Publications and Research   CUNY Graduate Center

2002

Urban Librarianship: Libraries, Cities and Beyond

Beth Posner
CUNY Graduate Center

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

URBAN LIBRARIANSHIP: LIBRARIES, CITIES AND BEYOND

As urbanization and urban issues become increasingly universal, the study of urban libraries will become increasingly relevant to all librarians, all library patrons, and all citizens of the world. In light of this, this essay examines how the past development, present issues and future possibilities of cities, urban areas, and urban libraries relate to each other and to the study of urban librarianship.

INTRODUCTION

Any human institution or endeavor – including libraries – can be categorized and understood in terms of differences and similarities. This is why, in order to fully encompass the study of human life, anthropological theories focus on both the differences that make up cultures and the similarities that constitute humanity. As for libraries, themselves, while they are categorized together because of the characteristics and goals they share, their differences, at the same time, also place them into sub-categories that influence, and sometimes even dictate, what services they provide, how librarians manage them and what roles they play in society.

In the United States, libraries are primarily studied with respect to three constituencies or categories: public, academic and special. However, fresh and valuable insights about an object of study can emerge by looking at it from different perspectives and libraries can also be differentiated on the basis of size, financial resources or location. With respect to the latter, in particular, libraries have always been responsive to their local communities. So, since differences in everyday life, as well as its larger meaning, distinguish urban existence, a term as rich in meaning as "urban" is likely to constitute another viable category for the study and practice of library science.

Of course, just because similarities or differences exist does not mean that they are significant or that any category (or set of categories) is superior to any other. It is entirely possible that urban libraries do not share enough to justify a meaningful separate category. The fact that urban academic, public and special libraries, even within the same city, face very different issues – because they serve different constituencies and have different missions – should not be ignored. Also, because people everywhere use libraries and all libraries share many of the same issues, urban location may not distinguish libraries sufficiently to be of much practical or theoretical significance.

Understanding relevant similarities and differences only helps entities function, improve and succeed when such understanding is applied to appropriate situations or conditions. Hence, it

is only by exploring what "urban" means that we can determine the usefulness of the category "urban libraries." This is complicated by several factors. First of all, the historical meaning of the term "urban" is constantly being redefined as the entities to which it refers respond to changing conditions and needs. Also, "urban" actually applies only to cities with certain characteristics and encompasses more than just cities. To be an urban society, the majority of people must live and work in cities, but to be urban, a city must be socially open and heterogeneous, as well as large and densely populated. As Jerome Krase wrote, "A city is a real place…urban society, on the other hand, is an abstract concept, a theoretical construct which can be used to classify or categorize different human social environments." (Krase, 6) And, while there are real cities with individual histories, the word "city," being mythic, archetypal and emblematic, (Pike, 13) can sometimes overwhelm and obscure reality. (As can the word "library.")

What constitutes a city, how cities differ from towns, villages, and metropolitan areas and what is meant when something is described as urban are complex, but essential, questions to sort through. Cities cannot be viewed in isolation. They are just one part, and in some cases, a decreasingly powerful part, of extended metropolitan systems that operate within and among city and county limits, as well as regionally, nationally and internationally. They interact with nearby suburbs, exurbs and edge cities in a myriad of ways to form metropolitan areas. As for urban libraries, these various jurisdictions affect them in a myriad of ways, particularly with respect to funding. (Molz and Dain, 9-10) It is also important to remember that not all cities are the same (and for New Yorkers to remember that not all cities are Manhattan). Moreover, just as cities and metropolitan areas within the United States differ, they and their libraries also differ throughout the world. (Campbell, 1965, 4)

As for the significance of the study of urban libraries, it is certainly instructive for libraries located in cities to consider the many challenges and opportunities they all face. Diversity, space issues, crime, and constant change are all reasons why an urban (or city) academic library may have more in common with a public library located a few blocks away from it than it does with another academic library in a suburban area. But, perhaps the study of urban libraries is relevant to an even larger audience. Just as some view cities as a microcosm of society and the key to understanding its general laws, (Blanchard, 12) urban libraries might hold the key to understanding much about libraries, in general. First of all, they serve urban areas, which include more than just cities. Secondly, many of the challenges and opportunities faced by

2

urban libraries face libraries located elsewhere, as well. As rural, suburban, and urban areas share more and more – such as disparities of wealth and education, diversity of population, and a variety of social ills (homelessness, public health issues, etc.) – they all experience certain challenges that urban libraries have some success dealing with - such as the demand for electronic information and the need to serve increasingly diverse populations. Thirdly, there are large universities in rural settings that - with their own heterogeneous populations, transportation systems, health services, rules, history, and buildings - are like cities unto themselves, so they and their libraries share certain urban issues and could benefit from considering how urban libraries deal with them. And fourthly, there are urban values that transcend urban areas to affect all libraries, such as a liberal and pluralistic commitment to open access to information; censorship is antithetical to any pluralistic urban society and to any library organization devoted to the dissemination of information.

Perhaps most significantly, the subject of urban librarianship is increasingly important today because of the increasing level and influence of urbanization throughout the world. In 1800, only 2.4 percent of the world's population lived in communities of 20,000 or more people, but United Nations studies suggest that now more than half of humanity can be found in urban areas. (Mack, 5-6; Cohen, 28) This means that urban issues will affect more and more libraries and that urban libraries will serve more and more people. As globalization increases the commonality of ideas and trends, people everywhere will face many of the problems traditionally, or first, experienced by urban societies alone. And, as urbanization impacts most of the world's population, anything that contributes to urban development - as libraries do in so many ways - becomes increasingly important to understand and support. Thus, we see that the importance of studying urban libraries may stem less from the fact that they are different than libraries, in general, and more from the similarities they share with other libraries, but may have experienced first or more intensely.

Admittedly, an exploration of the whole gamut of issues relevant to urban libraries and of all parts of the metropolitan areas that urban libraries serve cannot be addressed in one essay. The objective of this article is simply to raise some of the questions and distill some of the issues that deserve further study. Since cities are still a major component of urban areas and represent the traditional constituency of urban libraries, the focus will be on cities and libraries. Rather than a literature review, what is offered here is a general presentation of some of the past, present, and future issues of libraries in cities, in particular. And, while the space limitations of

such an overview may encourage more truisms than profound truths, the hope is that at least some interesting insights will be uncovered and that many more robust and detailed discussions will be provoked.

THE PAST

A historical approach to the study of urban libraries is the first of several useful theoretical orientations we can take to the subject. If we are to consider urban libraries and their study, then we must first consider their past, just as Lewis Mumford - one of the most thoughtful, popular, and prolific of urbanists - approached urban studies by first considering cities and their pasts. (Mumford, 1961, 3) Both the development of cities - and the conglomerated urban areas that we know today, of which cities are only one part - and the historical development of libraries have been thoroughly studied. What requires further consideration is how urban libraries and cities developed together and influenced each other.

The growth of libraries is intimately connected with the development of cities. Although most of the world, for most of history, was not urban, both modern civilization's beginnings and many of its most important developments happened in cities. Early cities existed 5000-6000 years ago, represented a community's maximum concentration of power and culture, (Mumford, 1966, 3) and were then, as they are now, not only centers of religion and military power, but also centers of social and economic life. (Pike, 3) This concentration of important religious, economic, governmental and familial activities spurred a need to record a variety of information. As Elmer Johnson wrote, "If we define 'history' as that period of man's existence since he began to keep records, then libraries are almost as old as history…As man's civilization has progressed, so have his libraries." (Johnson, 487) Even more important than mere record keeping, written history also began with the city (Pike, 6) because there was enough economic capital and cultural interest there to produce more substantial documents and to create libraries to collect, organize and preserve them. (Johnson, 7)

As cities grew, their libraries helped to promote all their varied activities, as well as their economic and cultural development. In their earliest incarnations, libraries supported business and government by serving as archives of important records. All great urban cities have been regional or global trading points, representing a large market for goods and services, attracting a wide range of people, and producing enough economically to attract talent and generate excess wealth that could be used for artistic endeavors. They were also often in the throes of economic

transitions, as well as in transformations in social relationships, values and views of the world. (Hall, 284-286) Most experienced at least one burst of creativity, be it cultural or technological or one that produced a new mode of production or industry (Hall, 5) and libraries contributed to new developments by collecting useful information.

Libraries also supported the arts and other humanizing activities in cities that might otherwise have focused only on business or military issues. (Durisch, 102) And, they supported cities' roles as civilizing forces in cultures, (Nyquist, 81) by providing educational and cultural material to people who could not otherwise afford either. Public libraries in the United States first developed in cities and because of their longer histories, their collections are more comprehensive and in depth than even the largest and wealthiest of suburban libraries. It is even arguable that having major libraries accessible to the public contributed to the many advancements of more recent times. (Johnson, 496-497)

Even though libraries and cities have existed for so long and libraries have always been aware of where they were located and whom they served, (Campbell, 26) scholarship on urban libraries remains under-developed. Although valuable articles and books have been written about the history and programs of specific urban libraries, and the relation between libraries and cities is an acknowledged one, scholarship on urban libraries, in general, has been more limited. (See Fluk's annotated bibliography in this and upcoming issues of *Urban Library Journal*.) Since the first significant tax-supported public library in the United States was established in Boston in 1852, all progressive cities have come to feel the need for a library, (Molz and Dain, 3-5) so many discussions of urban libraries are found within writings about public libraries. However, as a separate subject of study, a recent WorldCat search for items with the specific Library of Congress Subject Heading, "libraries and metropolitan areas," recalls only 173 items, and of these only about 15 have been acquired by more than 100 libraries and only about 15 have been written the past ten years.

Today, much of the work on urban libraries is connected to several major organizations, whose activities support urban libraries by arranging meetings, conducting vital research and producing practical publications. In 1971, The Urban Libraries Council was organized so that public libraries could collaborate on common issues. There are now about 150 members who serve communities of 100,000 or more people. And, the International Association of Metropolitan Libraries (INTAMEL), sponsored by the International Association of Library

Associations and Institutions (IFLA), was founded in 1968 for libraries around the world that serve communities of over 400,000 people.

As for scholarly study, *Library Trends* has devoted three issues to urban libraries, although the last one was over 25 years ago. The contribution of this publication, *Urban Academic Librarian/Urban Library Journal,* to the field has been as a more recent source for both practical and more academic or theoretical scholarship on urban libraries. In 1983, the librarians of the Library Association of the City University of New York (LACUNY), aware of all urban libraries share, expanded the charge and circulation of their internal newsletter by founding *Urban Academic Librarian*. Then, in 1996, they broadened its scope again, this time to encompass all urban libraries. The ten volumes of what is now called *Urban Library Journal* explore urban issues that affect academic as well as other libraries, such as multiculturalism, international patrons, and homelessness. Additionally, this journal addresses topics important but not confined to urban libraries, such as faculty status for librarians and library education. Again, we see that the usefulness of the category of urban libraries lies in both their similarities to and their differences from all other libraries.

THE PRESENT

Among the many approaches – political, economic, etc. - that can be used to study the contemporary aspects of urban areas or cities that contribute to the issues affecting urban libraries today is the sociological approach. Beyond the general agreement that all urban areas are "relatively large, dense and permanent settlement[s] of socially heterogeneous people," (Wirth, 190) there are many other qualities that influence urban libraries in various cities, such as contrasts, spatial organization, personality, history, social relations and services. And, while all cities are different, some of the issues that these create are the same in all of them, such as class conflict, racial/ethnic tension, education, crime, law enforcement, land use and urban development. (Urban Issues, v-vii) Of course, there are many different types of cities and the stage for urban libraries includes more than just cities. Since suburbs, for instance, have been increasing in size and power relative to many cities, a similar approach needs to be taken with regard to suburbs, edge cities, and their libraries. So, although not all of the following will be relevant to all urban, or even all city, libraries, they can offer some potential avenues for research and application in urban librarianship.

As Mumford observed, "The city in its complete sense, then, is a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theater of social action, and an esthetic symbol of collective unity." (Mumford, 1937, 59) Blanchard, similarly, wrote,

> The city is as much an image of each and every one of the social groups that constitute it as a reality of isolated facts and statistics. On the one hand, a city is the aggregate of its built, its streets full of houses and buildings; and, on the other, it is also much more than that. [All that has] become a repository for the thoughts, the feelings and the emotions of the people in its midst. (Blanchard, 5)

Although there is overlap, for the sake of discussion these characteristics can be divided into the following three approaches to urbanism: (1) Physical structure, (2) Social organization and (3) Attitudes, ideas and constellation of personalities (Wirth, 194) and extrapolated to the study of city libraries.

(1) Physical structure

The pure physicality of cities is their most obvious manifestation. Common images of generic cities include a downtown skyline, a slum, a stately old capital, or perhaps a thronging bazaar. And, some of the issues that urban libraries must deal with because of their physical location include the cost of real estate, security and environmental problems, parking and commuting. (Williams, 7)

Size -- The United States Census defines cities on the basis of population size and legal status (although the exact parameters have changed over time and there are cities of various sizes.) Whatever the numbers, however, all urban areas have relatively large and dense populations, and where there are many people, bonds between them can be weak. Also, where there is more space, navigating it is crucial to living and doing business. Although technology allows remote users to access libraries anywhere, licensing agreements still limit the use of electronic sources to affiliated – which often, although not always, means local - patrons. So, typically, more or larger libraries are needed to serve more people. In some places, where there are more libraries and people have more choices, there may be fewer repeat users, which can affect a library's hours and people's comfort with libraries, in general. (Sheehy, 77) Even with more libraries, however, if there are also more people using them, most will be busy and crowded. Lewis Mumford saw that there was a certain distance that should "properly define the area served for a selective minority by a university, a central reference library, or a completely equipped hospital."

(Mumford, 1937, 61) And, as for location, libraries also need to consider whether public transportation is convenient or if there is adequate parking in car-oriented cities.

Built Environment -- The quantity and size of the buildings, streets and parks that replace most of the natural landscape in cities can be inspiring and exciting, or alienating and suffocating. And, the physical presence of the past and the identity that is built in history is also physically palpable in cities in the form of historic buildings, streets and parks. (Pike, 13) Library buildings can contribute to the beauty and utility of cities or they can be poorly designed, ugly or virtually invisible. Their physical presence is both a symbol of the past and is important to the present community as young children seek safe haven there, students find a quiet place to study, or community members find recreational or educational materials within their walls.

Centrality -- Cities are often (although not always) physically central centers of commerce, culture and the arts. They are also frequently centers of ideas and ideology, creativity and technology. As the center for so much, they become job and talent magnets, and places of destiny where people (and many literary characters) come to succeed. (Blanchard, 8-9) Being located right in the middle of things also encourages the use of city libraries by people from other places. Since they are so convenient and so many choose to work or relax there, they must serve the many demands generated by being central to so much and so many. On the positive side, one benefit they enjoy because of their centrality is being close to so many other resources and libraries. This makes referrals and reciprocal arrangements easier and makes more information more readily available to more people. (Sheehy, 80)

Space – In some cities, limited space leads to higher land values, which then increases the cost of everything and encourages verticality as a solution. And, as the middle class seek more space and move to more affordable suburbs, the division between rich and poor in cities also becomes exaggerated. This simultaneously decreases tax revenues as the cost for city services escalates because the need for them increases. (Hacker, 42) The many jobs and amenities that characterize the modern city (Howard, 347) make living there convenient, but having it all in one place also leads to overcrowding. (Hall, 971) On the other hand, while there is room to grow in many younger cities, the benefit of having everything in one place is also minimized in such cities.

Space issues have important fiscal implications for public urban libraries that rely on cities for money. First of all, when the tax base decreases, funds become limited. Even urban academic libraries may have fiscal difficulties because the institutions of which they are a part

also rely on city governments and often, being relatively young, have fewer alumni from which to draw financial support. (Williams, 7) The limited space in cities also means that buildings are close to each other and difficult to demarcate and libraries that are not visible are harder to find and to market. All urban libraries –special, academic and public - that operate within limited space and need room to expand collections will have to store material off-site, discard items, build upward or become increasingly virtual. And, all urban libraries in more spread out cities will have to consider transportation and access issues.

Destruction and Decay – Although not all cities are in disrepair, there are abandoned buildings in some and various forms of pollution that can cause physical damage over time in most. There is also a certain fascination or satisfaction that can be felt towards the physical destruction of a city because the problems and promises that make them emblems of irresolvable conflict (Pike, 8) also make them both loved and hated. While renovated libraries can be a place of hope in a destitute neighborhood, poorly maintained libraries can contribute to a neighborhood's problems. Meanwhile, libraries that need to preserve their collections must deal with the air pollution that causes them conservation problems and libraries that want to help the environment can recycle the masses of papers that are discarded there and can move towards becoming increasingly paperless.

(2) Social Organization

Even though since the Renaissance there has been a tendency for the individual to replace the collective aspects of cities, the many individuals living in cities inevitably interact to form a social image and a community. (Pike, 14) Their physical size and density leads to a high degree of human contact and social complexity, (Davis, 1) including a characteristic social structure, social institutions and typical patterns of social relationships. Social meaning is place based, and as Mumford explained, the physicality of a city is, or should be, related to its social character.

> Unified plans and buildings become a symbol of their social relatedness; and when the physical environment itself becomes disordered and incoherent, the social functions that it harbors are more difficult to express… [S]ocial facts are primary, and the physical organization of a city, its industries and its markets, its lines of communication and traffic, must be subservient to its social needs…
> (Mumford, 1937, 60)

So, the social aspects of the urban are what we will consider next in our exploration of cites and libraries.

Social Diversity -- The many different people who congregate in cities – people of different ethnicities and races, from different places, and of different educational and economic levels - constitute a complicated amalgamation of hierarchies and networks. Social diversity also influences the urban personality (see below) and both the social unrest and the civility of cities, as people's differences foster both conflicts and tolerance. Urban libraries serve all people - children, researchers, business people, artists and many others - so they need to be aware of and responsive to their differences. For instance, urban universities sometimes attract more pragmatic students who work and commute to school (Williams, 8) so urban academic libraries must accommodate the schedules and needs of this non-traditional academic population. Then, there are both city public school students who, because they did not have adequate school libraries, come to urban public, academic and special libraries with a need for basic bibliographic instruction, and educated immigrants who require, instead, literacy training or help finding and preparing for career and educational opportunities. The size and diversity of cities requires full staffing of libraries and the employment of personnel from differing cultures, and although a leveling of services can occur when so many different needs are present, urban ambitions generally require a high level of service.

Power and Politics – One of the most critical aspects of life in cities and urban areas is the politics of what happens, how it happens, and who makes it happen. Decision-making should result from the input of the entire community, including advocates for minorities, children, the poor, and women. Urban public libraries are just one of the groups that rely on city governments for funding and zoning issues, and they must represent and negotiate their interests with respect to salaries for personnel and services for patrons. Urban academic libraries also rely on city governments for safety, building permits, and all urban libraries benefit from the various services offered by cities.

Services and Responsibilities -- The word "metropolis" is Greek for "mother-city," implying that cities have a responsible, caring, nurturing, maternal side. Cities attempt to make people happy and safe through the services they provide to their citizens, (Durisch, 101) and the larger a city is the more needs it serves, which attracts even more people to it. (Doxiadis, 413) These services include housing, health, education, welfare, tourism, urban planning and support for libraries. How libraries are supported is crucial and depends on local taxes, state and federal funds, public-private cooperative projects and private donations.

Libraries provide cultural, educational and business services to people. Public urban libraries are part of a system of public education, as are city universities and their libraries. Many of these systems were and are exceptional, but entrenched poverty has also led to some decline. Since, just as the school dropout problem is increasing among potential urban workers, (Kasarda, 307) and most jobs now require more education and training, urban libraries can help with lifelong learning services. Although all libraries are now interdependent through interlibrary loan, urban libraries with older and larger collections tend to serve a larger clientele that just their local patrons, including the nearby suburbs, commuters, or even an international audience. Libraries also have auditoriums and meeting rooms, cafes and gift shops. They serve the elite, who may sit on their boards, the educated, who may use libraries for research, students from city schools who come to city libraries unprepared and busy with other responsibilities, and public urban libraries must also serve the homeless. Public urban libraries are safe havens for children and provide access to information that is vital for equality.

Social Movements -- Urban areas can be the focal or starting points for important social change. As ideas are discussed there, a critical mass of people can gather to protest, demand and enact changes. Rural peasant movements have also generated change, but more recently, Manuel Castells and others have focused on how movements for revolutions, labor organization, peace, squatter and tenants rights and equality for people of all genders, races, and sexual orientations have come from cities. (Castells, xv) Urban libraries contribute to the process of social change by providing all people with access to any needed information, whether of a local or global nature. Urban librarians have also become activists, themselves. Historically, they campaigned for improved neighborhood conditions (Dain, 64) and today local professional groups still focus on various social concerns.

Neighborhoods -- In well planned cities the, "inter-relationship of schools, libraries, theaters, community centers, is the first task in defining the urban neighborhood and laying down the outlines of an integrated city." (Mumford, 1937, 60) Neighborhoods in cities may have physical boundaries but they are also based on other factors, such as history or economic development and neighborhoods are often the lines through which education, social status, and networking develop. (Savage and Warde, 326) Public library branches serve particular neighborhoods, although there are larger regional branches and research libraries that reach larger areas. And, all libraries – public, academic or special – draw people to neighborhoods, making them more

desirable, busy and safe and also encouraging the use of nearby businesses. (Rodger, 42) Public branch libraries sometimes even receive additional funding or volunteers from their neighbors, and what people in each neighborhood request properly influences what collections and services are offered.

Secondary Associations – Since the primary groups, like family and neighborhood, that exist in cities can be weak for some urbanites, they achieve a sense of social construction and shared social order (Hall, 617-618) by joining public, purposive secondary associations based on recreational, educational, religious, cultural, economic or political interests. Most people belong to several unrelated groups with high turnover. This leads to "the possibility of personal disintegration… [and] here lies the need for reintegration through wider participation in a concrete and visible collective whole." (Mumford, 1937, 60) The public library in metropolitan areas can be seen as "a completely new creation of metropolitan community social interaction and a true product of urban living." (Campbell, 1968, 40) Urban libraries of any kind are one of the secondary associations people become involved with and one of the spaces where reintegration can occur. However, urban librarians may also have fragmented relationships with patrons who they do not see repeatedly enough to form any meaningful or useful connection.

Work -- Work is a particularly important aspect of life and identity for many people in cities. Yuppies, who are young, *urban,* professionals, may spend so much time at their jobs that they get to know their colleagues better than their neighbors, and because of intense competition, they can become extremely focused on work. Increasing numbers of people, combined with technology, the segmentalized nature of relationships and the pragmatism of urbanites lead to differentiation and specialization in the workplace. There are special libraries that exist in and for the workplace. And, both those who work in the many highly skilled jobs in today's information oriented cities and those who work in the many service jobs that exist today require public and academic library resources for training and referrals to educational or business opportunities.

Communication -- The physical and social complexity of cities makes communication problematic. Although most have at least one daily newspaper, many have folded recently due to declining readership and increasing costs. Computer technology is the latest possibility for improving communication but is also problematic, as it is not available or understandable to everyone. Since cities can be confusing and opaque, urban libraries should be places anyone can go for information about community services, education, literacy instruction, housing

information, job searches, etc. Public urban libraries also provide free computer access to people who could not afford it otherwise and training on how to best use information technology.

Social Problems -- Even city lovers must admit that cities can be dangerous places where inequality, drugs, poverty and lust for the material objects seen all around lead some people to extreme aggressiveness. Urban struggles are rarely just class based, but are also organized around issues like gender, ethnicity, and neighborhoods. (Hall, 393) With so many people out for themselves, rather than feeling bound to family or neighbors, there can be alienation and anomie, crime and unemployment. (Hall, 613) People who do not see the whole of the city cannot make completely informed decisions and can become detached from organized bodies. This makes collective behavior in the city unpredictable and problematic. And, the diversity of people, including unassimilated groups who tend to congregate in cities (Dubois, 57) can contribute to racial and other social problems. In response to social unrest, urban librarians must consider security and have various disaster plans in place. More usefully, however, they should also address conflict through education and by acting as a neutral meeting place for all people.

Civility -- Cities encompass many contradictions and contrasts. For instance, despite the social unrest that exists there, cities and urban libraries also promote cooperation, understanding and good manners. John Stow, complimenting Elizabethan London, in particular, wrote of those civilizing aspects of the urban personality that arise from the sociality of cities.

> Men are congregated into cities and commonwealths for honesty and utility's sake…men by this nearness of conversation are withdrawn from barbarous fixity to humanity and justice…Good behaviour is yet called urbanitas…that also is closely bred and maintained in cities, where men by mutual society and companying together, do grow to alliances, commonalities and corporations. (As quoted in Mumford, 1937, 59)

Of course, civility also exists outside of cities, and by offering educational and cultural services to citizens, all libraries contribute to civil society. Historically, many librarians took this role quite seriously, choosing only books that would enlighten and educate, and shushing anyone whose voice offended others nearby. Today, manners may be less strict, but through the programs they present, the material they collect, and by serving as meeting places librarians, including urban librarians, certainly contribute to social understanding.

(3) Urban Personality

Many urban theorists would agree with Shakespeare who wrote in Coriolanus, "The people are the city." All kinds of people can be found in cities – the young and the old, wealthy sophisticates and poor students, yuppies and immigrants. Beyond these varied groups, individual eccentricity is an urban hallmark, and cities, themselves, develop unique and changing cultures as a result of their histories and as they reflect the ideology of their times. (Blanchard, 23) Despite all these differences, however, certain attitudes and ideas, their distance from nature and the difficulties and joys of city life have caused certain psychological characteristics to become associated with cities. Many urbanists believe that the three necessary conditions of the urban - size, density and heterogeneity – lead to both an urban way of life and a shared urban personality. (Wirth, 190-191)

Ambivalence and Contrasts -- Both good and bad exist in cities, as they do in all humans and human institutions. Strong negative and positive impulses, such as the ambivalence generated by cities, generally come from individuals' and cultures' inability to resolve inner conflicts, (Pike, 8) such as the contradictory feelings of pride, love, anxiety, and hatred that people feel towards cities. (Pike, 26) The extreme contrasts in cities that generate this ambivalence include the very rich and the very poor, and the gentrification that both improves and destroys neighborhoods. Cities are maps and labyrinths, where you can either find or lose yourself. (Pike, 121) They are made up of both fears and desires. (Pike, 127) People feel proud of their cities even as they experience guilt about them. (Pike, 6) They are seen as corruption or perfection, as places of destiny or doom, as nowhere or as utopias, as manmade and organic, sad and dazzling, and lonely yet crowded with people. They contain splendor and squalor, intelligence and ignorance, order and chaos. They are futuristic and up to the minute, even as they also encompass and reflect the past.

Perhaps the great accomplishments and promises of cities can be reconciled with their seemingly intractable problems by recognizing that ambivalence, itself, has ambivalent implications. It can lead to strong responses and the kind of progress that enriches our culture and humanity, but it can also lead to confusion and impotence. Interestingly, libraries also inspire ambivalence. Some see them as boring and unimportant, while others see them as the ultimate preservers and disseminators of knowledge. They also have an old fashioned image even though they were early automators and are increasingly computerized. Such ambivalence towards cities

and libraries needs to be faced and countered by urban librarians because otherwise urban libraries will be undervalued and underutilized.

Cosmopolitan -- The cosmopolitan pluralism found in, and encouraged by, urban cities can lead to tolerance and sophistication, or it can lead to a sense of irony or of being jaded. To be an urban society, cultural, racial, ethnic, and intellectual diversity is essential. Cities even recruit different people to perform diverse tasks and accentuate uniqueness through competition by placing a premium on eccentricity and inventiveness. Urbanites who see so many different people become accustomed to more difference, instability and insecurity in the world. Then, there is a German proverb that says "stadluft macht frei," or "city air makes you free." People can feel more uninhibited and can reinvent themselves in cities because of the anonymity that comes from limited ties within a large population. Urbanites may also have stronger connections to interests, ideas and self than to other people or nature, and those with whom they do connect may encourage their self-expression by being less judgmental. City dwellers also tend to have a relativistic perspective because they are accustomed to difference. Analyzing everything according to personal utility leads to rationality and the secularization of life. City kids, despite physical dangers, educational and career problems, can also be savvy, streetwise, culturally sophisticated, and energetic because of all they see and all the people they come in contact with. And, as for being jaded, Samuel Johnson said, "When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life." But, one's perceptions and enjoyment of city life can indeed become jaded from the overabundance of experience and material goods that urban societies enjoy. So, such cosmopolitan sophistication requires diverse and dynamic responses from urban libraries. Their buildings, programs and websites must be well designed. They must provide capable staffs and varied collections. And, they must be as open and worldly as the people they serve.

Anomie -- People in cities, while more socially tolerant, can also be more impersonal and brusque. Some are unable to cope with the difficulties of urban environments, while other neurotic souls only feel comfortable in cities because they are even more afraid of being alone, or of nature (or of not having access to good restaurants). The modern city can be an empty distraction from, and a threat to, meaningful lives. Loneliness, friction and irritation can develop from so many people trying to live in difficult conditions. And, nervous tensions can develop from personal frustrations. The secondary contacts that characterize cities are more impersonal, superficial and transitory. This can lead to reserve, indifference and a blasé outlook towards

relationships and serve as a defense against the personal claims and expectations of others. (Wirth, 192) A deep-seated anxiety about our relation to cities may also come from the idea that creation is a sacred act, while the city is built by people and has displaced nature. (Pike, 3-4) Urban librarians may find it difficult to foster good working relationships with patrons when they have so many quick interactions with so many people, but any warmth or attention they can bring to library experiences will probably be greatly appreciated and result in repeat usage and support of their libraries.

Creativity – Cities can be hip, cutting edge places where the latest trends in ideas, arts, fashion and technology are born, attracting young people and immigrants with new ideas and a willingness to experiment and participate in strong informal networks for the exchange of ideas and an open society. (Hall, 302) Urban libraries need to provide the free flow of information that helps create new products, ideas, and art. They should also be innovators themselves, developing new products and services to meet the varied and changing needs of their communities.

Energetic, Lively and Dramatic -- Never boring, cities operate as intense series of sense stimuli. They can be dazzling, dramatic, dynamic, fast-paced, always changing, diverse, modern, powerful, and full of resources, people, opportunities, distractions and bright lights. Like the Emerald City in *The Wizard of Oz*, they can be fairylands of spectacle and dazzle. Jane Jacobs described the city as a street ballet (Jacobs, 107-108) and Mumford as a social drama. (Mumford, 1966, 481) The city can also be defined as a series of psychic reactions to a world of events constantly succeeding one another. (Blanchard, 11) Change is an issue everywhere, but because of its pace and the competitiveness in cities, its effects seem more profound there. (Pike, 72) And, this pace can be problematic because even when changes are positive, by happening so quickly there is limited time to plan or adjust. (Nyquist, 81)

Urban libraries are one of the stages on which urban dramas are played out and depending how dynamic they are, they can inflate or deflate what goes on there. And, although major demographic and economic conditions impact every library, they also seem to affect urban libraries differently and first. A 24/7 pace leads to demands and expectations for 24/7 service from libraries that can partially be met by longer hours or online services. In addition to responding to the pace of urban life, urban libraries need to acknowledge the drama of their cities by providing services that capture people's attention and help them negotiate the intensity of

their surroundings. Libraries should also be among the exciting places in cities where people and ideas can meet up serendipitously. (Hall, 21)

Heart and Soul -- Cities are not only physical entities with a certain look, community and culture. They are also "moral entities with a certain feel." (Blanchard, 6) Victor Hugo, in *Les Miserables*, called the city, itself, "a good soul...a heap of mud and stone, if you will, but above all, a moral being." The physical or symbolic center of the city is often referred to as the "heart" of the city. To Spengler, what distinguished the city from the village was not its size, but its soul. (Blanchard, 11) Urban libraries are certainly part of the heart and soul of cities. If urban librarians are aware of this, then cities that otherwise can seem cold and shallow will show themselves as worthy of help and respect, and if urbanites are aware of this, then the urban libraries will be better appreciated.

Mysterious -- Librarians who enjoy an orderly universe of information must remember that just as all information is never completely organized or available, cities are also curious artifacts "compounded of willed and random elements, imperfectly controlled." (Burton, 4) Zola described the nocturnal Paris as, "the great enigma, the black chaos, the dark ash crackling with sparks, out of which the next dawn would arise." (Blanchard, 8) Because of their size and all that goes on in them, unexplored corners of cities will always exist. (Blanchard, 14) This, along with their complexity, adds to their mystique. Thus, some past and present aspects of cities will always remain mysterious and their futures hard to predict.

THE FUTURE

As uncertain as the future always is, since the same technological, demographic and environmental forces operate on libraries, cities and urban areas, in general, and since they all confront the same larger issues facing the world, they are likely to develop in parallel ways. And, changes in library service are likely to continue to affect urban areas as much as changes in cities and their surroundings have always affected urban libraries.

Libraries are probably changing even faster than cities today, and we may be surprised at which of the two ultimately survive better or longer. If libraries become virtual, serving more widely dispersed patrons, then the term "urban libraries" will either lose its relevance or become ubiquitous. If the entire populated area of the world becomes urban, then so will all libraries, and the subject of urban libraries will be incorporated into general library literature. On the other hand, if urban societies, because they became too large or too explosive, disappear from the

world, then urban libraries will disappear with them and the term will again become meaningless.

One future challenge facing both cities and libraries is the continual advancement of computer technology. This has already changed, if not revolutionized both of them, but although by offering the possibility for communication across distance it threatens them, it has not yet marked the demise of either. Instead, it could actually help solve some of their mutual problems (Hall, 986) by decreasing the gulf between the information rich and the information poor. The future of the city is information based and post-industrial because people prefer, and perhaps even need, face-to-face contact to conduct their business and lives, and both cities and urban libraries offer both information and personal contact.

Mumford worried that cities that grew too much would become unmanageable. Although he believed that proper urban planning could help, he also saw the gigantism of cities as inevitably clashing with the human desire for order and harmony, leading only to urban decline. Anther potential problem for cities is the poorer areas within them that need to be economically integrated with the rest of the city, rather than ignored. (LeGates and Stout, 452) Perhaps, in the future, cities will not need to keep increasing physically as better communication systems allow work to be done over distances, and all areas will be included in development plans. Some worry that limiting the growth of cities will discourage further development, but bigger does not always mean better. (Mumford, 1937, 60-61) But, Mumford's solution was to develop regions with better transportation and communication, which is what today's urban areas really are. However, regions can also become too big and congested to function, and there is a vital energy that comes from a concentration of human contact in one place.

Another future challenge for cities and libraries is security. When agriculture first allowed people to become sedentary they grouped together in proto-cities for protection. In the future, however, if cities become targets for increased crime and terrorism, many may feel less safe there. Terrorism may also mark the beginning of fiscal, health, and other problems for cities, and the focus on combating it may lead to fewer resources and civil liberties. The crucial issue for libraries in this environment is their responsibility for the safety of their patrons and their collections and their need to be vigilant about open access to information in the face of increased security concerns.

Instead of either rising or falling in the future, cities will undoubtedly do both, because change is generally cyclical. And, as they grow stronger and weaker, so will their libraries. In the mid-20th century, Mumford cited urban decline and the rest of the century saw fiscal problems and decreases in library services, followed by a stronger economy that began to allow improvements in cities and their libraries. Most recently, cities that had not already been on alert, are now girding themselves for possible terrorist attacks. Urban areas may face fiscal, public health and other problems as a result, but the hard working, ambitious aspects of their urban personality will also help them face any threats and rebuild from any attacks, just as many Japanese and German cities recovered with renewed vitality after World War II. (Hall, 939)

In addition to cyclical changes, cities will probably also change by developing into new forms. For instance, traditional economic centers will be pushed out to form edge cities in suburban downtowns, just outside of established urban areas. Because "the social, cultural and economic life of the city and that of its surrounding suburbs are so interdependent…it is hard to say where one area starts and another stops… In this continuing pattern of migration and change lie many of the problems which libraries of both city and suburbs must face and solve." (Campbell, 53) And, as the differences between urban and rural and edge and traditional cities are minimized, the advantages and resources which city libraries enjoy need to be extended everywhere. (Campbell, 18)

Besides edge cities, global and developing cities will predominate in the future. The United Nations predicts that by 2005, 4.4 billion people, or 80 percent of the world's urban population, will live in the megacities of developing countries like Brazil and India, where globalization and technology that make the rich richer and the poor poorer are major issues. (Cohen, 28) Global cities, plugged into transnational networks, are where power increasingly lies. As Peter Hall predicts, "far from seeing the destruction of the great city, we are seeing them become global cities, attracting the organizations and people that command the global economy." (Hall, 6) Meetings between a critical mass of bankers, lawyers, accountants and others capable of moving data across borders – such as librarians - will remain necessary in these cities, as will reaching the economic and information poor.

Plenty of once popular machines, ideas and institutions are now obsolete, but those who predict the end have often been proven wrong. Most things that have served real human needs – including cities and libraries – have evolved rather than disappeared, leaving several other more

positive scenarios for the future of cities and urban libraries. Although Hall acknowledges that cities have problems, he also suggests that they are on the verge of a golden age. He believes that innovation is the key to survival and that cities will continue to thrive as centers of innovation, creatively solving their own problems. He also thinks that the next successful cities will combine art and technology to create cultural products such as movies and music. (Hall, 503) Meanwhile, advances in the service and information industries may provide people in cities with more time to produce culture, improve the quality of life, attract tourists and businesses and, as Keynes hoped, allow more people to do whatever they want to do. (Hall, 10) Urban libraries, in this sort of world, will have much to do to support all these endeavors.

As for the future of metropolitan areas, the association of suburbs, cities, etc. will continue to evolve and the power balance will continue to shift. And, as for the future study of urban libraries, there is much more to be explored. For instance,

- How urban libraries interact with the urban world beyond cities needs to be explored.
- In order to determine if, and exactly how, urban libraries are different and/or similar to other libraries, comparisons of librarians' job descriptions or mission statements can be undertaken, as can surveys of patron needs in libraries located in different areas and in different types of libraries in the same area. Solutions to problems addressed by urban libraries should also be attempted by other libraries and vice versa and the results evaluated to determine if and how libraries in different locations are different and/or similar.
- The general history of urban libraries should be related to the development of specific cities, cities in general, and to urban areas.
- By considering libraries located in edge, developing and global cities around the world, the lessons of urban librarianship can be made more relevant and useful to libraries in differing and different cities.
- Those who seek to understand something about urban libraries should also turn to fiction because it is in fiction that the complexity and untidiness of the urban world can be best and most fully expressed. (Pike, 138) Two interesting recent portrayals of decidedly urban librarians are Jan O'Deigh, in *The Goldbug Variations*, by Richard Powers, and Mary, in the movie *Party Girl*.
- The literature of urban theory, urban history, urban economics, urban sociology, urban politics, and urban planning should also be applied to urban libraries, not so that librarians

are told what to do by urbanists, but so that they can consider their opinions, learn to speak their language, and understand any useful suggestions or counter any questionable ones that urbanists may offer.

- The results of the study of urban libraries should be promoted so that practitioners and scholars of urban studies come to acknowledge just how useful urban libraries are to cities and how important it is to support urban libraries as places that can help them and their constituents. Libraries influence the economic development and quality of life of cities and are vital to their functioning and success. (Rodger, 42) They help all people - from preschoolers to adolescents, from job seekers to continuing education students, from artists to small business owners and from new immigrants to senior citizens - develop skills. And, they are part of urban life in the abstract, as culture is transmitted and shaped, and of the everyday reality of city life, as people struggle with and enjoy them.

CONCLUSION

Libraries in cities and beyond - in urban areas - provide people with many of the tools they need to live the good life. And, as Aristotle said in *Politics*, "Men come together in the city to live; they remain there in order to live the good life." (As quoted in Mumford, 1961, 111) But, just as urban libraries share all of the energy and magic of cities, they are also afflicted with all of their problems. As Ree DeDonato acknowledged, these include, "living in a world of multiple but insufficient resources, a world filled with opportunities, uncertainty and lack of time," but as she concluded, "Perhaps the acceptance of this tension is the essence of urban…librarianship." (DeDonato, 29) And, if, as Peter Hall suggests, answers to the most impossible seeming problems will come from people in cities, (Hall, 7-8) then it is vital that urban librarians make information accessible despite any difficulties or tensions. This, along with inspiring people by preserving and marketing their libraries as institutions that can help answer questions and address problems, may be the greatest contribution that urban librarianship can make to library science, cities, urban areas, and an increasingly urbanized world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blanchard, Marc Eli. (1985). *In Search of the City: Engels, Baudelaire, Rimbaud*, CA: Anma Libri.

Campbell, H.C. (1965). Introduction. *Library Trends*, 14(1), 3-6.

Campbell, H.C. (1968). The Effect of Metropolitanism on the Public Library. In Leon Carnovsky (Ed.), *The Public Library in the Urban Setting* (pp. 32-40). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Campbell, H.C. (1973). *Public Libraries in the Urban Metropolitan Setting*. CT: Linnet Books.

Castells, Manuel. (1983.) The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cohen, Roger. (2000). Audis and Cell Phones, Poverty and Fear. *The New York Times*, January 1, 2000, 28.

Dain, Phyllis. (2000). *The New York Public Library: A Universe of Knowledge*. NY: New York Public Library.

Davis, Kingsley. (1965). The Urbanization of the Human Population. In Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout (Eds.), *The City Reader* (pp. 2-14). NY: Routledge, 1996.

DeDonato, Ree. (1989). Commitment Beyond Location. *Urban Academic Librarian*, 6(2)/7(1), 50-55.

Doxiadis, Constantine. (1969). Ecumenopolis: World City of Tomorrow. In Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout (Eds.), *The City Reader* (pp. 459-467). NY: Routledge, 1996.

Dubois, W.E.B. (1899). The Negro Problems of Philadelphia. In Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout (Eds.), *The City Reader* (pp. 459-467). NY: Routledge, 1996.

Durisch, Lawrence L. (1968). In Leon Carnovsky (Ed.), *The Public Library in the Urban Setting* (pp. 101-105). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hacker, Harold S. (1968). In Leon Carnovsky (Ed.), *The Public Library in the Urban Setting* (pp. 41-57). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hall, Peter. (1998.) *Cities in Civilization*. NY: Fromm International.

Howard, Ebenezer. (1898). Author's Introduction. In Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout (Eds.), *The City Reader* (pp. 346-349). NY: Routledge, 1996.

Jacobs, Jane. The Uses of Sidewalks: Safety. In Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout (Eds.), *The City Reader* (pp. 103-108). NY: Routledge, 1996.

Johnson, Elmer. (1970). *History of Libraries in the Western World*. NJ: Scarecrow Press.

Kasarda, John. (1990). The Jobs-Skills Mismatch. In Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout (Eds.), *The City Reader* (pp. 306-310). NY: Routledge, 1996.

Krase, Jerome. (1989). Urbanism and the University. *Urban Academic Librarian*, 6(2)/7(1), 4-13.

LeGates, Richard and Stout, Frederic (Eds.). (1996.) *The City Reade*r. NY: Routledge.

Mack, Raymond W. (1968). In Leon Carnovsky (Ed.), *The Public Library in the Urban Setting* (pp. 3-12). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Molz, Redmond Kathleen and Dain, Phyllis. (2001). *Civic Space/Cyberspace: The American Public Library in the Information Age.* MA: MIT Press.

Mumford, Lewis. (1966). *The Culture of Cities*. NY: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, Inc, 1966 c1938.

Mumford, Lewis. (1937.) What is a City? *Architectural Record,* lxxii, 59-62.

Mumford, Lewis. (1937). *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations and Its Prospects*. NY: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

Nyquist, Ewald B. (1968). In Leon Carnovsky (Ed.), *The Public Library in the Urban Setting* (pp. 78-89). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pike, Burton. (1981). *The Image of the City in Modern Literature.* NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rodger, Eleanor Jo. (2001). Helping Cities Work: Urban Libraries and Economic Development. *Library Journal*, 126 (9), 42-43.

Savage, Mike and Warde, Alan. (1993). In Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout (Eds.), *The City Reader* (pp. 312-329). NY: Routledge, 1996.

Sheehy, Carolyn A. (1992). Reference and Information Services. In McCabe, Gerald (Ed.). *Academic Libraries in Urban and Metropolitan Areas: a Management Handbook* (pp. 75-84). NY: Greenwood Press.

Urban Issues: Selections From The CQ Researcher. (2001.) Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Williams, Delmus. E. (1992). Defining the Mission of the Urban University and Its Library: The Beginnings of a Typology. In McCabe, Gerald (Ed.). *Academic Libraries in Urban and Metropolitan Areas: a Management Handbook* (pp. 3-14), NY: Greenwood Press.

Wirth, Louis. (1938). Urbanism as a Way of Life. In Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout (Eds.), *The City Reader* (pp.190-197). NY: Routledge, 1996.