How do public libraries measure their socio-economic value and impact upon citizenship in the UK?

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Introduction
One of the roles of the public library is to provide access to resources which support the self-education and development of the citizenry (Alstead & Curry, 2003). This study sets out to investigate how public libraries in the UK measure their socio-economic value and impact in carrying out this role.

Theoretical framework and Literature Review
This will be addressed through an investigation into the generation and exchange of human, intellectual, transactional and social capital in the UK public library service. There is a general acceptance that public libraries contribute to ‘community’ and have the potential to have a very positive impact on civil society. This can be attributed to public libraries contribution to the creation of social capital (Varheim, 2007). The study will explore the extent to which the generation and use of social capital helps library users develop as citizens. Literature reviews have been conducted around the themes of performance measurement in libraries, value and impact case studies, information society and public libraries generating social capital. In addition, the study will now look into the generation and use of intellectual capital and human capital in public library services with a view to determining whether or not there is a positive and valuable impact on an individual’s citizenship due to the effective seeking and processing of information and support obtained through the library. The study must also consider the growth in information and whether the concept and theory of the Information Society has a bearing on information and library usage.

Method
The research will be generated from a continual review of the literature as well as empirical research elements. This will enable a longitudinal 3 year study and include a cohort approach over three geographical locations in the UK, representing different demographics and types of public library services within the UK. Focus groups will be used with cohorts of library users and library staff from each location.

Keywords: public libraries, impact of public libraries, social capital

References

Curriculum Vitae
Leo Appleton is a part time PhD student in the Centre for Social Informatics at Edinburgh Napier University as well as Assistant Director of Library Services at Liverpool John Moores University. He is responsible for the operational management and strategic planning of the university’s library service with a particular focus on customer services, business planning and administration. He has worked in a number of Further Education colleges and Higher Education Institutions in various management roles, and has published and presented widely on a number of library management themes including, student partnerships, quality assurance, library spaces, electronic resources, information literacy, staff development and library technology initiatives.