

Unlimited Value

INTERIM PROJECT REPORT | NOVEMBER 2017



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About the Unlimited Value project

What are libraries for?

What impact do they have within their communities?

How can libraries use and improve this impact to inform new business models, which will help them to be financially sustainable?

These are some of the key questions that underpin our research project, funded by Arts Council England (ACE). The project brings together Libraries Unlimited with the University of Exeter Business School, the Real Ideas Organisation, and ODI Devon. Together, the project partners are exploring how Libraries Unlimited can identify and maximise the social impact the organisation has, and might have in the future, within local communities. In so doing, it is hoped that Libraries Unlimited will be able to identify new partnerships and possibilities that will help to ensure its sustainability as a social enterprise.

At the heart of the project is a programme that will build the capacity of Libraries Unlimited's staff to support and develop the potential for libraries to bring people together, offer services that make a difference to communities, and play a role in improving the quality of life and opportunities available to people. This project is important not just to Libraries Unlimited's future; it also has the potential to enable library services across the country to gain a better understanding of the different impacts libraries have. We also anticipate that the lessons learned in this project will be applicable beyond libraries, for other arts and cultural organisations, and for any enterprises seeking to use their social impact as a basis for financial stability.

How are we making a difference:

- Analysis of Libraries Unlimited's borrower/user information. This will help us to understand how libraries can better serve the communities that use (and don't use) them.
- Action Learning Sets (ALS) for Libraries Unlimited employees, in which they explore and learn from their own work challenges.
- Action Research Summits bringing together experts in social enterprise, sector leaders and a variety of other stakeholders.
- Relationship mapping to capture the partnerships and potential for new revenue generation.
- New tools and techniques for understanding Libraries Unlimited's impact, for example through social media, community workshops and Data Discovery days.
- Developing teaching case studies and engaging students at the University of Exeter Business School with mini-projects.

We outline progress on the key components of our research project below. Core findings from the project will be disseminated through further publications and key events highlighted at the end of the report.

Action Learning

The action learning process is now just over mid-way through with approximately three sets left to run. Many of the participants have now produced action plans that they are now actively progressing.

At our recent Action Research Summit, members of the action learning set presented insights on their experiences with the process. Some participants also took part in a workshop session at the Libraries Unlimited Staff Conference (30th October), where staff attending were offered the opportunity to be involved with a taster

session facilitated by ALS participants with support from Beverley Hawkins and Hugh Waters. Some of the insights shared included working on new ways to employ library floor space, in terms of how it might be used/monetised such as through wall space and outside space. Discussions also explored how to encourage 'non-users' into the library and breaking boundaries around library users through local history projects that bring together elderly people with school children to explore buildings, memories, and local communities.

Partnership research and development with students at the University of Exeter Business School

As part of the project, a range of opportunities have been created in conjunction with the University of Exeter Business School to embed sub-projects into various undergraduate and postgraduate modules. These modules support students to develop skills and knowledge through a management consultancy-based project exploring new digital opportunities and position organisations to realise higher business value as a result of the partnership.

Some of the questions students are currently exploring are:

- What best practice exists in the UK and beyond, where libraries have used digital technology to transform their organisation and the way customers access their services?
- How Libraries Unlimited can best exploit digital transformation to provide a more diverse service to its current and potential customers, and how can this be commercially viable?
- What is the role of libraries in a modern digital economy where competition varies from charity shops, to Google and Amazon?
- How can digital technology help support a transformation of new services?

In addition, students are exploring, through the principles of research design, scoping and data analysis, an evaluation framework for Libraries Unlimited library users.

Partnerships have also been developed with Dissertation Students, including looking at how social enterprises operating public library services can utilise social media more effectively to engage their users in value creation, which is intended to help shape a future social media marketing strategy.

Further opportunities are being developed in conjunction with the University of Exeter's world class MBA programme, including how the outputs of all the consultancy-based projects will shape a knowledge exchange event with Libraries Unlimited.



Data Discovery

This component of the project is being led by the ODI Devon Node which focuses on the development of an open data platform where Libraries Unlimited can host their data and link it to both local and national openly held data sets. So far a discovery workshop has taken place with key stakeholders to scope data requirements. The findings from the day were collated with a report outlining possible next steps.

The next phase of work will look at collating information on available and relevant datasets internally and externally and to run a prototyping workshop with development work of data visualisations after the initial discovery work is complete. The open 'Datastore' is available at <http://libraries.thedata.place> where datasets will be added as the project progresses.



Action Research Summit: Leading practice in Unlimited Value Creation

Leading practice in Unlimited Value Creation was our first Action Research Summit hosted by the University of Exeter Business School. Bringing together academics and senior practitioners from a diverse range of backgrounds to ignite discussion, network and exchange knowledge. The Summit offered the opportunity to shape thinking and practice on how libraries, social enterprises and cultural institutions can understand, grow and communicate the diverse value they create within their communities.

Rather than simply hold a large dissemination event at the end of our work, we have built two such Action Research Summits into our research plan. They allow us to make wider connections as we go, draw in other partners and expertise, learn from others doing similar work and help ensure that our research is sharp and focussed, and as likely as possible to produce findings of wider import and value beyond our own context.

The sections below summarise some

of the ideas emerging from thought-provoking keynote sessions and insights from delegates shared during the day. The purpose of the event was to establish a network for continued, inter-disciplinary conversations on how organisations can create 'unlimited' forms of value, relating to but not bounded by social, cultural, health, wellbeing and economic impacts.



Setting the scene

An introduction to the Unlimited Value project, Libraries Unlimited and wider perspectives on the research questions led by Ciara Eastell, CEO of Libraries Unlimited. This was supported by delivery of the 'academic perspective' from Adrian Bailey, Senior lecturer at the University of Exeter Business School. Matt Little, Co-founder and Director of Impact and Research for the Real Ideas Organisation (RIO), offered perspectives from the past 10 years on RIO's journey as a spin out and developing social enterprise. This session concluded with a workshop involving all delegates.

Discussions were structured with the following questions for consideration by delegates with facilitation by members of the project team.

1. Compare and contrast what you are experiencing from your perspective with what you have heard from Libraries Unlimited. What chimes loudest for you? What is different and why?
2. In terms of working at the intersection between social and financial value at a time of change, what are the knottiest challenges and biggest issues that keep you awake at night?
3. Drawing on your own experience and perspective, where are the main opportunities for libraries to create more linked social and financial value?

Thoughts from discussions

Insights from discussion and workshop sessions emerged along two broad themes during the day which have been summarised below.

1. Creating and connecting social and financial value
2. Reflections on the change process and future directions

Creating and connecting social value and financial value

- There should be a focus on exploring the 'why and how' of social value.
- There is a need to find a balance or the sweet spot between social value and financial value.
- The process of turning social value into tangible data could better open-up financial value.
- It was suggested that the measures used by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) do not fulfil the wider reach of libraries in the current day.

- Financial viability and value remain pertinent – and this would be the main question or issue focussed on by stakeholders (e.g. LA in a library case). In short, we could talk about social value but ultimately money is still the main arbiter no matter what we do here.
- A desire to find approaches to social value that sit somewhere between data and figures (quantitative) and narrative and case studies (qualitative).
- It was discussed that in the same way we seek to unpack social value and explaining its multi-dimensionality, the same should be done for financial value.
- It was felt that we instinctively know that we can't tell much or actually measure much that is meaningful in complex social organisations.

Could big data be key to helping us better understand and ground these perceptions and get a handle on this?

For example, financial value can be construed or interpreted as:

- A proxy for social value (e.g. as with SROI or cost benefit analysis – and even then it can be money saved or money created).
- Enterprise value and the dynamic that comes with this (e.g. linking more to a way of working, of meeting and serving customer needs etc.).
- Customer value (accounted for in a range of ways).
- A tool for sustainability of social value or a social project or organisation.



Where next? Research Summit participants' reflections on the change process and future directions

- The need for change was recognised by many organisations present, with the understanding that change processes will look different for every stakeholder.
- It was acknowledged that libraries cannot do everything for everyone and that the focus should be on tailoring services to the right groups at the right time. Participants recognised that organisational values are particularly important, for example being research-focused and cultural.
- Getting staff 'buy-in' was a challenge in some instances, in terms of demonstrating the impact of the library service and the role of libraries in health and wellbeing.
- Ethics are an important aspect of what is considered appropriate (or legal). People might be happy for organisations to use their data for social purposes, but not for financial purposes.
- Libraries were recognised as being especially 'trusted' institutions, which equates to 'value'.
- Participants noted that stories are a good way to emphasise core organisational messages. Every interaction leaves a trace, however consistency of messages is important.
- In some instances, social services are replicating the services of libraries: if this is framed properly then this could be

How can libraries become legitimised among external groups?

- offered in terms of a social package.
- The value of data was acknowledged with greater need for data sharing and bringing together open data from different parties among common platforms.
- Library services could benefit from more information about users and where they come from and how they travel to the library.
- There are benefits from the devolution from the Council. Though the challenge becomes moving to a culture of enablement with a focus on people development.
- In some instances, public ambition is driven by desire to have a bigger library with more books, but in the context of a transition towards a digitised service.
- We need more recognition about 'what good looks like' and how it changes over time. This shifts depending on what social value a public service mutual needs to focus on at any given time.
- Community sits at the heart of 'library' along with personal expectations and strong relationships with the past. This also creates a potentially limiting or inhibiting set of constraints on business and direction – which can run counter to the enterprise's direction of travel.

Practical perspectives and Action Learning insights

Beverley Hawkins' presentation focused on the transition Libraries Unlimited is making in becoming a public sector mutual. Her key question was 'How can we make 'library work' into 'socially enterprising work'? What is clear from the discussion and from existing research, is that this change requires a shift in identity not just for senior leadership team, but for employees at different layers of the organization. Four participants from Libraries Unlimited's Action Learning Set explained to the audience how Action Learning has

transformed their understanding of their work and helped them to think about capturing and monetising social impact in new ways. A central question was:

Reconfiguring understandings of 'space' – what is a 'library space'?

External stimulus

Professor Will Harvey: University of Exeter

Will Harvey's presentation discussed how organisations can manage their reputations while changing values. This included a discussion of a working paper written by the University of Exeter Business School on the challenges of how organisations can couple social and financial value using technology and big data.



John Knell: Culture Counts

1. **Data needs to raise stories:** You must make a promise to people. He mentioned the Shining a Light report – if you tell people about libraries they want to go. Someone described libraries as being a magic carpet to go somewhere else. An asset may look shabby on the outside, but if you get your welcome right it can be a magical experience.
2. **Ideas change things:** You as practitioners can change things. How can organisations become more data driven?
3. **A focus on metrics and evaluation:** Seven years ago – the Western Australia Government funded a project and then found additional funding in the UK. Australia want to capture public value. John challenged funders to think more innovatively and laterally about what value looks like in the sector. Why don't we ask people who make culture what the core outcomes are of a high quality

experience? The Department of Culture and Arts in Australia said that it couldn't be done, but it had remarkable results.

The documentation on the Culture offer by ACE is the Quality Metrics. Self + Peer + Public and triangulation. This creates a knowledge community around a particular area of evaluation and measurement. It allows for positive interaction with other industry standards.



Jen Wallace (Head of Policy) Carnegie

Jen Wallace presented on Shining a Light; a report published by Carnegie UK <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/shining-a-light/> based in Dunfermline. Jen explained that when she joined Carnegie UK six years ago, finding out what the public think about public libraries was a key priority. Subsequently, her team have worked on this question and invested in a cross jurisdictional survey. This ran in 2011 and the new data was produced in 2016. The 'Shining a Light' report polled 1,000 people in the UK and Ireland. However, they were not able to do that so they polled 1,000 people in England, Wales, Scotland, NI and Ireland.

The key findings of the report highlighted in the presentation are summarised below:

- 50% of people use the library in each jurisdiction, 2/5 use once a month, however this doesn't help us answer questions about what do libraries do and what could they do better.
- Public libraries are pretty well used. Yet the narrative about public libraries are fairly negative. The people who do not use libraries are not all the same, nor do they have the same reasons for not using these spaces.
 - » Some people do not use because of accessibility.
 - » Some people do not use because they are not acceptable to them.
 - » Some people do not use because they don't want to (could be lifestyle).
 - » Frequency of visits are going down – but we don't know why.
 - » Non-users are rating the library as important to your community.
- Libraries are being used most heavily by young people age 15-24 years.
- Communication Challenge – people say they would use the library more if they could reserve books online – but of course they can do this already. So there is a knowledge gap.

Continuing the conversation and next steps

Key Dates

- 'Next Library', Aarhus, June 2017
- Leading Practice in Unlimited Value Creation, University of Exeter, October 2017
- Prototyping Day with ODI Devon, Exeter Library, February 2018
- Hackathon, Exeter Library, April 2018
- Knowledge exchange with University of Exeter Business School students, Exeter, May 2018
- Final Action Research Summit, London, July 2018
- 'Next Library' Berlin, September 2018
- Final project report, September 2018

For more information on the Unlimited Value project and our future activities please visit our project blog and read some of the recent posts from the project team. We are keen to showcase co-created content on the blog, if you would like to write a blog post in relation to the summit for us to share, please do get in touch!



blogs.exeter.ac.uk/unlimitedvalue/

We would also like to invite you to connect with us on Twitter, we have setup the hashtag below for you to tweet your thoughts before, during and after the event.



#UnlimitedValue