technology changes. Libraries should find ways to support their staff.

To respond effectively to these challenges, particularly the issues of funding and breadth of remit, my argument is that libraries should aim to provide access to specific capabilities to help them to focus on what they might do most effectively for their communities. I further argue that these capabilities should form the basis of an overarching standard for British Columbia's public libraries. Based on the research findings, I think that libraries are best placed to support the following capabilities from Nussbaum's list:

- 4 - S*enses, imagination, and thought*
- 6 - *Practical reason*
- 7 – *Affiliation*
- 10a - *Control over one's environment* (Nussbaum, 2006, p.76-77).

I believe that libraries could use Future Studies as a method to plan for the future in relation to supporting these capabilities, even in uncertain times. This would enable libraries to deal proactively with the overall challenges they face (funding and remit), as well as specific challenges like digital inclusion. When new technologies emerge, libraries could use a capabilities lens and Future Studies to consider two general aspects: whether a lack of access provides a barrier to the public in the context of the library's mandate and how this barrier might be reduced or overcome; and whether this new technology could help libraries provide a better service and, if so, how. Libraries keeping the focus of this approach (the combination of Capabilities Approach and Future Studies) on the communities they serve will only amplify the effectiveness of it.

8.1 What this means for me as a library professional

What I learned during the research concerns the need for structured goals and guidance in the face of compelling needs, and how such structure can support library staff in changing times. Structure, in the form of a mandate, goals of service, philosophical framework, or service guidelines, seems to me to be essential in supporting staff. What I realized through my research was the different ways in which the structures we build (through policies

and procedures) can be used to provide significant help and guidance to staff by providing pathways and guidance during changing and challenging times. While this may seem obvious, the reality is that the role of libraries has broadened to fill service gaps and social voids in our communities. However, libraries have limited capacity. Library initiatives should not be about the next new interesting idea or trend for programmes or services. Instead, I would like to foster thoughtful consideration about the role of the library in their local contexts. This is where an overarching standard would be beneficial for public libraries in British Columbia. It gives libraries a focused goal and guidelines to strive towards, while still having the ability to specialize services for the unique nature of individual communities.

I think that to be successful in dealing with challenges like digital inclusion will require more than just appropriate frameworks, and associated policies and procedures. I would like to encourage a culture that supports staff. As libraries work towards supporting digital inclusion in their communities, there will likely be some experimentation with new approaches, new programmes, or new services. These initiatives could be successful or not: I would like to encourage an environment where libraries support a work culture that understands that sometimes we fail, sometimes a new initiative does not work, or only partially works. I would like to support policies where libraries provide staff with a way of trialling their ideas, linking those ideas directly to the library's standards, and how to use what they are learning to plan for the future. Technology is changing society so rapidly that I would like to encourage staff to focus on the big picture concept of what libraries do, versus getting caught in specifics. For example, as one interviewee pointed out, it is about how patrons can listen to music versus the medium through which they listen - in other words, it does not matter if the patron access music through a digital platform or a physical CD, what matters is that they have access to music. In other words, the medium may change as technology changes, but what remains important is access.

8.2 Professional Implications

In my own professional work, I currently focus on digital learning and literacy, coordinating the work of the librarians in that area. I started in this position well after starting my dissertation research, and I have found that my research has influenced how I do my work and

lead in my area. My research has helped me look at my own work in a different light and articulate the challenges and the potential paths forward in a different way. In the library where I work, I would like to create a culture that supports staff to consider digital inclusion through the Capabilities Approach and Future Studies. I would like to build into our procedures ways of using Future Studies to consider and test out ideas for the future, not just in a strategic planning focus (though that would be a feature), but in the planning of everyday events and services.

Currently, my position is, in effect, a new role, having been vacant for the four years before I took up the post. Work in my area was halted during the COVID lockdown and its aftermath and has not been fully restarted. This means that we are starting from the beginning: to respond to this I am looking at how we can align my portfolio area in a way that will meet the long-term needs of the library. Along with my librarians and my supervisor, I am looking at our responses to digital learning and literacy with the aim of better supporting the library and library staff. I would like to build an approach to digital inclusion that embraces new ideas, looks at current trends and the needs of the community, develops an agreed plan, tests that plan, and then reviews it to evaluate what worked, what did not work and why. This approach would use aspects of Future Studies to help librarians create preferred futures in their areas and use the Capabilities Approach to ensure it aligns with the library's goal and role within the community. Then, using the information gathered, we can adapt our provision to better serve our community. Creating such an approach would also help library staff to adjust and adapt to changing technologies and the potential new ways libraries may have to consider if they are to fulfill their role in the community. As the library system I work with uses a community-focused approach, this will all be done with a focus on the community we serve.

8.3 Future Research

I would also like to continue researching areas of library provision. As my research progressed, I found myself curious about other related topics of research. These areas focus on lifelong learning in library staff, AI and libraries, aging, and digital inclusion, and how libraries can effectively use future studies. For example, I am curious about questions relating to lifelong learning and how this relates to library staff. For example:

- How do libraries support lifelong learning in their staff? Is encouraging lifelong learning helpful and if so, how is it helpful? How does library management successfully empower lifelong learning in staff in a library context?
- How can AI or other new technologies support lifelong learning in library staff?
- Can lifelong learning help staff - or people in general - cope with continuous change in the way we are faced with new technologies? If so, how does it help?
- In the context of lifelong learning in library staff, how can libraries build an educational framework focused on training staff? As libraries are supposed to support community education, it makes sense for learning to be embodied within the library's staff as well.

On the topic of AI, I am also curious about how AI will affect libraries moving forward. How will libraries, and the work of the librarian, change in the face of AI? As I have discussed, AI is having a significant impact on how we research and write, and there are many considerations on the topic – from ethics to library impact.

I also touched on aging when developing my themes. Though it was not universally discussed, I felt that age was a factor of interest in digital inclusion. Specifically, in what ways does how we age affect how we cope with new technologies? Age tends to be a factor in the digital divide in that older people are more likely to be left behind as technology changes. Is this challenge unique to this generation of older adults as they did not grow up with such rapidly changing technology? Will age factor into digital inclusion in future generations? Or will we find that as we reach a certain age, our ability or willingness to adapt to new technologies changes? Lastly, as I discussed in chapters 4 and 7, I believe that Future Studies will be very useful in helping organizations like libraries cope with change. I think it would be beneficial to study how libraries could incorporate and use Future Studies in a planning context.

Lastly, I would like to investigate the broader use of Critical Future Studies combined with the Capabilities Approach for both research and for strategic planning in a library setting. It is a very powerful combination that helps one to both understand and define a strategic goal while moving forward in a meaningful way.

8.2 A Few Final Words

Libraries play a valuable role within communities. As Klinenberg (2018a, p. 220) states:

> "Libraries are the kinds of places where ordinary people with different backgrounds, passions, and interests can take part in a living democratic culture. They are the kinds of places where the public, private, and philanthropic sectors can work together to reach for something higher than the bottom line".

While I have stated that the challenges libraries are facing are daunting, I believe that it is an exciting time to be working in libraries. There is huge potential for the future of libraries: new technologies are changing society and libraries can play an important role in supporting and building capacity in communities to access the potential that digital technology can afford. I agree with Klinenberg (2018a, p. 32) when he says, "all social infrastructure requires investment, whether for development or upkeep, and when we fail to build and maintain it, the material foundations of our society and civic life erode". If libraries are to adapt to the changes that technology has brought and will bring, they need to ensure that their role is clear not only to staff, but to the communities they serve.

The research suggests that society needs to recognise the importance of libraries, and that governments need to invest in our libraries and our library staff and focus on a more structured and united way of moving forward. Having a province-wide structure, with overarching standards, would not only give British Columbia's libraries more power when it came to advocating for themselves, but pooling those resources in a constructive way would help provide better access to all of British Columbia's citizens. I believe this is important because it would help to give libraries the resources and focus that they need not only to rise to the challenges technology is bringing to our society but to fulfill their role with respect to digital inclusion.

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Deborah van der Linde

Signature:

Appendix A

Regardless of the platform or interface, what libraries aim to achieve is to provide access to knowledge, information, culture and lifelong learning in their communities. Agreed upon standards should be defined enough to provide adequate direction to libraries - sufficient for libraries to hold up whatever idea or new concept they are investigating to it and be able to justify whether they should peruse that idea or concept. It means looking at the work libraries do differently – instead of just trying to meet community needs, which is commendable, libraries should look at what their goal is, their focus or the capability they are striving to provide. They then ask how they can deliver that capability to their community? As new technologies come into play, libraries can ask, does this help the library fulfill its role in the community? Would it make that work easier? Or, conversely, does our community need to access and understand this technology to access information, knowledge and culture? Does the library need to provide assistance in this context if people are to be able to have access to the capabilities the library provides? This change in how we look at challenges, be it new technologies or otherwise, will help libraries focus on their mandate more clearly, and it will be the mandate that leads decision making instead of reacting to current circumstances. Given the issue libraries are having with being pulled in many directions, this strategy should help libraries break things down to their core needs, and not get caught up in specific formats and overlooking the bigger picture. This will allow library staff to connect community members with services, programs, or otherwise that are outside the library's mandate but still part of the social services available to the community.

To give an example of how this might work, let's use the example of basic computer classes. (By basic computer classes, I mean introductory courses on how to use a computer, the mouse, basic internet or word processing lessons.) The question would be: should a library provide these types of classes? The answer is: it depends. Though she is referring to political theories, Nussbaum (2006) makes a comment that holds true for this situation, as well. She states, "to assume a rough equality between parties is to assume something so grossly false of the world as to make the resulting theory unable to address the world's most urgent problems" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 235). In this case, not all situations are equal, and situations should be looked at individually to determine the best solution for that situation. Looking at it through a

capability lens, the goal of the library is to provide access to knowledge, information, culture and lifelong learning (American Library Association, 2018; Canadian Federation of Library Associations, 2019). In a digital services context, people would need access to computers, internet, and the specific platforms to access this information, knowledge, etc., to be able to fully have access to this capability. So, it is reasonable for libraries to provide access to digital content in some manner at the library, be it from access to Wi-Fi, computers, tablets, or otherwise. However, what about those who do not have the skills to use those digital platforms? It makes sense for libraries to provide classes on how to access and use those platforms, along with classes on topics like information literacy or algorithmic literacy to better aid people in using them. What about people who do not know how to use computers at all? Should libraries provide basic computer classes? This is where the answer is that it depends on the community in which they are located and the needs of individuals in that community. As Nussbaum (2006) writes, "institutions have both cognitive and causal powers that individuals do not have, powers that are pertinent to the allocation of responsibility" (p.308). Basic computer classes are a step away from the library's mandate, but a lack of basic computer classes could act as a significant barrier to libraries providing access to specific capabilities. Libraries, as the type of institution to which Nussbaum (2006) referred, have more ability than individual community members to overcome barriers of this nature. This is where the community the library is based in, along with having minimum standards for libraries across the province, would help answer the question. In larger urban areas like Vancouver or Victoria, it makes more sense for libraries to focus their attention on services that directly promote access to the specific mandate. These libraries can far more easily partner with other organizations to provide access to these basic computer classes. This prevents libraries and library workers from being stretched too thinly and can better focus their efforts on their given mandate. This in turn will mean that these libraries are more successful in providing access to specific capabilities. However, in communities that are far smaller and more remote, where there is not much more than the library, a school, possibly a grocery store or general store, it becomes more reasonable for libraries to take more of an active role in providing basic computer courses to the public. They may be the only ones available to do so.

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