# public libraries and resilient cities

edited by **michael dudley**

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# preface

n the midst of an economic and technological "perfect storm," the public library is increasingly being seen as a keystone institution in addressing a number of significant and pressing urban and environmental sustainability issues. Libraries are evolving sustainable urban design practices, ecologically sensitive procurement processes, contributing to local economic development, and adapting to rapidly changing conditions, all while maintaining a strong commitment to social equity. From the economic renewal potential of library development projects, to the provision of public space in a privatizing world, to targeting services for the homeless and crisis management during natural (and other) disasters, public libraries have shown themselves capable of contributing to community resiliency—that is, the ability of a community to respond effectively to stressors and challenging circumstances.

This book, *Public Libraries and Resilient Cities,* will explore the roles that public libraries can play in the promotion of ecologically, economically, and socially resilient communities in challenging times. It situates the public library in terms of urban planning concepts as well as current thinking on sustainability issues, and shares success stories in resiliency from library and planning practitioners. For the librarian, this book will hopefully reinforce and strengthen what is already known about the potentialities of the public library, while providing new contexts for its contribution. For the urban and regional planner, this book will demonstrate that the public library is a valuable partner in promoting planning goals.

The collection of essays in this book is intended to demonstrate that public libraries can contribute to a city's diversity, adaptability, and learning capacity. While there is a long tradition in the library literature arguing for the public library's role in addressing urban social problems, I believe the gravity of our

contemporary social, environmental, and economic crises constitutes a renewed and urgent imperative for such an engagement—made more so by the constraints and challenges of economic recession and fiscal retrenchment on the part of governments.

By highlighting case studies of innovation in public library design, management, collaboration, and public services, I hope that *Public Libraries and Resilient Cities* will provide librarians, library administrators, and urban planners with the knowledge, tools, and vocabulary to bridge professional and disciplinary barriers, and to recognize and promote the importance of the public library to successful, equitable, and sustainable cities. Public libraries, it will be argued, are contributing meaningfully to "placemaking," or the creation and nurturing of vital and unique communities that can provide intergenerational equity for their residents. This book will consider the public library—as an institution, a place, a function, and an idea—as one important means by which cities may develop resilience. It considers both precedent and potentialities for public libraries to serve the needs of their communities in terms of increasing their flexibility, diversity, interconnections, and adaptability through contributing to their learning capacity, even as those communities and their needs undergo dramatic change.

In the pages that follow, the contributing authors and myself will demonstrate these synergies. In chapter one I will review some of the major trends facing contemporary urban societies and their public libraries before introducing key concepts in resilience and how they can relate to the public library's mission. With these foundations in place, we then turn to the work of the book's contributors, who for the most part describe their own experiences working in public libraries under challenging circumstances, whether these are straitened economic conditions or outright disaster. In these pages you will learn of efforts to address poverty and social exclusion; to recover from disaster; and to build environmentally sustainable communities.

A number of these themes have, of course, already been addressed in the library literature, and indeed some of them have been currents in the literature for decades; yet in recent years they have come to the forefront. Sanford Berman (2007) and Karen M. Venturella (1998) have urged a greater role for libraries in services to the urban poor, and Kathleen de la Peña McCook showed how libraries can contribute to community building (2000), while Ronald McCabe (2001) has argued for renewing the social mission of the public library in the face of growing social problems.[1] Roger Kemp and Marcia Trotta (2008) examined the role libraries play in urban vitality; Shannon Mattern studied the prominence of new downtown libraries in placemaking (2007); and Kathryn Miller highlighted the ability of public libraries to "green" their operations (2010) to become more sustainable.[2]

The context for the present exploration, however, is that of crisis, both within the library world and the larger society. For that reason its scope is necessarily constrained. Just as cities and their flows of information and commodities are best viewed in terms of their complexity, so too is the relationship between the city and the public library a complex one: it is multifaceted, mutual, dynamic, and one structured by law, convention, and culture. The influences on the public library are many and have been approached from a wide variety of perspectives

by countless authors over decades, as we have seen. A thorough and holistic examination of the public library's relationship with urban conditions would of necessity include discussions of the education system, literacy, democracy, culture, technology, social changes, community economic development, moral values, community capacity, public administration, poverty, and homelessness, to say nothing of architecture and urban planning. Most of these are beyond the scope offered here. My treatment of the broad themes related to the library-city interface in the introduction is deliberately focused on the library and the city in particular, rather than these issues in general.

The intention is not so much to identify innovative public library contributions to community development, ecological sustainability, or social equity, for these areas have been well established by others. Rather, the focus is to explore how such innovations can contribute to a city's ability to *respond to stressors*—whatever they may be. I am interested here in potentialities. What follows is both suggestive and normative, rather than empirical. In other words, I'm not out to "prove" through a collection of essays that a public library *has,* in a particular instance, made a city more resilient than it otherwise might have been without one. Instead—and in the context of anticipated transformations—I am arguing for the *necessity* of the public library as a keystone municipal institution, and that this necessity derives from both the library's traditional functions as well as emerging ones.

While contributions in this collection derive from the United States, Canada, Europe, and Africa, there is a geographic and political emphasis on the contexts in the United States. Not only does the balance of the selections describe the American experience, but the crises facing cities and public libraries emerging from both the global recession and the politicization of urban development and publicly funded institutions are in so advanced a state in America that the book's themes are particularly pertinent there. Canada, by virtue of its more regulated banking and real estate industries, has been to a large extent shielded from the full brunt of the present recession; yet its peculiarly impoverished constitutional arrangements where cities are concerned leave its municipalities even more hamstrung than their American counterparts. While Canadian public libraries have for the most part not faced the same debilitating budget cuts as those in the United States, the contributions and partnerships of which public libraries are capable are just as relevant for Canadian libraries and cities.

This project warrants a little background. It's the product of bridging two professions: I am both a librarian and a city planner. For five years I worked for the Edmonton Public Library in Alberta in a number of capacities, and completed a master's degree in library and information studies at the University of Alberta before moving to Calgary to work for the public library there for four more years. Having fielded during those years thousands of reference questions, visited schools, delivered book readings, performed puppet shows, and read stories to preschoolers, I found rewards in every setting and was unsure in what capacity I would ultimately end up working.

In the course of commuting by bicycle to my job at the Calgary Public Library (CPL) I became politicized regarding transportation issues and soon became engrossed in reading urban studies literature. After coordinating the CPL's par-

ticipation in that city's commuter challenge for a couple of years, I came to the realization that many of the issues that engaged my attention were urban ones. I can still recall the moment in 1997 when I knew that I had to pursue the city professionally. I was riding the train, reading the closing pages of Jane Jacobs's classic book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, when I came across her famous final line: "lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration, with energy enough to carry over for problems and needs outside themselves."[3]

Within a year my wife and I had sold our house and moved to Winnipeg, where I enrolled in the city planning graduate program at the University of Manitoba. As much as I had loved being a public librarian, I felt compelled to understand the problems of the city and hoped to someday be able to address them. I never expected to work in a library again, but as fortune would have it, shortly after graduating I received a phone call from the then-director of the Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg. They had an urban planning library but nobody to run it; would I be interested?

Since 2001 this hybridized career has served me very well; but I have never lost sight of the recognition that the worlds of the library and the city share more than most realize: not only are the fortunes of libraries and their communities intertwined, but because of these synergies, some of the professional interests of the planner and librarian are similarly parallel. An understanding of and engagement with community are therefore paramount to the mission of both professions, as is the goal of creating vital and livable communities.

In the following pages we will learn about the ways in which the public library, in partnership with other institutions and with citizens, contributes to the ability of urban areas to respond to challenges—in other words, to be resilient. Yet this relationship can only flourish where public libraries themselves are allowed to do so as well—and in our present era of shrinking budgets and ideologically motivated attacks on public services this is very much in doubt.

Public libraries must weather this crisis and aid their cities in the process. Inasmuch as libraries are institutions dependent on public funding, they are much more than mere outlets of service delivery; they are a cultural force both ancient and modern, repositories of wisdom and whimsy and, when used to their full potential, generators of innovation, creativity, and new visions for the future.

My hope, then, is that in the pages below we can see how—to crib from Jane Jacobs—"*lively, diverse, intense public libraries contain the seeds of their own regeneration, with energy enough to carry over for problems and needs outside themselves.*"

—Michael Dudley

## NOTES

1. Sanford Berman, "Classicism in the Stacks: Libraries and Poverty," *Journal of Information Ethics* (Spring 2007): 103–10; Karen M. Venturella*, Poor People and Library Services* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998); Kathleen de la Peña McCook,

*A Place at the Table: Participating in Community Building* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2000); Ronald McCabe, *Civic Librarianship: Renewing the Social Mission of the Public Library* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2001).

2. Roger L. Kemp and Marcia Trotta*, Museums, Libraries and Urban Vitality* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008); Shannon Christine Mattern*, The New Downtown Library: Designing with Communities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Kathryn Miller, *Public Libraries Going Green* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2010).

3. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 448.

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# The library and the city

*Libraries stand as a prime example of social capital, which more and more observers see as the secret sauce that makes the difference between a community that thrives and one that struggles.*

—Jay Walljasper

## From crisis to resilience

Braddock, Pennsylvania, was the site of the first of the over 1,600 public libraries that Andrew Carnegie would construct in the United States. Built to serve the needs of the workers at the magnate's Edgar Thomson Steel Works, the Carnegie Free Library of Braddock is a majestic brownstone structure that is still a focal point for the town. Originally constructed in 1888—with a subsequent addition only five years later—the library housed bathing and recreational facilities for Carnegie's steelworkers, including a swimming pool, a gymnasium, and a music hall, as well as the requisite books. Fueled by the steel industry, Braddock was a rapidly growing industrial center, and its population would reach 20,000 people in the 1920s before a gradual decline in the postwar years turned precipitous in the 1970s following the collapse of the American steel industry.

The Braddock Carnegie Library would languish along with its community: its roof gave way in the 1970s and its interior fell into disrepair from exposure to the elements. Even though it had been added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, it still faced demolition, and it was not until later that decade that the local Field Historical Society led a grassroots campaign to save the structure and bought it from the town for one dollar.

However, Braddock's woes continued to worsen: by the turn of the twenty-first century, and having lost nearly 90 percent of its population and been

ravaged by an epidemic of crack cocaine, Braddock became the very epitome of Rust Belt decline. Yet the Braddock Carnegie Library remained open—for all practical purposes the only functioning institution left in town. As the *New York Times* describes it, the library, along with "a medical clinic, auto garages, a florist, an optometrist, three markets, a preschool, a parochial school [and] a dollar store . . . continue[s] to do business alongside empty buildings wrapped in barbed wire."[1]

The Braddock Carnegie Library may have a long history and its share of brushes with erasure, but it has emerged confidently into the twenty-first century: its Facebook page and Flickr account give ample evidence of its imaginative and innovative programming, including art classes, printmaking, music lessons, line dancing, ceramics studio, cooking classes, and community feasts. The town's fortunes have also been boosted by the creativity of its energetic mayor, John Fetterman, whose "do-it-yourself" revitalization efforts made him a media favorite and caught the attention of the Levi Strauss Company. In fact, Levi's in 2010 made the town and its mayor the subject of a multimillion-dollar "Ready to Work" series of short films, part of which focused on the library and its programming, and how the library had become, in their words, "a symbol of the town's resilience."[2]

As the Braddock experience illustrates, the development and resilience of cities and towns have always been bound up with that of their libraries; after all, urbanism itself originated in part from the creation and storage of written records and the correspondingly complex societies those records made possible.[3] By *resilience* we mean the ability of cities, towns, or neighborhoods to respond effectively to changing circumstances and challenges by virtue of their flexibility, diversity, and built-in redundancies. While we often hear of resilience in the face of disaster or crisis, its application need not be so extreme: it pertains instead to a system's inherent organic quality, allowing it, like a successful species or an enduring habitat in the natural world, to continue to maintain its primary functions even as its circumstances change.

An understanding of resilience speaks to the nature of a city's interconnections, as well as its adaptability and learning capacity. In the pages to follow, we will consider how public libraries can contribute to enriching these interconnections, to building a community's adaptive capabilities, and to enhancing learning capacity. In their long-established roles of supporting both informed decision making and genuine democratic processes, as well as the ability of citizens to access the range of information, services, and opportunities that may only be had in the public realm, public libraries surely play a leading role in bolstering urban resiliency.

Discussions about different concepts related to resiliency have gained a great deal of currency in recent years as the challenges confronting urban societies have grown more urgent. Rapid urbanization, escalating poverty, depleting energy resources, climate change, and ever-worsening gridlock have led many to question how cities can be made more livable in the twenty-first century; but their proposals must contend with divergent and competing visions for the metropolis.

One of these visions is associated with a form of urbanism found the world over: a relatively dense population, with buildings four to six stories tall; a mix of shops, businesses, and services within walking distance; a variety of means to

travel; streets filled with a diverse combination of people of all ages; and abundant public spaces. In this city, differences are accommodated more readily because there are so many of them; behaviors are more liberated because of sheer anonymity; and opportunities and choices are readily at hand. Houses, apartments, and shops share the same block, and the yards, if they exist, are small and feature front-facing porches that allow neighbors to engage one another in conversation. Since everything can be reached on foot, independence costs relatively little. The businesses and services are of modest scale and owned by local residents. And the public realm is everything: with private space at a premium, social activities and recreation are largely enjoyed in the company of others. This is the kind of cityspace that Canadian author Chris Turner calls the classic "urban operating system," one that has proved its durability over hundreds and thousands of years, across cultures and across continents.[4]

The other vision is perhaps more familiar to most North American readers: a city divided into zones, with single-family housing congregated by income level and at great distances from apartments; corporate retail "power centers" clustered at major freeway intersections, yet far enough apart and in such hostile surroundings that walking from one to the other would be inconvenient at best and dangerous at worst; employment centers even further away from home, requiring long and solitary commutes by car; and the whole set of functional pods stitched together with freeways. Because housing is grouped by price point, social division and de facto segregation are inevitable. A great number of life opportunities and choices may be available, but at a price paid in time and distance. The private realm dominates, with rear-facing decks and private pools outside and home theaters inside. In this city, independence comes dear; car ownership is required. Public transit, if it is available at all, is infrequent and tediously slow. This city space is dubbed by author James Howard Kunstler as "the Geography of Nowhere," and one that has almost no prospects for viability in a world running out of cheap fossil fuels.[5]

The debate over the direction of the city is very much an open one, and under the best of conditions has always been made problematic by economic competition between cities and their suburbs, often taking the form of a "race to the bottom" in terms of tax rates and concessions to developers. However, this debate has morphed into one not so much about urban form as it is about the nature of American society itself, and the extent to which our freedoms as individuals to live and work where we choose may be infringed upon in an era of dwindling resources. For many, the postwar suburb, with its curvilinear streets devoted exclusively to single-family homes, represents the American Dream and all that comes with it. Any notion that we live in a world of limits, and that this living arrangement may soon be rendered dysfunctional and crippled by such threats as "peak oil" and climate change, is regarded by many opponents of sustainability planning as liberal, elitist claptrap, or in the words of libertarian author Wendell Cox, a "War on the Dream."[6]

On the other side, advocates for a return to traditional urbanism—for what is popularly known as New Urbanism—see an urgent need to increase the density

of our cities, to make better provisions for walking, cycling, and public transit, and for regulations to rein in urban growth, redirecting it inward so as to preserve open space and—critically—farmland.

These worldviews are increasingly at odds and unable to communicate. Worse, the nature and future of the metropolis have, in fact, become inextricably bound up with America's "culture wars" and hence, with its notions of itself as a democracy. The role and extent of governments and markets, the rights and responsibilities of the individual, and the relationship between humans and nature—all these are fundamental to a functioning democracy yet are becoming increasingly contested as both financial and natural resources dwindle; as governments, mass media, and other institutions have lost their credibility; and as ideological extremism undermines certain formerly shared values and assumptions about what constitutes a good society.

There is, however, one North American institution that has always served to mediate such forces in the culture, and that is the public library. Replete with a tradition of both progressive and conserving impulses yet holding a steadfast commitment to an informed electorate and strong democracies, the public library stands as a public institution—indeed one of the few remaining public institutions—that may be credibly seen as a force for reason, insight, wisdom, and inspiration. Not incidentally, it is equally at home in central cities, suburbs, and towns of all sizes. It also finds itself at a historical moment when it is both wildly popular and needed more than ever, but is nevertheless threatened by forces ideologically predisposed to erode it financially, and technologies and economic logic seemingly bent on usurping its purpose.

Like the cities in which they are situated, public libraries are facing challenges—and in some cases, the same challenges. In a time of collapsing civic and state budgets in the United States and a volatile political climate, the long-term survival of the public library in its present form cannot be guaranteed. Like Marylaine Block, author of *The Thriving Library,* I fear for the future of the public library owing to the "perfect storm" it is facing.[7] Carl Grant summarizes the situation this way:

> Libraries are being closed; hours reduced, funding slashed, staff reduced, collections purged, and programs are being eliminated. Beyond the financial crisis with which libraries are already dealing, there are the much larger country-wide issues of a failing commercial real estate market, growing unemployment, and numerous states that are facing bankruptcy. If any of these situations worsens, it will require more federal bailouts and almost certainly it will mean that we will all be facing inflation and further devaluation of our currency. And, each one of those crises will have a continuing major negative impact on libraries as we know them today.[8]

Crushing debt on the part of American city and state governments is resulting in public library funding being squeezed like never before. As this book was being prepared, New Jersey's Camden Library shuttered one branch and turned

its library over to the county; the Detroit Public Library laid off more than eighty staff after a failed fund-raising effort that yielded a mere $100.00; California's Governor Jerry Brown handed down a budget that sliced more than $30 million from public library funding; and the state of Texas passed a budget in May 2011 that all but killed state support for public libraries, and left a mere 1 percent of former funding in place. In Santa Clarita, California, three libraries were privatized and handed over to Library Systems and Services, a company that already operates formerly public libraries in Oregon, Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and Kansas. During the battle over the federal budget in the spring of 2011, New Jersey Republican Representative Scott Garrett introduced a motion—which was defeated—that would have entirely eliminated funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), upon which America's public libraries depend for federal funding.

These issues are hardly confined to the United States. In Canada, Toronto's public library, threatened with significant cuts under the new administration of conservative mayor Rob Ford, was forced to close its Urban Affairs Branch and reduce hours throughout the system, retrenchments which would only mark the beginning of an ongoing battle over its future. And in the United Kingdom, the austere "Comprehensive Spending Review" of the Cameron-Clegg coalition government will likely lead to the closure of at least 400 public libraries, with the possibility of 600 more in the next three years.[9] And with Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Italy all facing default, publicly funded services of all kinds are facing an extremely uncertain future.

In response to these dire trends, Art Brodsky (of the information society lobbying group Public Knowledge) warned during 2010's National Library Week that America's "Public Library lifeline was fraying" because libraries are not seen as an "essential" service but as a discretionary one.[10] Glen Holt concurs, noting that the tradition of public libraries being "free" has led to the popular misconception that they don't require taxpayer support—and besides, since the Internet is "free" then libraries ought to be, as well. Holt adds:

> Technology and the economy have reshaped the "marketplace" for libraries. We really do have competition—pottery stores that give children's story times and an Internet that revises information faster than our staff can provide it [with] headings. And information and books and magazines are distributed faster than ever. We don't read daily newspapers because it is like reading boring history text books. We use syndicated electronic feeds from our favorite communities and blog interpreters to hear the voices we like to hear to offset the pontifical "experts" who in their print pieces act like we have no other sources of news. Where does the library fit into these massive shifts?[11]

An indicator of this disrespect may be seen in an infamous news story broadcast on a Fox News affiliate in the summer of 2010 which suggested that the tax money that was going to public libraries would be better spent on schools, police, or pensions.[12]

The crisis of the public library does not end with mere budget cuts, as significant as they are. As a consequence of the economic downturn brought on by the foreclosure crisis and the collapse of Wall Street in 2008, as well as the resurgent right-wing rhetoric that exploits it, the very *notion* of the "public" has come under attack, be it in the form of taxes, services, publicly funded health care, Social Security, or salaries for public employees. The "Tea Party" insurgency that in 2010 boosted Republican fortunes and filled the party's ranks in Congress has lent even more political will to the efforts to roll back most of the achievements of the New Deal. The highest-profile test case for this agenda has been the state of Wisconsin, where Governor Scott Walker legislated an end to most collective bargaining rights for public workers and championed the privatization of education.[13]

This neoliberal logic is forcing pronounced and debilitating divisions between the private and the public realms and, as a consequence, the erosion of the latter. In an increasingly privatized urban society where the private sector is lionized and any notion of the "commons" is essentially equated in some quarters with socialism, the public library appears extremely vulnerable. As educator Henry Giroux writes:

> Shared sacrifice and shared responsibilities now give way to shared fears and a disdain for investing in the common good. Conservatives and liberals alike seem to view public values, public spheres and the notion of the common good as either a hindrance to the profit-seeking goals of a market-driven society or a drain on the market-driven social order, treated as a sign of weakness, if not pathology, or even worse, dangerous. . . . As social problems are privatized and public spaces commodified, there has been an increased emphasis on individual solutions to socially produced problems, while at the same time market relations and the commanding institutions of capital are divorced from matters of politics, ethics and responsibility.[14]

These conditions are equally at work in America's cities. What began as a foreclosure crisis in 2007–08 has erupted into a full-blown recession that has left millions out of work, thousands of homes abandoned—many of them still unbuilt in what are now "ghost" subdivisions—and increasing numbers of families entering the ranks of the homeless. In 2010 the Conference of Mayors reported an average 9 percent increase in family homelessness in American cities, and services are so overwhelmed that 64 percent of cities reported their shelters are regularly turning families away.[15] With states unable to run deficits and struggling to fund their operations in a climate hostile to public taxation or public investments of any kind, they are instituting massive cutbacks to their cities, and many municipalities are reaching the point where they will be unable to raise capital by issuing bonds, and indeed many are on the brink of defaulting on existing bonds. One of the most dire results is that the American Society of Civil Engineers estimates that the United States has an infrastructure deficit of over $2 trillion, owed not only to aging roads, bridges, and sewer lines, but to decades' worth of neglect from all levels of government. At the same time, global resources and geopolitical

circumstances are driving up the cost of petroleum-based energy and building materials, just as the threat of global climate change has made new investments in more sustainable infrastructure an urgent priority.[16]

On a global scale, environmental conditions are worsening rapidly. In 2010–11 we witnessed a series of devastating climate-related disasters as much of the Northern Hemisphere baked under extreme heat while the South suffered heavy rains. An unprecedented heat wave in Russia incinerated forests and left as many as 15,000 dead, leading to a halt in Russian grain exports. Flooding in Pakistan covered a fifth of the country, injured or displaced 21 million people, and killed nearly 2,000. Over 3,000 people perished in floods and mudslides in China, and millions of Nigerians were displaced by flooding in September. An enormous section of the Petermann Glacier in Greenland broke away in August 2010, and between December and January three-quarters of the state of Queensland in Australia was hit by massive flooding that killed at least thirty-five people and caused an estimated $30-billion hit to Australia's economy—which was already affected by the lethal 2009 brushfires in the state of Victoria that killed 173 people, following almost ten years of drought. In June 2011, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre determined that approximately 42 million people worldwide had fled their homes due to environmental natural disasters in 2010, an increase of 17 million over 2009.[17]

Accompanying these natural disasters—many of them exacerbated by anthropogenic climate change—have been some equally devastating technological calamities. The Deepwater Horizon blowout dominated headlines for much of the middle of 2010 as millions of barrels of oil and highly toxic dispersants fouled the Gulf of Mexico, even as a public information crisis developed around the unknown risks to public health. A similarly prolonged and globally significant disaster befell the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear reactor in Japan following the devastating Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, which killed almost 16,000 people. As of this writing, with reliable public information on the disaster disturbingly scant, the reactors are still spewing radioactivity and engineers speculate that the decommissioning process will take decades.

Taken together, these events point to a future of growing crises—of ever more extreme weather events for which our societies are ill-prepared, and energy regimes demanding ever more risky and hazardous practices, portending further and perhaps even more widespread spills or meltdowns. What's more, they illustrate how, even in our "information age," corporations and governments alike can stifle and obfuscate badly needed information that is in the public interest.

In her 2002 book, *Planning in the Face of Crisis,* Israeli planner Rachelle Alterman reviews the literature on crisis and disaster planning and identifies key attributes of crisis situations requiring special attention in planning, several of which I elaborate on below.[18]

***High degree of uncertainty and dependence on exogenous variables.*** Geological, environmental, and geopolitical conditions around the world have an impact on local conditions and cannot be excluded from planning processes. Where community planners in the past might have focused solely on local demographic or economic data, now conditions are influenced by a host of global factors that

are all interconnected and therefore subject to feedback loops. The price for gasoline, for example, has risen and fallen dramatically and unpredictably in recent years, with almost immediate impacts on agriculture and shipping and therefore the affordability and availability of food.

*High degree of change.* Just as changes to local communities are increasingly global, so too are these changes more dramatic and disruptive—the scale and extent of climate-related catastrophes being only the most obvious. However, the anticipated peaking of the global oil supply will bring with it significant changes to almost every aspect of our globalized society, from transportation to food production to the availability of everyday goods.

*Low degree of knowledge and understanding; existing solutions inadequate.* Having based planning decisions for so many decades on the basis of stable economies, predictable weather, and cheap and dependable energy, existing processes and institutions are not prepared for the challenges that economic, social, and environmental crises may bring. Our institutions, businesses, and democracies—if they are to thrive in the twenty-first century—will be forced to innovate and adapt to these conditions or else they will fail.

*Challenge on the "symbolic" level (goals, norms, and values); low degree of goal consensus.* Part of the reason that our institutions, economies, and practices are not commensurate with the challenges currently facing our globalized society is that the status quo is powerfully supported by sociopolitical ideologies for which concepts such as climate change and peak oil represent threats not so much to the future of humanity as they do to that status quo. The suburban development model which has so dominated our cities for decades is seen as being particularly vulnerable as energy becomes more expensive; yet it is so enmeshed with our notions of the "American Dream" that its partisans are hostile to any alternative. Many Republicans, for example, refuse to accept the legitimacy of climate science, because to do so would require calling into question almost everything they believe is essential to a strong American economy. As Naomi Klein observes, accepting the reality of climate change

> would mean upending the whole free trade agenda, because it would mean that we would have to localize our economies, because we have the most energy-inefficient trade system that you could imagine. . . . That would have to be reversed. You would have to deal with inequality. You would have to redistribute wealth, because this is a crisis that was created in the North, and the effects are being felt in the South. So, on the most basic, basic, "you broke it, you bought it," polluter pays, you would have to redistribute wealth, which is also against their ideology. You would have to regulate corporations. You simply would have to. I mean, any serious climate action has to intervene in the economy. You would have to subsidize renewable energy, which also breaks their worldview. You would have to have a really strong United Nations, because individual countries can't do this alone. You absolutely have to have a strong international architecture. So when you go through this, you see, it challenges everything that they believe in.[19]

What we see, then, is a world in which crises are global and multiplying in complexity and intensity, but derive from contested causes that often threaten us on a symbolic level, thereby forestalling any resolution. Furthermore, efforts to challenge the dominant political economy through popular movements such as Occupy Wall Street become, themselves, threats to this symbolic level of individual and collective identities.

There is, however, one starting point upon which many can agree: if the economic, social, and ecological challenges of the twenty-first century are going to be addressed at all, they will need to be addressed in, with, and through the world's cities. In his 2009 book, *Welcome to the Urban Revolution*, Jeb Brugmann puts it this way:

> If we can just learn how to design, govern, and manage the growth of our cities, we can also design solutions to many of the global problems that confront us. But if we fail to advance sound practices of urbanism . . . we will be designing the global crises of tomorrow.[20]

To meet the challenges posed by these crises, what many urban planners are arguing for now is a transition to a sustainable society—one with the resilience necessary to adapt to the changes ahead. While *resiliency* may contribute to a city's *sustainability*, it is important that we distinguish between them. As a term, *sustainability* has of course become ubiquitous since the United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development defined it in 1987 as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[21] It therefore is generally applied to *forms of development*, characterizing them as having the capacity to meet present and future needs in a balanced and equitable fashion. Sustainability in turn is comprised not just of environmental sensitivity, but economic and social qualities as well—with the stipulation that development should not only boost a community's economy, but preserve or enhance the ecological bases of that community while at the same time distributing resources more equitably.

Cities, on the other hand, are more than a mere type of development. They are complex, constantly evolving collaborations between thousands or millions of people, all of whom are interacting, sharing, and competing over flows of commodities, energy, and information within ecological and material constraints, and under a wide range of governance styles. It is therefore more accurate to refer to cities as *systems*, rather than as static developments, which necessitates a more holistic and dynamic way of describing them. Systems-thinking also requires us to be more process-oriented, rather than geared toward an ideal end-state, as is the case with sustainability. As Andrew McMurray writes,

> Resilience implies action: to be resilient. Resilience implies an inner toughness: the strength, as its etymology tells us, to jump back to a previous state. Sustainability, by contrast, suggests a defensive posture, a desire to stay the same, to resist change without the attractive ability to push back against change and win out. Resilience also connotes

a measure of risk, while sustainability suggests that systems are set: they simply need to be cared for and so carried forward. Resilience acknowledges that risk is a constant, and that systems are always in a struggle against dissipation.[22]

Generally, resilience is understood as the degree to which a complex system is flexible enough to respond and adapt to an externally imposed force or change and thus persist over time while retaining its structure and functions. Conversely, a vulnerable system would be one in which conditions are inflexible, key resources comprise a monoculture, there is little learning capacity, and choices for addressing crises are constrained.

Resilience can be manifested in both ecologies and in human societies; each are considered highly complex systems in which the interrelationships and synergies between elements are fundamentally important to their potential resiliency. Human societies are indivisible from their bases in the natural environment: social-ecological systems such as cities cannot therefore be considered resilient unless these adaptive capacities are present not only in the natural environment but also within the full range of social, cultural, economic, and political relationships.

Highly interconnected systems such as cities, economies, or global ecosystems are seen to be vulnerable because failure in one part of a system can reinforce collapse in another. This can then result in a cascading series of failures. To address these possibilities, resilience principles emphasize self-organization, flexibility, and adaptation through redundancy, distribution of resources, and the development of learning capacity, as well as a loosening of interconnections, making a system (be it a forest or a city) better capable of bearing and absorbing shocks.

In the early years of the twenty-first century several significant and devastating events contributed to a heightened interest in the use of biological models for understanding and repairing social-ecological systems. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on New York and Washington D.C. shocked the world and revealed not only the inherent risk in centralizing operations and resources, but that cities are vulnerable to volatile global geopolitics. Less than two years later the blackout of August 2003 knocked out power to millions of people from Toronto to New York to Detroit, demonstrating the dangerous overextension of North America's outdated and centralized energy technologies. Then the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in 2005 was exacerbated in equal parts by the prior destruction of coastal wetlands for development, the poor state of infrastructure intended to protect New Orleans, and the many social inequities that left thousands of African American residents with no means of escape.

In light of these and other cases of disaster and recovery, the recent literature on hazard mitigation advocates strategies to promote urban resilience, such as ensuring reserves of key resources; equitably distributed and redundant infrastructure; and healthy social networks of trust to ensure people can share information and come to one another's aid.[23] Urban resilience is also viewed in terms of our uncertain future and how human societies might cope with peak oil and climate change. Accordingly, the resilient city of the twenty-first century will need

to include renewable energy; carbon neutrality; dispersed utilities such as small-scale solar and wind rather than massive, centralized power plants; local agricultural and fiber production; closed-loop industries in which one manufacturing process uses the waste or by-products of another; local economies focusing on independent and locally owned businesses rather than being dominated by distant mega-corporations; and a transportation hierarchy built around compact urban environments supportive of walking, cycling, public transportation, and electric vehicles.[24]

The concept of resilience saw its origins during the early 1970s in the ecological sciences. Canadian ecologist Crawford "Buzz" Holling used mathematical models of natural systems to determine what makes them adaptive and resilient. Holling observed that forests have an adaptive cycle of growth, conservation, collapse, regeneration, and regrowth. In the growth stage the ecosystem gathers biomass and becomes increasingly complex and interconnected. Eventually, self-regulation mechanisms kick in, developing efficiencies as specialized organisms fill a range of niches, and the system seeks to conserve these efficiencies. Eventually, however, the forest becomes so oriented to a particular and specific set of environmental circumstances that it can't absorb shocks, be they invasive species or changes to climatic conditions. The introduction of such elements—particularly if the result of violent or abrupt change—can therefore cause collapse of the ecosystem.[25]

Yet in the wake of this collapse comes the opportunity for new organisms to gain hold, which at first are not interconnected to others and so can develop independently. With the arrival of these new opportunistic organisms the system experiences regeneration and reorganization, as well as the beginning of a new growth stage. The ability of such a system to so regenerate also depends on the health of larger-scale complex systems in which they reside; if the climate is stable, the forest will regenerate.

Holling was careful to distinguish between system equilibrium and resiliency. That an ecosystem is stable does not mean it can persist indefinitely; in fact, he argued that long-term homogenous conditions work against resilience by reducing diversity and flexibility, thereby discouraging novelty. By contrast, a resilient system may fluctuate greatly in terms of its condition and populations, but it nonetheless, over time, will demonstrate a greater ability to persist. Resilience is therefore not the result of any one element in the system but the nature of the relationship between the elements. These elements need to be connected to others, but not so rigidly that they can't also operate independently. Implicit in this adaptive model is the ability of a system to self-organize, which requires that its various component parts have coevolved through the presence of flexible network connections that facilitate communication and other adaptive relationships.[26]

The problem, of course, is that modern cities have few if any adaptive capacities. They are completely dependent on rapidly depleting energy sources, inefficiently distributed through an aging and highly centralized network of refineries and power plants. Countless forms of commodities and resources flow through cities, most of which are sourced from remote and often vulnerable locations and delivered via trucks on expensively maintained roadways. A heavy reliance on

private automobiles results in a transportation monoculture that is prone to disruption and chronic inefficiencies, with the result that an estimated $115 billion is lost to the American economy each year because of traffic congestion, and $3.7 billion in Canada.[27] Modern deindustrialized cities fill highly specialized functions, most of which are unrelated to the manufacture and local distribution of necessary goods. Most serious of the many impediments to resiliency is that for the past two centuries cities have been built with an almost complete disregard for natural processes, with watercourses and prime farmland paved over and built upon with structures relying on air conditioning and gas heating to compensate for external environmental conditions.[28]

Major urban planning concepts have emerged over the past two decades under the rubric of a "sustainable cities" or "Smart Growth" agenda to redress these problems, which have become all too apparent after more than a half-century of rapid suburban expansion and automobile-oriented development. As a policy goal, a "sustainable cities" agenda has become fully integrated into urban planning and policy discourse, if not into actual urban outcomes. Despite being conceptualized and operationalized in terms of some generally recognized criteria as part of a vast literature, sustainable development resists universally accepted interpretations.

Meeting the demands of the three major dimensions of sustainable development—the ecological, economic, and social—presents many challenges, many of them political. Classical liberal political philosophy promotes the pursuit of individual liberty; and so, insofar as this depends on the consumption of resources, the ownership of land, and the ability to move about freely, there are perceived limits to what a democratic state may or should reasonably do to impose limits on such pursuits. As such, attempts to institutionalize sustainable development through Smart Growth initiatives have often been countered by social and fiscal conservatives and libertarians, on the grounds that such policies will stifle growth or pose unwarranted limitations on personal freedoms, and all in the name of addressing problems which in their view either aren't problems at all (e.g., there is no shortage of farmland) or are ideologically motivated.[29]

Contemporary measures to integrate Smart Growth in urban planning processes include encouraging a mix of housing types, rather than just single-family homes; investing in public transit systems such as bus rapid transit and light rail that can connect nodes more rapidly and efficiently; promoting "mixed use" developments that combine higher-density housing, shops, services, and amenities around public transportation routes (also known as "transit-oriented development" or TOD); "pedestrianizing" cities by improving "walkability" through well-designed pedestrian and cycling facilities that can enable people to more easily opt out of driving; focusing on infill opportunities such as those on former industrial lands; establishing greenbelts to protect farmland and natural areas; and instituting a suite of incentives, disincentives, and regulatory regimes to make it easier and more attractive for developers to create these patterns of development, rather than conventional, sprawling development. These urban forms reflect the resiliency value of diversity quite significantly by eschewing narrowly defined monocultural and industrial efficiencies of the sort that for so long enabled freeways and mass-produced suburban housing.

Strategies for mixing uses, increasing housing density, improving transit, and increasing options for nonmotorized transportation are not only essential for reducing energy consumption, but also offer city dwellers more choices in terms of where and how to live and how to get around. Compact and walkable developments become magnets for all kinds of desirable amenities such as street cafes, shops, and arts-related activities. While this program of development (or elements of it in various combinations) has been successfully sold as "New Urbanism" in both the United States and Canada, these approaches are, of course, a return to much older patterns of city building. They contribute to more humane urban environments, in which informal encounters between residents and shoppers are frequent, and opportunities for social connections and cohesion are integrated at all scales. The contemporary urban designer Jan Gehl calls these sorts of development "cities for people," which is really the ideal to which any city can aspire.[30]

As a major institution in the public realm, a key destination in which countless social interactions occur on a daily basis, and a primary "place" in any community, the public library can become a key player in such developments, as has indeed been the case in such places as Plainsboro, New Jersey, where its new public library became the focal point for a New Urbanist development, or in Seattle, where Rem Koolhaas's iconic design for its central library helped encourage a wave of ambitious downtown library redevelopment. As Shannon Mattern observes,

> All over the country, public library design projects are rallying communities around them, and the finished buildings are proving themselves beloved community gathering places. These are without question among the most vibrant public spaces in American cities today.[31]

Being community nodes and trip generators, public libraries are ideal anchor institutions in transit-oriented developments, as well as prime locations for cycling infrastructure. When colocated with other community amenities, they can help meet multiple needs and promote "trip-chaining" to reduce vehicle traffic. High design standards in library architecture and landscaping can support placemaking efforts, and library parks, plazas, and meeting rooms afford members of the public valuable public spaces. From Andrew Carnegie's day to our own, public libraries have always had a significant place in the city and as a force for urban development. Yet as important as they are, urban form considerations are not all that the public library can contribute to a resilient city.

## Urban resilience and the public library

As we have seen above, terms such as *resilience* and *sustainable development* resist easy definition and prove contentious when applied to policy decisions. In an effort to more effectively operationalize the term *resilience*, Graeme Cumming and his colleagues sought in a 2005 paper to identify empirically measurable components that could contribute to the resilience of a socio-ecological system. In their view, a system's *identity* is the primary consideration, rather than merely

its functions; and to support its continuance in the face of internal change and external shocks and disturbances, the identity of a system is supported by

- the components of the system;
- their interrelationships;
- sources of innovation; and
- sources of continuity across space and time.[32]

Significantly, Cumming et al. viewed continuity in terms of "system memory, which may take the form of elderly people, seed banks, social and biological legacies that remain after disturbances, customs and taboos, laws, or formal archives and libraries that become repositories of knowledge and also of identity."[33] For our purposes then, we can view the public library as an essential component of a community's "system memory," and one that assists the community in maintaining its identity and retaining access to local knowledge and history.

At a basic level the public library is a fundamental component of the public realm, along with the school system and other public services, and should ideally play a key role in assisting users in navigating the relationships between those components. The public library also fosters a community's learning capacity, by affording the opportunity for individuals and groups to gain new knowledge, create needed innovations, and forge new connections between social actors. Those libraries operating in metropolitan or regional systems fulfill a basic requirement for resilience through their distributed and redundant resources, rather than concentrating materials in one—potentially vulnerable—location. Each library provides a neighborhood reference point and is a memorable place; and many municipalities have sought to reinforce their urban identities through architecturally significant buildings.[34] Civic identity has always been expressed through memorable buildings and urban design, and this was certainly the case with Andrew Carnegie's program of public library building. In these ways, the roles and functions of the public library are quite consistent with the concept of resilience through the support of a system's identity.

Library practitioners, policy makers, and theorists have long made the connection between the "system identity" that is the city and the roles and functions of the public library. Born of the progressive beliefs in the positive and ameliorative effects of public interventions in social conditions, as well as in the ability of knowledge to elevate the individual and instill normative values, the modern public library has always been seen as more than another public service. It has been associated—at least by its advocates—with a faith in its power to yield broader social, economic, and cultural outcomes in society. As long ago as 1921, librarian and educator Arthur Bostwick would write in *The Library and Society* that

> the public library is destined to play an important part, to exercise an incalculable influence in the solution of the social problems of to-day. . . . The wisdom needed for this task is not to be found in schools or colleges but from the higher education of mature minds—the masses of the people—which the public library alone can give.[35]

While its initial missions may have been connected more with instilling middle-class values among surging immigrant populations, the public library's increasingly complex relationship with surrounding neighborhoods and the larger metropolitan context became apparent as North American cities grew rapidly following the Second World War. Librarians and municipal leaders alike began to wonder: what roles do and should public libraries fill in the modern city, and how should these roles change as cities themselves have changed?

The first systematic examination of this relationship was undertaken as a part of the Public Library Inquiry (1947–52) conducted by the Social Science Research Council at the request of the American Library Association (ALA). Rather than carrying out an internal (and potentially biased) review, the ALA sought the impartial observations of trained social scientists, in the hope that the findings would bolster their own professional assumptions about the value of the public library and thereby provide an empirical basis for their own lobbying efforts. To the dismay of many partisans, the inquiry concluded that the public library was not, in fact, meeting the demands of the masses but rather of a more educated stratum of society.[36]

With the rapid demographic, spatial, and economic shifts in the postwar era, public library administrators and city managers were forced to acknowledge that service models from earlier in the century were no longer commensurate with the forces at work in the contemporary American city. At a three-day symposium in 1963 on "Library Functions in the Changing Metropolis," librarians, administrators, planners, scholars, and political scientists gathered in Dedham, Massachusetts, to consider the changing metropolis: the demographic and financial implications of the rapid abandonment of traditional urban areas for the suburbs on the part of a white, middle-class, and print-oriented public, and what these trends would mean for library services. In the resulting volume, *The Public Library and the City*, the editor Ralph Conant asked:

> Libraries have . . . been one of the places where the talented of the lower classes have learned middle-class values. What role should the public library play in acculturation and education of low income groups who suffer economic deprivation because of functional illiteracy? Will the great central institution gradually be dismantled and even abandoned . . . [to deal with] the demand of outward moving middle classes . . . [through the] spatial dispersion of library facilities? [37]

Interestingly—and consistent with the modernist and utilitarian worldview dominating both urban planning and library thought at the time—the symposium also (uncritically) noted that

> [the urban] planner views the public library as an institution that should achieve publicly desirable goals and should be planned so as to achieve these goals with a maximum number of desirable consequences, a minimum number of undesirable ones, and at the lowest possible cost.[38]

The perennial debate over prescriptive vs. demand-based collection development (i.e., "good" books as opposed to popular fiction) was, as such, framed in terms of community planning outcomes: that "a library that is not used sufficiently is a waste of resources even if its goals are noble."[39] Accordingly, the contributors to the symposium focused on how to serve cost-effectively both a dispersed (mostly white and suburban) middle class as well as increasingly ghettoized African American populations. The very complexity of American metropolitan areas argued against any sort of hard-and-fast formula. This meant that each library must be planned according to an empirical assessment of the populations in their respective service areas:

> In middle class areas the contemporary library is desirable, with its emphasis on child student and nonfiction readers. In low income areas . . . the middle class library is unsatisfactory. Here a library is needed that invites rather than rejects the poorly educated. It should be geared to two types of readers: the small number who are already motivated, and may even have the middle-class values and skills that are prerequisites to using the library . . . [and those who] would like to read but are afraid or scornful of the ethos of the middle class library.[40]

This awareness grew throughout the 1960s to a more focused attention on the crisis in America's cities. As Kathleen de la Peña McCook (2001) recounts, public libraries received funding from President Johnson's War on Poverty programs, and the ALA in 1968 created its Coordinating Committee on Service to the Disadvantaged and held the first meeting of the Social Responsibilities Round Table the following year.[41] The need to better respond to growing social needs in that era also led to the widespread development of community information collections that indexed and linked patrons with social services.[42] In 1990, the ALA Council endorsed a "Library Services for Poor People"; while some critics like Sanford Berman have pointed out that the policy has been inadequately promoted and unevenly implemented in the intervening years, rapidly changing economic realities in the United States are compelling public libraries to provide more attention to low-income clientele.[43, 44] A remarkable example of this is the San Francisco Public Library, which has hired a professional social worker to provide visitors in need with referrals to social services.[45]

The ability of public libraries to address the needs of diverse urban users is inherent in their structure. In a 2009 paper, geographers Ruth Fincher and Kurt Iveson found that public libraries are a form of urban infrastructure that does not merely embrace diversity but helps to distinguish different kinds of diversity. Specifically, they observe that there are three social phenomena in cities that affect the ability of an individual or group of individuals to access a city's services: wealth and poverty; social status; and what they refer to as "hybridity," or the antiessentialist recognition that individuals are complex and can't be defined and limited by any classification. The public library, they write, negotiates these social realities through redistribution, recognition, and encounter.[46]

Just as much urban planning is inherently redistributive, in that it seeks to reduce to the extent possible locational disadvantage by distributing urban assets across the city, Fincher and Iveson point out that public library branches are situated so as to increase the potential for users of all incomes to access them. However, this redistribution isn't enough: giving people a right to urban amenities doesn't mean they will feel free to access them if they feel they don't "fit in" as a result of social stigma and denigration. This requires, they argue, the act of *recognition*, or the acknowledgment that certain classes of people have been subject to discriminatory cultural forces that have prevented them from full participation in society. There is an important distinction the authors make here that such recognition on the part of the public library shouldn't be merely affirmative but relational; that is, confirming the identity of a person within a particular social classification (e.g., African American) is not nearly as important as doing so within a context that has some bearing on the *relational* dimensions of these classifications. In other words, library programs and services should recognize the extent to which structural barriers and negative cultural patterns can affect a person or group of people based on potential social classifications. Determining if users are restricted in their freedom to use the library based on status relations, write Fincher and Iveson, is much more important than affirming social identities.[47]

The third dimension identified by Fincher and Iveson is perhaps the most affirming of the public library's identity and purpose: that of encounter. They argue that the goal of both urban planning and public libraries is not to let people "be themselves"—and thus remain fixed within social categories—but rather, through encounters with other people, to develop new social relations and through them develop new identities. The contribution that public libraries can make in this exploration, they stress, is that, unlike any other public space in which people may gather, the level and type of conviviality required for these interpersonal transformations are facilitated by the library through its collections and services. A public realm alone is not enough:

> To step into a public library is to step into a space that is shared with "strangers," in the form of other library users and library staff. As such, the forms of encounter that might occur between these strangers are mediated by the normative expectations about how a library should be used that are extant in any given library. . . . One of the remarkable features of "library-ness" most commonly identified in research on contemporary public libraries concerns the diversity of uses and users that libraries can accommodate. Reading newspapers, checking community notices, checking email, surfing the Internet, doing homework, relaxing with a coffee, attending lectures and community meetings, listening to live or recorded music, discussing a book with staff or other users, flirting, meeting and making friends. . . . All of these encounters are significant. They are premised on the capacity of those who use the library to mutually negotiate their common status as library users in

the moments of their encounters. This is a process of mutual (if tempo-rary) identification which transcends fixed identity categories.[48]

Such encounters within the library can contribute to community-building, as can the many services through which these encounters occur. However, as McCook (2000) showed, while public libraries and librarians have long engaged in a broad range of activities supporting the development of their communities, they have been less proactive in putting themselves "at the table" of community planning efforts.[49] More recently, however, the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) has docu-mented the extensive work being done in Chicago in engaging their communities by recognizing and building on existing assets and relationships between indi-viduals and their institutions.[50] Numerous cases cited by the ULC demonstrate how public library collections and services can, as "place-based assets," enhance and strengthen economic development and revitalization efforts.[51] Furthermore, many public libraries have joined in the efforts to build sustainable communi-ties. As Kathryn Miller found in her 2010 book, public libraries are going "green" through energy-efficient building practices, reducing water consumption, green procurement, a shift away from the use of toxic chemicals in their buildings, and fulfilling environmental education goals through programming.[52] She suggests,

> Environmental leadership and education are growth opportunities for the twenty-first century public library . . . Environmental education is yet another way the public library can help its community take another step towards societal progress.[53]

For all the potency or effectiveness of these diverse missions, though, it remains problematic that public libraries in the United States have no unifying, national mission. Each public library defines its own mission and tailors it to the library's respective community, and while this may afford benefits for those com-munities, Glen Holt counters that this is also the public library's greatest weak-ness: without a statement of their national importance, there is, as a consequence, no commensurate national mandate or funding.[54]

Such a national mandate would, unfortunately, bring with it a significant political dimension, and the requisite need to navigate and contend with the divisiveness that has always characterized America's political culture. In his 2001 manifesto, *Civic Librarianship*, Ronald McCabe views public libraries within the context of America's "cultural civil war" between the forces of liberalism and lib-ertarianism. He argues for a return to civic librarianship that can inform and participate in the "community movement," the characteristics of which include

> discovering social and political common ground; renewing a social morality that balances rights and responsibilities; collaborating to solve social problems; strengthening institutions and civil society; reexam-ining zoning laws and community planning to enhance civic life.[55]

According to McCabe, the foundation of the culture wars is the tension between the empiricism of the Enlightenment and the reaction of Romanticism,

which rebelled against the notion that there is one truth, one commonly agreed-upon structure of the world which can be revealed through objective study. Taken to its extreme, he argues, Romanticism becomes anti-intellectual, anti-social, anti-education, and hyper-individualistic, for it supposes that humans can and should exist in their purist form untainted by civilization and without reference to common understandings and consensual approaches to the running of a civil society—essentially a denial that a society should be built on shared knowledge.[56]

McCabe sees a linkage between the New Left's reaction against the state born of a rejection of war and unjust social policies, and that inherited by the New Right in the 1980s in their own attacks on the interventionist state. The boundaries in American political life have thus grown more pronounced. As discussed above with regard to urban development, libertarians are consistently opposed to governmental authority and control over one's life, be it economic or social. Liberals, meanwhile, are statist on socioeconomic issues but libertarian on moral ones; conservatives the opposite. Yet, what should be seen as positions on a continuum are instead, in McCabe's view, positioned as "false choices . . . between anarchy and authoritarianism in the life of society and between relativism and absolutism in the intellectual life."[57] McCabe doesn't necessarily blame the withdrawal of public life (as documented by Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone*) as a result of countercultural and libertarian thought, but stresses that these philosophies validated these trends in the mind of the public. The response of what McCabe refers to as the "community movement" is to seek balance between the extremes of social conservatives and individualists. No group can impose their will on a pluralistic society; at the same time, no society can function as a collection of atomized individuals who share no social norms or are incapable of engaging in dialogue. In this regard McCabe echoes Bostwick, who in *The Library and Society* (1921) noted,

> Those who think on this subject and who really desire the improvement of society . . . are divided over the question whether mankind shall progress by the path of individualism or that of collectivism. Extremists assure us that these paths go in opposite directions, or traverse each other at right angles. The truth is they run parallel; and we have been travelling both, now advancing more on one and then on the other, towards the ultimate goal of humanity—the perfection of society through the elevation of the individual, the perfection of the individual through the improvement of society. Each helps the other; neither can be independent of the other.[58]

Interestingly, McCabe identifies mainstream public library services as distinctly libertarian. Where the public library movement in the United States has its roots in the Enlightenment view on progress and the perfectibility of mankind, in the wake of cultural civil war of 1960s, what had been an attempt to balance individual enlightenment and an informed citizenry was replaced in the 1980s with a focus on the autonomy of individuals. This happened to appease both the expressive individualism of the left and the utilitarian individualism on the right. The result for McCabe, however, is that public libraries have put themselves in the

position of educating without actually educating, and cites the example of the 1980 American Library Association report *Planning Process for Public Libraries,* which assumed that libraries do not lead communities but that communities determine what kind of libraries they need. Libraries therefore can't be evaluated by an external standard. The public library is as a consequence required to shift from education to merely providing information, leaving it to the individual to determine what to do with that information. The effect, McCabe argues, has been crippling:

> The new institution no longer claimed to overtly educate the community, no longer claimed to prescribe specific social outcomes. Librarians and trustees . . . were no longer confident in their ability to understand the world; they no longer believed in the right to exercise the social authority of educators and community leaders. This led to a shift in the missions of the institutions from education for a democratic society to the more utilitarian mission of providing access to information for individuals.[59]

Absent a broader social mission, McCabe warns, the public library has no moral foundation and stands for purely utilitarian goals, an amoral component of the marketplace.[60]

This also parallels the postwar trajectory of urban planning. Demoralized and delegitimized as a result of both disastrous early postwar planning (such as freeway construction and dehumanizing public housing projects) and the brilliant assault on its hubristic excesses by Jane Jacobs in her 1961 classic *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, planning largely retreated from any pretense of societal leadership and assumed a largely reactive stance, essentially as an adjunct of the development industry. In a 2011 essay on the legacy of Jacobs, planning scholar Thomas Campanella writes,

> [Jacobs's critique] diminished the disciplinary identity of planning. . . . And once the traditional focus of physical planning was lost, the profession was effectively without a keel. It became fragmented and balkanized, which has since created a kind of chronic identity crisis—a nagging uncertainty about purpose and relevance. . . . We have become a caretaker profession—reactive rather than proactive, corrective instead of preemptive, rule bound and hamstrung and anything but visionary . . . We are entering the uncharted waters of global urbanization on a scale never seen. And we are not in the wheelhouse, let alone steering the ship. We may not even be on board.[61]

In the case of planning, Campanella warns that urban development processes can all too easily be derailed by a culture of pluralism, hyperindividualism, and relativism, where all views are seen to be equally valid. Similarly, Ronald McCabe believes that, without a moral claim for public libraries, the yardstick for their success is that they are used and therefore justify public support. The dilemma about this transformation (which McCabe stresses is not yet complete) is that the

public library has become a social institution premised on unbounded individualism rather than collective interests.

The alternative for McCabe is a public library based on the emergent community movement that seeks to balance individual aspirations with a recognition that we are all members of a larger society to which and for which we have responsibilities. While McCabe's efforts to conflate the right's authoritarian turn and the left's pluralistic relativism are not entirely convincing, his principal contention is paramount to the objectives of this book: that public libraries should move from a libertarian model in which they are primarily a distributor of materials and services to a communitarian one in which the public library assumes a leadership role in addressing the needs of contemporary urban society through the distribution of materials and provision of services.[62]

For Kathleen de la Peña McCook, the public library must also be more engaged than it has been. In her 2000 book *A Place at the Table* she points out that public libraries have been largely absent from community planning processes, and have themselves been neglected by those leading these efforts, such as the New Urbanists. Seen as necessary but essentially passive institutions, public libraries, she argues, must be much more proactive about inserting themselves into community visioning exercises and—literally—placing themselves at the table whenever civic-minded organizations gather. As it stands,

> [public] library services . . . are not well understood by community-building organizations . . . [and] librarians have not been integrally involved with community visioning efforts and thus have not been identified as part of the comprehensive community-building strategies being developed today. The lack of librarian participants among the rosters of community visioning projects means that the library message is not being received.[63]

McCook finds this is a "puzzling situation," as her analysis of the community-building work with which public libraries are already engaged—from arts and culture, to local economic development, to employment training, family services, and welfare—"would, by any definition, be counted as substantive community-building activity."[64]

Glen Holt would likely argue that this absence is in part owed, again, to the lack of any unified policy or financial support from the federal government. The closest proxy, he notes, is that provided by the Urban Libraries Council, to "Strengthen the Public Library as an Essential Part of Urban Life."[65] Since 1971, the Urban Libraries Council has provided institutional and advocacy support for North America's public libraries in helping them serve the needs of their cities and has been recognized for this role. In its 2005 publication *The Engaged Library* the ULC offered not only examples drawn from Chicago for how public libraries can connect with their cities, but offered a "toolkit" that illustrates many of McCabe's and McCook's points: it aids libraries in identifying potential linkages with other institutions and associations, as well as community assets such as public spaces and community leaders. The final diagram in the report boldly situates the library in the center, with a host of community elements, assets, and attributes

arrayed around it, with arrows in each case drawn in both directions, revealing the library to be the focal point of transactions of all kinds.[66] It is important that these relations are bidirectional, for they connote mutual benefit. The library may be a "magnet," but it is not the only center of gravity in a city, just as no city draws all resources and assets to itself. Each has drawing power, but these powers may only be augmented through the power of their relations with others.

It is these relations that permit the proactive stance advocated by Holt, McCabe, and McCook. It is not enough that the public library remain a mere vessel from which users can draw information as they see fit, nor to limit itself to offering spaces in which democratic processes may transpire according to the desires of participants, whomever they may be. The challenges of the twenty-first century are going to require the public library to actually insert itself into the democratic process, to adopt—as McCabe would have it—"civic librarianship that seeks to strengthen communities through developmental strategies that renew the public library's mission of education for a democratic society."[67]

## Thinning the container, strengthening the magnet

It is in the realm of democracy that the library and the city—and their attendant professions of librarianship and city planning—are connected most intimately. The mission of the public library movement has always been associated with providing access to information so as to encourage an informed citizenry and thus a healthy democracy. Molz and Dain (1999) state:

> Hallmark of a democratic society, the public library is an open, community-based institution ensuring the public's right to know, a defender of the free and open mind. Libraries remain complex, democratic, one-stop shopping and consultation centers for all manner of free (or mostly free) information, learning, cultural enrichment and entertainment for people of all ages and persuasions . . . as physical and intellectual presences they retain powerful symbolic as well as utilitarian importance in American Society.[68]

Primary among the public library's function in this regard is its ability to provide what Ray Oldenburg calls a "third place," a public gathering spot away from home and work where people can engage in meetings both informal and formal—and such places are in short supply in an increasingly privatizing world, where shopping malls can provide only the barest facsimile of a public realm.[69] This is why Jay Walljasper grants such prominent place to libraries—and the information commons—in his book *All That We Share: A Field Guide to the Commons.* For Walljasper, the library is a prime example of the "commons"—an idea around which all communities were once based but is now both unusual and under siege through existing and sought corporate ownerships. The commons is that which we hold in common—natural elements such as air and water but also physical places within the city such as parks, sidewalks, and libraries. It is also made up

of our socio-technological artifacts such as the airwaves, the Internet, and Wikipedia.[70] The library, as a physical repository for information as well as a place for sharing it, becomes not just a part of the information commons, but the bridge between this intangible commons and that of the city itself.

In the city we see the location of the more traditional commons of streets and squares where free assembly is guaranteed, where institutions of democratic processes are concentrated, and where social categories are expressed spatially, even if they remain unacknowledged. Truly public spaces offer the possibility of multiplying the efforts of individuals to motivate and institute transformational shifts in governance and policy changes challenging these categories. In the wake of the 2011 "Arab Spring," particular attention was directed by urbanists to the fact that these events transpired in ancient cities with real and vital public spaces such as Cairo's Tahrir Square—and that the public realm had made these revolutions possible in a way that social media alone never could have.[71]

The professional planner, in seeking to effect incremental or dramatic transformation in spatial and social arrangements, must engage political actors within the accepted conventions of democracy—which, in their turn, public libraries nourish and defend. The city and the library can also be said to be related structurally, in the sense that they are spatially organized through zoning and classification, and indexed via cataloging and street coordinates, all in an effort to, as Alberto Manguel has it, contain the uncontainable through an imposed "vision of the world."[72]

For here we come to the most germane of all these interrelationships and shared commitments: the city and the public library are both at once containers and magnets. In his classic book *The City in History*, Lewis Mumford identified the origin of human settlements in the various forms of storage containers that allowed people to accumulate and organize surplus goods, and the city itself would become humanity's greatest container. In becoming the focal point for surplus, as well as for the organized hierarchical societies designed to organize and distribute this surplus, the city would also become a magnet that would draw people and economic activities from broad regions. Over time, he wrote, as societies and their technologies, literature, culture, and civilizations became more sophisticated, the container of the city (most coherently expressed in its massive external walls) became thinner, and eventually became—in the words of historian Arnold Toynbee—"etherealized" or dematerialized, rendered intangible or symbolic. Walls give way to recognized convention and lines on maps, even as the power of the urban magnet grows. Mumford saw that the dynamic between etherealization and magnetism was a constant in urban societies, and in the closing pages muses on what he called the "invisible city"—the emerging potentialities of telecommunications and the distributed interconnections of resources around the globe.[73]

The Internet age has permitted the etherealization of the city in ways that Mumford could never have imagined. Employment, services, shopping, entertainment, and recreation can now all be had online, and people can work from anywhere. However, where some early observers saw in these trends an end of the need for cities, quite the reverse has happened. As Frances Cairncross predicted in her 2001 book *The Death of Distance*, cities and urbanity have actually

taken on a new importance in the digital age, as magnets for culture, recreation, and creativity.[74] This is a major thread of the whole "creative class" argument in urban planning and economics articulated by Richard Florida—that those cities that will thrive in the twenty-first century will be those best able to provide a high quality of life for creative workers, in the form of amenities, street life, and cultural infrastructure—including public libraries.[75] As the container is thinned, the magnet has grown more powerful. In his 2011 book *The Triumph of the City*, Edward Glaeser suggests that this shouldn't surprise us: after all, he writes,

> a few decades of high technology can't trump millions of years of evolution. Connecting in cyberspace will never be the same as sharing a meal or a smile or a kiss. . . . The most important communications still take place in person, and electronic access is no substitute for being at the geographic center of an intellectual movement.[76]

In other words, the role of—and demand for—great urban spaces has only grown in the Internet age. This has been particularly the case where public libraries are concerned. Far from being rendered obsolete by the digital age, the public library—once seen only as a "container" of paper documents—has become even more of a magnet for users, who have flocked to gain access to public workstations for Internet access, particularly with the onset of the current recession. Indeed, as Shannon Mattern notes,

> A number of new public library buildings have played significant roles in downtown revitalization projects, and they have helped cities—many in a stage of transition during the 1990s, as these libraries were coming into being—to redefine their civic identities. In short . . . urban public library buildings have loudly and convincingly reassured their relevance in this age of informational and urban sprawl. They are potent forces in giving shape and character to both the urban and the information environments.[77]

According to a 2010 report by the Institute for Museum and Library Services, nearly a third of the U.S. population over fourteen used their public libraries to access the Internet; and it is now among the most sought-after public library services.[78] As the recession surged in 2009 public library circulations in the United States were up 6 percent, many of them seeking assistance with job searches.[79] The importance of facilitating Internet use was highlighted in May 2011 when Frank LaRue, the special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression for the United Nations, submitted a report indicating that access to the Internet—and more particularly the physical infrastructure that makes it possible—was a human right, as it is a key element in our ability to communicate and express ourselves.[80]

Once merely at the service of their neighborhoods and cities, public libraries are now connected to every other library and to the global library of data, media, information, and opinion stored on the Internet. Every aspect of information pro-

vision has been etherealized. Books are increasingly being read in digital form: by mid-2010 Amazon reported that e-books outsold hardcovers, while in the last three months of that year they outsold paperbacks.[81, 82] Reference services have been largely "disintermediated" by Google, to the extent that the company's name has become a verb synonymous with searching for information. Public libraries are even "loaning" e-books, although the business model is still being worked out, with publishers wanting libraries to repurchase rights to e-titles after a certain number of "circulations."[83] The façade of this "etherealized" library, wrote William Mitchell in his *City of Bits*,

> is not to be constructed of stone and located on a street in Bloomsbury, but of pixels on thousands of screens scattered throughout the world. . . . Reading tables become display windows on screen . . . the huge stacks shrink to almost negligible size, the seats and carrels disperse, and there is nothing left to put a grand façade on.[84]

The relationship between the library and the user has, appropriately, changed as citizens become "prosumers" that both produce information in the form of tweets, blog entries, and YouTube videos, and consume it on an ever-more portable array of devices. With the installation of wireless hotspots in public spaces (including, of course, libraries themselves) and 3G and 4G networks servicing smartphones, iPads, and other tablets, "the library" has become etherealized to the point where each of us can now access more information in our smartphones than anyone could hope to read in a hundred lifetimes. For Alberto Manguel, writing in *The Library at Night,* the Enlightenment vision of a "world encyclopedia, the universal library, exists, and is the world itself."[85] James Gleick, too, notes in his 2011 book *The Information* that the world has in essence become a "Library of Babel" and all of us are its librarians.[86]

But just as the physical commons were once enclosed and the public spaces in cities are largely privately owned (such as coffee shops), so too is the Internet commons under threat of enclosure. What is known as "Net neutrality"—the unfettered and free Web through which any website may appear on a list of results based on the search terms used—is being challenged around the world by large telecommunication corporations seeking the ability to charge for premium access to the Web, as well as those who would like to restrict access to certain sites on ideological, political, and "security" grounds. Under the privatized, "tiered" Web model being promoted by the telecom companies, some could pay for the privilege of greater access to the Web and to dominate search results, while smaller, less endowed organizations could be crowded out. The passage in the United States of the Federal Communication Commission's Open Internet Order in December 2010, which mandated transparency on the part of Internet service providers and forbade blockage of lawful content as well as discrimination of access, has not quelled this debate; as of this writing, Republicans are vowing to overturn it. (In November 2011, the Senate voted to reject Republican opposition to the FCC rules in support of neutrality announced in September, although several telecommunications corporations, including AT&T Verizon, are

planning court challenges, which may be heard in 2013.) While there have long been debates over censorship in libraries, their noncommercial nature as well as their institutional commitments and histories make similar prospects affecting libraries virtually unthinkable.

Yet, for all our access to "free" information and our pretensions of living in an "Information Age," it is apparent that we are, ironically, actually living in a shockingly misinformed society. Studies and polls continually reveal that large minorities of Americans hold demonstrably false beliefs, not only about science (i.e., that the Earth is only thousands of years old) but about recent history (WMDs were discovered in Iraq), current events (President Barack Obama is a foreign-born Muslim), and their civic realm. Worse, studies also show that political partisans, when confronted with documented facts that contradict such beliefs, defend those beliefs even more adamantly.[87] The deterioration of political discourse has become such that, in April 2012, *Chicago Tribune* columnist Rex Huppke wrote a popular (and only somewhat tongue-in-cheek) obituary to Facts, in which our shared understandings of the world, after reeling from decades of such assaults as the Monica Lewinsky affair and President George W. Bush's justifications for the war in Iraq, finally succumbed. In it, he quotes Northwestern University sociology professor Gary Fines, who counters that, "facts aren't dead. If anything, there are too many of them out there. There has been a population explosion."[88] Which is precisely the problem: there may be exponentially more information available, but it has become commensurately more difficult to discern its provenance, quality, and appropriateness. In his book *Just How Stupid Are We?* (2010) Rick Shenkman observed that the delusions many Americans hold "can be traced to our mistaking unprecedented access to information with the actual consumption of it."[89]

None of this is to say that facts should not be contested; far from it. The act of challenging or refuting assumptions is a fundamental part of any democratic process. However, such counterarguments must themselves be defensible by reference to some external form of validation, be it empirical evidence, traditional knowledge, the precedent of literature, or a body of humanist ethics, not merely faith or opinion. This is why libraries have always been at the foundation of the intellectual life of any society that builds them, for they afford that society the opportunity to store, organize, refer to, and build upon such information for the present and into posterity. However, libraries are by definition more than merely accumulations of information; their curatorial function in the service of collection building lends rigor as well as transparency to the formation of collective memory.

The universal library of the Internet, by contrast, provides us opportunities for information consumption that beggar the imagination; the sheer volume of media channels, including cable, satellite, and web-based content represents an unprecedented information environment with which we are scarcely equipped to cope. As Bill McKibben demonstrated in his 1993 (and pre-Web) classic *The Age of Missing Information,* the ironic result of this bombardment of mass media is that our psyches have become polluted with inanities while the essential truths about how the natural world actually works have become almost unknown to us.[90] Without such moorings, our ability to distinguish the reasonable from the

irrational appears to have become terminally crippled, and a whole range of opinions have arisen in the body politic that compete with one another—on the basis of evidence whose legitimacy no opponent will admit. In what is arguably among the most consequential of these cases is the "debate" on whether or not climate change is a hoax, furiously waged online even as swathes of Russia burned, parts of Australia drowned, and the American Midwest was torn apart by tornados. The extent of disinformation and misinformation on a wide range of essential issues—much of it officially sanctioned and promoted—prompted the organization Project Censored in 2010 to declare a "truth emergency," which they describe as

> the lack of purity in news brought about by . . . propaganda and distraction. It is the state in which people—despite potentially being awash in a sea of information—lack the power of discernment, creating a paucity of understanding about what it all means. In short, we are living in a time when people do not know whom to trust for accurate information and thus yearn for the truth. . . . So many critical subjects remain . . . unreported or so tightly wrapped in propaganda that they literally make no sense. Faced with accounts that aren't helping them understand or fix their deteriorating circumstances, people are growing angry and turning to other information sources, primarily on the Internet.[91]

This mass shift to online media is not without cost. There is growing evidence that the constant availability of online information simply isn't good for us or our social relationships. Studies are showing that Internet users who are continually tracking news are subject to constant stress, and even while our brains are processing and synthesizing all this new (and often distressing) data, those parts of the brain responsible for empathy and emotional intelligence remain inactive.[92] We may become intellectually stimulated by what we read, but remain unmoved even to the needs of those around us. Sherry Turkle writes in her 2010 book *Alone Together*, we have become so accustomed to the shallow, frequent, and decontextualized interactions on sites like Facebook and Twitter that our real-world relationships are suffering.[93] As two additional titles from 2010 confirmed, there is still much to debate about the Google era. Nicholas Carr's cautionary *The Shallows* argued that the Web is rewiring our brains and crippling our ability to concentrate, while Jaron Lanier's *You Are Not a Gadget* observed that the "hive mind" of the Web threatens our sense of individuality and of humanness itself.[94]

These phenomena are, of course, the complete antithesis of those associated with the experience of using a library. Where libraries concentrate our focus, invite contemplation, and increase social capacity through encounters and collaboration, the Web, by its very structure, encourages hyperindividuality and superficiality. Its reach in terms of potential collaboration may be unmatched, but the quality of these encounters remains open to debate. We must remember that the Web is a tool, and like any other may be overused, abused, or used inappropriately; the library, by contrast, is both a *place* and an institution, an "addiction" to which may pose a risk of mere eccentricity, rather than outright anomie.

This is one more reason why any talk of the Web replacing the library is not just shortsighted in the extreme but contrary to our needs as human beings, as social animals. It also—not incidentally—ignores the essential role that physical libraries can play in what must be a social, cultural, and political project of the first order: generating, communicating, and synthesizing the information needed to build the knowledge base commensurate with the multiplying and interrelated challenges of the twenty-first century. Without some mediating and curatorial force or institution to help bridge this chasm between the mass of information that is being produced and what is actually comprehended, a host of policy problems facing our society will have little hope of being assessed rationally. In his 2001 bestseller *The Demon-Haunted World,* Carl Sagan presciently wrote:

> I have a foreboding of an America in my children's or grandchildren's time—when the United States is a service and information economy; when nearly all the key manufacturing industries have slipped away into other countries; when awesome technological powers are in the hands of a very few, and no one representing the public interest can even grasp the issues; when the people have lost the ability to set their own agendas or knowledgeably question those in authority; when . . . our critical faculties in decline, unable to distinguish between what feels good and what's true, we slide, almost without noticing, back into superstition and darkness.[95]

Rather than being an Information Age, then, ours is perhaps in danger of becoming an Age of Ideology and Belief—for it is one in which our beliefs are vastly augmented by instantaneous access to the beliefs of others. Combined with unpredictable economic turmoil and the upending of long-held expectations about entitlement and privilege—that is to say, the trappings of the American Dream that are so essentially fixed to the suburban landscape—it is becoming ever more difficult to chart a feasible course through crisis, because we are apparently no longer capable of even agreeing on what the problems are. As author Danny Schechter notes, "the worse things get, the harder it is for people to agree on what to do."[96] In such a context, public policy decisions on a whole range of pressing social, environmental, and economic issues are being influenced or derailed altogether by debates governed by ideological preconceptions rather than by actual information. As a result, we slide ever further into seemingly intractable crises.

## The public library and the "citysystem"

In such an environment—when reliable and diverse information about the issues facing society is as necessary as civilized, reasoned, and informed debate about those issues—the need for robust and engaged public libraries mandated with contributing to both would seem paramount. Robert Putnam puts it this way:

The prediction that the World Wide Web would kill libraries ignores another essential role of the public library in the Internet Age. The almost inconceivable variety of information available online is a mixed blessing. Finding a few needles of useful, reliable information in vast haystacks of junk calls for precisely the skills that librarians have always had. . . . The techno-utopian belief that access to unlimited information automatically translates into understanding and knowledge has proven to be false. Trained guides are more important than ever, and libraries provide them.[97]

It is important as well to recognize that this universe of information is but one of the resources, just one of the flows, that intersect the contemporary city:

The city is seen as a focal point for a wider complex of economic, social, political and environmental linkages and flows of power, energy and information. Because it is a focal point, place and context remain important as nodes through which power, energy and information flow and may be transformed. Indeed, it is contestation over patterns of distribution and transformation of these three flows that shape urban life.[98]

It is these transformative flows that Jeb Brugmann describes as an unfolding "urban revolution," a globally interconnected stream of resources and networks coalescing around the half of the world's people who live in cities. Key to what Brugmann terms a city's "urban advantage" are its density, scale, and ability to promote association and extension (i.e., networking and global reach). Here, too, the public library is perfectly situated to build, promote, and facilitate associations and connections, and to contribute to extensions of all kinds, be they virtual, entrepreneurial, or institutional. In the face of the challenges urban societies are facing, Brugmann calls for a "citysystem," an organic combination of spatial, economic, social, entrepreneurial, and political forces that express a community's "strategic ambitions" through "co-building" and resource/waste flows that are modeled on natural ecosystems.[99] Given these demands and potentialities, it would seem more important than ever that public libraries be capable of contributing to citysystems, and of engaging in the kind of multi-sectoral collaboration that would permit these sorts of extensions and associations. In its 2009 report, *The Engaged Library*, the Urban Libraries Council argued that public libraries are able to contribute to successful community building by

discovering and mobilizing layers of assets already present in every community [including] the skills and resources of its individuals, the power of relationships in voluntary associations, assets present in the array of local institutions, the physical infrastructure of the community, the profile and dynamics of the local economy, [as well as] the stories that define the community, its history and its dreams.[100]

But in this task the public library cannot—and is simply not capable—of acting alone. While the public library may indeed be seen by its publics as their "front porch," Michael Cart observes that

> the public library is more important than ever before as a centering institution, as a place of gathering, and as an equalizer, but the public library cannot build community by itself. The problems are simply too great. The library needs partners and it needs a place at the community planning, policy making, and development table. There needs to be collaborating and forming partnerships and alliances. If public libraries really want to have effective partnerships and make a difference in their communities they have to be part of the decision-making process in those communities. They have to be at the table with other organizations and government agencies. They have to be involved in giving and getting assets for the common good of the community.[101]

Such would seem to point to the need for a national public library strategy to make these interconnections possible. Yet, as Glen Holt points out, the very strength of public libraries as local institutions is also their greatest weakness: their localism and the constraining local nature of their funding base is matched by their lack of a national mandate or statement of purpose, which they need to fulfill their historic and newly emerging purposes.[102]

What follows in these pages will, I hope, assist in articulating why such a national mandate is desirable, and why any national urban strategy should include a commensurate, complementary, and equally robust public library strategy. While the chapters in this volume are mostly American, several are Canadian, one is European, and one is from Africa. They may each have their particular local contexts, but they also speak to the universal values of public libraries in any context.

Glen Holt begins the collection with a statement querying our assumptions about resiliency and the extent to which public libraries may be able to contribute to it, given the constrained environment in which they are presently situated. He rightly argues that the promotion of "resilience" cannot be a matter of faith, but must, like other purported library contributions to community well-being, be intentional and measurable. It can also, he stresses, be the result of services at which public libraries have always engaged.

This reality is demonstrated in case studies of public libraries addressing social issues through a familiar range of programs and services. Jennifer Hoyer considers how public libraries can combat social exclusion through collections and services, using the Atwater Library and Computer Centre (a Montreal subscription library) as an exemplar. Similarly, Vanessa Francis looks at the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore for examples of equitable services to address social needs. Queens Library demonstrates its own strengths in Deborah Olley Murphy and Denise Clark's examination of that library's "Literacy Zones." Finally, Monique Woroniak explains how outreach efforts on the part of the Winnipeg Public Library address the needs of two significant demographics in that city— Aboriginal people and newcomers in fiscally challenging circumstances.

There are, in addition, efforts at which public libraries are engaged that are nontraditional and also capable of generating significant impacts. Melissa Rauseo and Julie Edwards relate the collaborative efforts the public library led in Peabody, Massachusetts, to provide a free summer meal program for children and youth, while Mary Wilkins Jordan shows how public libraries can contribute to bringing the benefits of nature and green living things to urban areas through library gardens. The Urban Libraries Council discusses how public libraries and local governments can form "partnerships for the future" to build sustainable communities. An essential component of a sustainable, resilient city is that of "place," and Maija Berndtson reviews the significant achievements in library architecture that have made contributions to placemaking efforts, particularly in Europe.

These contributions describe the efforts of libraries in challenging times; yet libraries are also increasingly facing crisis. The director of the Houston Public Library, Dr. Rhea Lawson, and her colleagues Meller Langford and Roosevelt Weeks recount the harrowing days following Hurricane Ike, during which time the Houston Public Library provided invaluable service to America's fourth-largest city by offering its facilities and services to assist in disaster recovery. My colleague Matthew Evan Havens and myself then look ahead to the potential disruptions that an era of "peak oil" and climate change may bring to our cities, and how public libraries might be able to offer their support toward the necessary "transition" to a less energy-intensive future. The theme of crisis continues as Innocent Chirisa reveals the necessity of community leadership and collaboration efforts under conditions of severe financial privation in Harare, Zimbabwe—a sobering reminder of what is at stake for public libraries under austerity measures currently being considered by many governments around the world.

A powerfully recurring theme in these essays is that of partnership. All the efforts described cannot be undertaken by libraries alone, for they would strain already limited resources; this is why public libraries must reach out in new and powerful ways to their communities. In the concluding section, Pilar Martinez outlines the Edmonton Public Library's "community-led model" for service delivery, one which seeks to move beyond community participation and to empower communities to more significantly influence the direction of library collections and services.

I believe that these portraits of public libraries in action afford those of us who are passionate about libraries further confirmation of the vitality of the public library as a civic institution, and reveal to those professionally engaged in planning for cities that the public library can be a valuable ally in those efforts. With stressors on cities and their residents increasing almost daily, this book is a plea to preserving and defending the public library, or what Art Brodsky calls our "library lifeline;" for the resilience that our cities will need in a turbulent future may be found—at least in part—through its doors.

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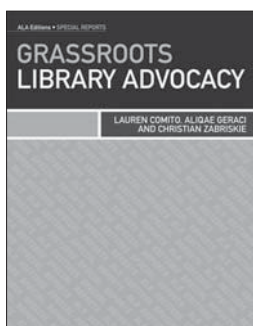
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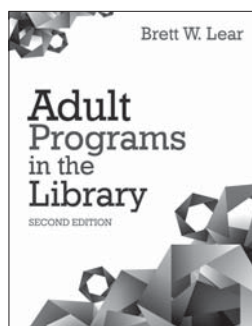
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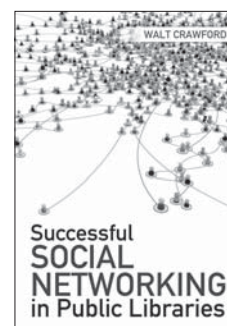Lauren Comito, Aliqae Geraci, and Christian Zabriskie
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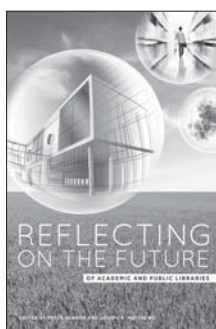
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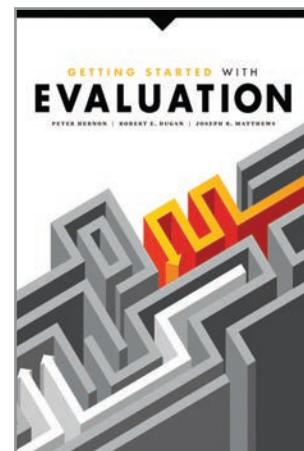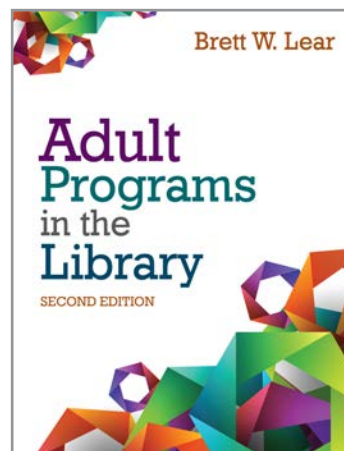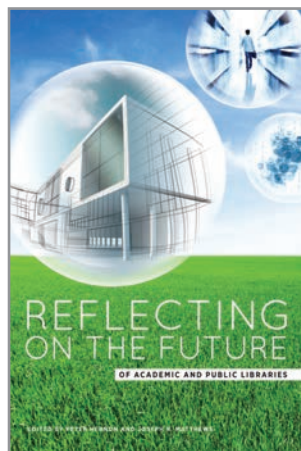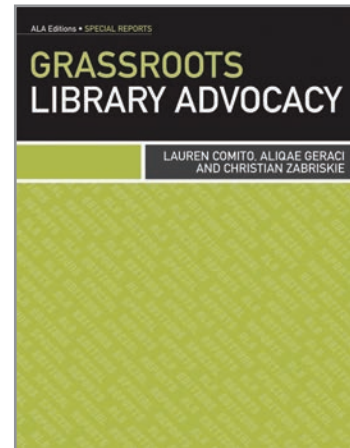David Stern
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