City of Libraries: The Impact of the Urban Reform Movement on the Toronto Public Library

by

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Abstract
This research explores the impact of Toronto’s urban reform movement of the 1970s on the Toronto Public Library (TPL) system. The TPL is the largest public library system in Canada, with 98 branches located in neighbourhoods across the city. These highly visible, accessible, and dynamic local branches promote social inclusion and community engagement through the provision of a range of programs and services. Public participation in the library planning process through citizens’ advisory groups resulted in the “equalization” of library services across the city, a renewal of the local branch system, and the restructuring of programs and services to meet community needs as defined by communities themselves. This research also discusses the possibility of creating new opportunities for patron participation at the TPL in the context of the recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues.
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Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................. iv
List of Figures ................................................................................................................... vi

Chapter 1—Introduction .................................................................................................. 1
  1.1—Background ............................................................................................................. 1
  1.2—Research Focus ...................................................................................................... 6
  1.3—Overall Research Aim and Individual Research Objectives ............................. 8
  1.4—Implications of this Research ............................................................................. 10
  1.5—Outline Structure ............................................................................................... 14

Chapter 2—Issues of Agency and Power in Public Library History and the Role of Public Libraries in Civic Life .................................................................................. 17
  2.1—Introduction ......................................................................................................... 17
  2.2—Issues of Agency and Power in Public Library History ..................................... 17
  2.3—The Role of Public Libraries in Civic Life ........................................................... 27
  2.4—Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 46

Chapter 3—Research Methods ....................................................................................... 48
  3.1—Introduction ......................................................................................................... 48
  3.2—Research Strategy ................................................................................................ 48
  3.3—Data Collection .................................................................................................... 52
  3.4—Framework for Data Analysis .......................................................................... 53
  3.5—Limitations and Potential Problems ................................................................... 59

Chapter 4—“Citizen Participation” and Urban Reform in Toronto ............................... 62
  4.1—Introduction ......................................................................................................... 62
  4.2—Themes in the History of the Urban Reform Movement ................................... 62
    4.2.1—The Emergence of Citizen Participation ....................................................... 65
    4.2.2—The Impetus for Urban Reform ................................................................... 68
    4.2.3—The Composition of the Urban Reform Movement .................................... 73
    4.2.4—The Legacy of Urban Reform .................................................................... 76

Chapter 5—Urban Reform-Era Library Activism and the Evolution of Patron Participation at the TPL ........................................................................................................ 79
  5.1—Introduction ......................................................................................................... 79
  5.2—Themes in the History of the Urban Reform Movement ................................... 79
    5.2.1—The Emergence of Library Activism ............................................................... 79
    5.2.2—The Impetus for Library Activism ................................................................. 82
    5.2.3—The Identity of the Library Activism .............................................................. 90
    5.2.4—The Legacy of Library Activism at the TPL ................................................. 94
  5.3—Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 109
Chapter 6—Discussion: “Deepening Democracy” at the TPL .................................. 112
  6.1—Introduction ........................................................................................................ 112
  6.2—Recent Resurgence in Civic Engagement on Library Issues .................. 112
  6.3—Discussion .......................................................................................................... 120

Chapter 7—Conclusion ................................................................................................ 146
  7.1—Introduction ........................................................................................................ 146
  7.2—Research Objectives—Summary of Findings and Conclusions .............. 146
  7.3—Recommendations for Future Research .............................................................. 157
  7.4—Limitations ......................................................................................................... 158
  7.5—Self-Reflection .................................................................................................... 159

References .................................................................................................................... 163
List of Figures

Figure 1—“Public Involvement Continuum” ................................................................. 162
Figure 2—“Ladder of Citizen Participation” ................................................................. 162
Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Background

Public libraries are highly accessible, inclusive, and dynamic public institutions that enrich the imaginative inner lives of patrons and strengthen civic life in neighbourhoods and communities. UNESCO (1994) defines the public library as a “living force for education, culture and information, and [...] an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women” (emphasis added, n.p.). This statement brings to mind the relatively recent phenomenon of “living libraries” (or “human libraries”), a popular learning activity in which people (or “living books”) represent a specific facet of their identity and make themselves available “on loan” to engage in a discussion about their experiences with borrowers (http://human-library.org/index.html). The “living library” concept is not directly connected to public libraries (although local branches often organize and host the event). However, the exercise mirrors the evolving role of public libraries, from imposing, often inaccessible scholarly spaces into lively, communal sites of interaction and exchange.

In many ways, the “living library” concept exemplifies the imaginative aspect of the public library as an institution. Anderson (1991) defines the nation as an “imagined political community” (p. 6). Said (1979) describes how “imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away” (p. 55). For library patrons, the public library exists within a similarly imaginative dimension. Since the late nineteenth century, governments, philanthropists, and librarians have attempted to dictate the purpose of the public library, its relationship to society at large, and its role within the community. However, public libraries have also been forced to contend with the changing needs, attitudes and behavior patterns of patrons.
The progressive view of adult education greatly influenced the development of the public library system at the turn of the century, and many Progressive-Era principles underlying public librarianship (in Toronto and elsewhere) would remain unchallenged until the 1960s, when outmoded and increasingly irrelevant practices hindered the ability of libraries to connect with the rapidly changing communities around them. As predominantly middle-class institutions, public libraries have tended to “emphasize conformity to middle-class values and maintenance of the status quo” (Du Mont, 1977, p. 104). The social movements of the 1960s—including the antiwar movement, the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the gay liberation movement, and the student movement—led many librarians to a critical examination of the middle-class bias inherent in library services to communities. The social movements of the 1960s also ushered in new perspectives on public participation in library planning and governance.

One consequence, perhaps unintended, of an expansive and accessible library system is that individuals are able to educate themselves and draw their own conclusions about the economy, society, and power. The learning that takes place in libraries can thus be transformative, but is also highly individualized, tacit, and unpredictable in nature. Public libraries have become remarkably accessible and responsive institutions by constantly adapting their services to meet the changing needs of patrons. Exploring exchanges between libraries and patrons provides some insight into this uniquely reciprocal relationship.
This study explores the long-term impact of one such exchange: the urban reform-era library activism and patron participation\(^1\) that led to the radical transformation of the Toronto Public Library (TPL) in the 1970s. Participation in the library planning process through citizens’ advisory groups resulted in the “equalization” of library services across the city, a renewal of the local branch system, and the restructuring of programs and services to meet community needs as defined by communities themselves.

Toronto could be described as a city of libraries. Public libraries are fixtures of the urban landscape and play a vital, multifaceted role in its civic life. The Toronto Public Library (TPL) is the largest public library system in Canada, with 98 branches located in neighbourhoods across the city. The TPL supports lifelong learning through the provision of a wide range of programs, services, and courses. Many of these initiatives, such as adult literacy and ESL programs, early childhood education programs, and programs for youth and seniors, also promote social and economic inclusion in communities. Libraries are also primary points of contact for many newcomers across the GTA and provide unique windows into the communities they serve. As City Librarian Jane Pyper has noted, local libraries are likely to be “the first civic institutions” many new Canadians encounter upon arrival in Toronto. Remarkably, local branches are so well-used that TPL staff can accurately predict emerging demographic trends based on demands for new multilingual materials in advance of the release of census data (Pyper, 2009).

Many of the TPL’s distinctive features—the ongoing expansion of multilingual resources and services, the commitment to community programs and initiatives, and the extensive branch

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\(^1\) Patron participation refers to the sustained involvement of patrons and other stakeholders in library planning and policymaking. I use the term “patron participation” to emphasize my focus on participatory democracy in a public library context. I am aware that this term may appear to exclude non-users, including the “socially excluded” communities addressed by the Working Together Project (2008). However, the term “patron” is used frequently within libraries and I use it in a broad sense to refer to existing and potential patrons.
system—developed during a period of profound organizational questioning and change sparked by Toronto’s urban reform movement. The 1970s urban reform movement emerged during a “heady time” in Canadian politics. Popular dissatisfaction with all levels of government found expression in a variety of countercultural and social movements, as well as demands for more accountable and responsive governments and institutions. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau responded to the tenor of the times by nominally supporting the notion of “citizen participation and open government” (Goldrick, 1984, p. 22). As Lemon (1984) notes, the “urban reform movement” in Toronto developed out of popular opposition at the local level to large-scale real-estate redevelopment and transportation projects such as the Spadina Expressway (p. 3). Public anger over these redevelopment projects ushered in a new era of urban activism marked by the demand for greater citizen involvement in municipal planning and governance. The growing influence of citizens’ groups such as the Confederation of Resident and Ratepayer Associations provided a popular platform for a new group of reform-oriented politicians, such as John Sewell, to enter municipal politics for the first time.

There is some debate over the cohesiveness of the urban reform movement. It did not necessarily represent a unified political perspective; however, as Caulfield (1974) argues, it resonated with “the real feelings of people who believed that their civic government was, at best, grossly unresponsive and irresponsible, or worse, a pawn in the hands of the land development industry” (p. 4). Higgins (1981) argues that “it seems to me to be claiming too much for what happened to city politics in Canada in the late Sixties and early Seventies to call it a political movement.” However, he does acknowledge that the “influx of new groups of people into the civic arena” had important implications for municipal politics (p. 87). As this new group of city
politicians familiarized themselves with the inner workings of City Hall, many city agencies and boards, including the Library Board, came under close public scrutiny for the first time.

During this period, the future direction of Toronto’s public library system seemed uncertain. New Library Board appointees, such as James Lorimer and Dorothy Thomas, began to examine TPL policies and planning issues from a reform perspective. The TPL argued that it was striving to improve its services by embarking on a building plan that involved the construction of large-scale “district libraries.”

Marshall (1984g) places the district library plan in the context of other municipal redevelopment projects from the period:

The idea of district libraries with large reference collections, with neighbourhood facilities reduced to tiny satellite libraries largely for children’s services, was characteristic of the centralizing tendencies of the ‘50s and ‘60s. […] Inner-city libraries, so it was argued, were and would be little used, while the readers (white, middle class) were moving out to the suburbs. […] Therefore, the principle of large district libraries, spaced several miles apart, will meet the major needs of these mobile suburbanites […] (p. 117).

Some communities feared these libraries would supplant existing local neighbourhood branches in the circulation of materials and provision of services. For many of the reform-era activists, the proposal was reminiscent of other massive redevelopment projects. However, unlike the private developers, Thomas (1984) explains, the TPL, a municipally-funded organization, “was using the taxpayers’ own money to block-bust the neighbourhood” (p. 62).

The popular opposition to the Spadina Expressway occupies a central place in many accounts of Toronto’s urban reform movement. However, public scrutiny of the district library plan forced people to reflect on the role of local libraries in their communities and to imagine an alternative course of action for the TPL. In 1974, an East End Advisory Group (comprised of Library Board and community members) was formed to examine the district library proposal for

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2 The TPL is currently comprised of “Neighbourhood Branches,” “District Branches,” and “Research and Reference Libraries.” The “District Libraries” as they exist today are described by the TPL as “Medium-Sized Libraries” and have not supplanted the far more numerous “Neighbourhood Branches” (TPL, 2012).
the east end of Toronto, setting a precedent for the formation of subsequent advisory groups in other parts of the city. Charged with the task of reviewing the suitability of the district library proposal, commissioning reports, and providing recommendations, these groups, along with the Library Board, began to uncover other pressing issues such as the unequal distribution of library resources and outdated and “elitist” collection development policies (Marshall, 1984c, p. 193). As Thomas (1984) explains, “once the community got its collective foot in the door, the door was pushed wide open, and the whole library system was fair game for comment and criticism” (pp. 65-66).

1.2 Research Focus

Marshall (1984d) describes how this intense period of library activism and patron participation led to significant shifts in TPL policy and planning priorities, including the dismissal of the district library model; the retention (and expansion) of neighbourhood-based library services through local branches; the “equalization” of library resources and services across the city; a renewed focus on responding to patron needs (with increased outreach efforts targeted at non-users); a new imperative to provide Canadian materials; expanding the scope of the library’s multilingual collections to meet the needs of non-English speaking patrons; and acquiring “popular” materials (e.g. non-print media) to meet the demands and tastes of all patrons (pp. 278-279). A number of the policy changes described by Marshall—including the commitment to creating inclusive library services, community programs and initiatives and the ongoing expansion of the extensive branch system—have become integral components of library service as practiced by the TPL.

According to Marshall (1984d), patron participation created tangible benefits for the TPL. Perhaps most significantly, patron participation allowed the library to build a “constituency
of library supporters who may be called upon for help in applying pressure to City Hall, in backing budget requests, etc.” (p. 279). When I embarked on this research in 2009, the TPL appeared to be entrenched in the public realm and seemed to be able to secure adequate government support and investment, even in troubled economic times (Hurst, 2009). I intended to explore how public engagement in library planning associated with Toronto’s urban reform movement in the 1970s and 1980s transformed the TPL into a reflective and adaptive library system open to community involvement. This period of profound organizational change, it seemed, had ensured that the TPL would always remain deeply embedded within the fabric of city life in Toronto.

Toronto’s municipal election in the fall of 2010 marked a palpable change in the city’s political climate. Mayor Rob Ford’s campaign promises to “Stop the Gravy Train” and restore “Respect for Taxpayers” resounded with voters, and Don Cherry’s controversial address at the Mayor’s inauguration, in which he mocked the “pinkos out there that ride bicycles and everything,” set a new, divisive tone for City Council (The Toronto Star, 2010). Public libraries became one of the City’s services targeted for extensive cuts in 2012 municipal budget.

The accessibility and high visibility of the TPL had always been a point of pride for the organization; in the city’s new political climate, it was becoming a political liability. The Toronto Public Library Workers Union (TPLWU Local 4948) launched a high-profile campaign and online petition to draw public attention to the proposed branch closures and cuts to library services. Public support for library funding remained steadfast throughout the 2012 budget process, as Torontonians gave deputations, signed petitions, and wrote letters to TPL Board Members and City Councillors. Based on feedback from their constituents, several of the

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3 The campaign and petition was organized through the website OurPublicLibrary.to.
Mayor’s key allies on City Council reversed their position on cuts to libraries. The strong public reaction to the proposed cuts suggests that Councillor Doug Ford (the Mayor’s brother) and the Mayor’s other allies on City Council underestimated the power of Marshall’s “constituency of library supporters” (1984d, p. 279)

The TPL will inevitably continue to face financial and political pressures in the near future. In many ways, this appears to be an ideal time to explore the legacy of Toronto’s urban reform movement and its impact on the TPL. The strong “constituency of library supporters” will likely continue to play a key role in allowing the TPL to maintain its status as an adequately funded public institution. In many ways, the TPL is well-positioned to create new opportunities for patron participation. Creating a truly “participatory” library system could benefit “socially excluded” populations (Working Together Project, 2008) and create new inroads for researchers, institutions and grassroots organizations interested in adult education, community development, citizenship learning and participatory democracy.

1.3 Overall Research Aim and Individual Research Objectives

The overall aim of this research is to explore the long-term impact of patron participation on the TPL. This study has four objectives: identifying issues of agency and power in public library history and exploring the role of public libraries in civic life; understanding the influence of the urban reform on library activism in Toronto; exploring the evolution of urban-reform era library activism and its impact on TPL policy; and generating discussion regarding the creation of new opportunities for patron participation within the context of the recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues.
Identifying issues of agency and power in public library history and exploring the role of public libraries in civic life

In order to place urban reform era activism on library issues in Toronto within a theoretical and historical context, this study will explore how issues of agency and power have shaped the relationship between public libraries and patrons. Examining the role of public libraries in civic life will provide additional insight into the nature of this relationship.

Understanding the influence of the urban reform movement on library activism in Toronto

The momentum of the urban reform movement helped to shape the library activism that emerged during this period. In an attempt to understand the influence of the urban reform movement on library activism in Toronto, this study will situate the rise and fall of the urban reform movement within a broader political and historical context.

Exploring the evolution of urban reform-era library activism and its impact on TPL policy

The evolution of library activism into formalized patron participation initiatives created significant policy changes at the TPL. This research will demonstrate how many of the features that allow the TPL to connect with patrons and communities today—including the inclusive orientation of its programs and services and the accessibility of its neighbourhood branches—exist as a direct result of the organizational changes that occurred at the TPL during the urban reform period.

Generating discussion regarding the creation of new opportunities for patron participation in the context of the recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues

Today, opportunities for patron participation at the TPL appear to be more limited than they were during the urban reform period. As public libraries continue to face mounting financial pressures
in Toronto and elsewhere, this study will examine the potential benefits of creating new venues for patron participation.

1.4 Implications of this Research

This research has implications for the related fields of adult education and community development. As a historical case study, it provides some insight into the long-term impact of patron participation on library planning and governance and the changing role of libraries in civic life. Understanding how libraries can strengthen their ties to the communities they serve is particularly relevant today, as public libraries around the world face an uncertain future in the wake of the global financial crisis.

Public Libraries and Adult Education

In his “Memorandum on Adult Education in Libraries” (1960), Dr. J.R. Kidd, Director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, stated, “There has always been the most cordial relationship between librarians and others working in Canadian adult education. It is fairly well understood in Canada that the public library is the foundation stone of adult education” (emphasis added, quoted in Shaw, 1960, p. 80). Public libraries are highly visible and accessible educational institutions that encompass several areas of interest within the diverse field of adult education, including lifelong learning, community development, citizenship learning, and participatory democracy. Throughout their history, libraries’ service to their communities has been shaped by various philosophies of adult education, ranging from progressivism to post-modernism (Elias and Meriam, 2005). Exploring the changing role of libraries within society can deepen our understanding of the theory and practice of adult education. For example, librarians and library staff often learn about community needs through their interactions with patrons and
through outreach activities. The study of public librarianship thus provides insight how organizations can learn from and alongside the communities they serve.

Exploring the impact of the urban reform movement on the TPL can also enhance our understanding of social movement learning. As Hall (2006) argues, “A most powerful form of social movement learning, and one often neglected in the literature, is the learning that takes place by persons who are not directly participating as members of a given social movement—by people outside of a given movement” (p. 232). According to Goldrick (1984), Toronto’s urban reform movement “was destined to be an ambiguous, loosely aligned movement. No particular shape or objectives emerged, and its initial focus was on curtailing the excesses of government it replaced and increasing its responsiveness to the public” (p. 34). Similarly, Higgins (1981) argues that “it seems to me to be claiming too much for what happened to city politics in Canada in the late Sixties and early Seventies to call it a political movement” (p. 87). However, this “loosely aligned” and localized movement attracted diverse groups of people who opposed the destruction of existing neighbourhoods and infrastructures. This research will examine how the wider community responded to the movement’s vision for the city and for the public library system.

**Public Libraries and Community Development**

Ongoing investment in new technologies is gradually changing the role and the perception of public libraries within communities. However, according to De la Peña McCook (2000), “The assimilation of technology into the library is ongoing in terms of newer, more powerful electronics, but the ideological assimilation has been accomplished. We have incorporated the use of technology in service of traditional values.” In terms of the future of public libraries, she argues, “The next shift needed is for librarianship to make formal recognition of and
commitment of resources to the importance of community building” (p. 109). De la Peña McCook’s interest in “community building” reflects an area of interest within the library profession emphasizing on the role of the library within the community. Other related work has focused on concepts of “civic librarianship” (McCabe, 2001), “community development” librarianship (http://www.librariesincommunities.ca) and the “needs-based library service” model (Pateman & Vincent, 2010). This study adds to this growing body of literature by providing a historical example of “community development” librarianship in action.

**The Impact of Patron Participation on Public Libraries**

Marshall (1984d) noted several benefits of participatory approaches to library planning and policymaking at the TPL: creating library policies and services responsive to “neighbourhood, ethnic and specialized needs, interests and aspirations”; creating a “feedback mechanism” that enabled the library to assess how policies, programs and services were being received by the community; increasing the number of library patrons by converting non-users; recognizing, supporting and recruiting leaders from community and ethnic groups to participate in advisory groups and serve on the Library Board; creating a robust “constituency of library supporters” and advocates; and building “a knowledgeable network of citizens” who would uphold the library’s commitment to freedom of speech (p. 279). This study highlights the long-term impacts of reform era participatory approaches to library planning and policymaking, with a special emphasis on the role of Toronto’s “constituency of library supporters” during the 2012 municipal budget process.

**The Role of Public Libraries in Civic Life**

According to DCMS (2003), “Libraries have a vital role as anchor institutions in our communities: they are among the most basic membership institutions in civil society” (p. 42). As
highly visible and accessible public institutions, public libraries “evoke consistent, extraordinary public trust among diverse adult users” (Griffiths & King, 2008, p. 3). Perhaps more than any other publicly-funded institution, the library seeks to demonstrate its value by opening its doors to all members of the community. This research will explore the vital role that public libraries play in civic life.

Skocpol (1999) describes the impact of the decline of civic life in the United States. He argues that “[m]any highly educated, individualistic elites find it hard to believe that there could be any advantages in groups or institutions that mix family life with community involvement, recreation and fun with an occasional venture into electoral politics or public affairs.” Today, American “group life” is highly “fragmented and disarticulated,” making it difficult for “regular citizens” to gain “the clout that can be indirectly generated by mixing politics and civic activity with family life and socializing” (p. 504). Skocpol argues that we “can and should look for ways to recreate the best of our civic past in new forms suited to a renewed democratic future” (p. 506). Libraries are uniquely inclusive and accessible public institutions with a strong commitment to citizenship learning and lifelong learning. Throughout their history, libraries have maintained strong symbolic ties to notions of democracy, free speech, human rights, citizenship, and civic life. By revisiting this moment in the history of the TPL, I hope to draw attention to the immense potential of public libraries to “recreate the best of our civic past in new forms” in Toronto, and beyond.

**The Uncertain Future of Public Libraries**

In the wake of the global financial crisis, public libraries around the world are facing an uncertain future. Library systems in some American cities have been turning to outsourcing and privatization initiatives to cope with budgetary pressures. While there has been a public outcry
against the notion of privatizing the management of public libraries, this practice has become a reality for library systems under financial duress in several American cities (Streitfeld, 2010).

Some of the most eloquent writing in defense of public libraries has emerged from the U.K. over the past year. Novelist Zadie Smith (2012) argues that private sector solutions will not resolve the financial issues facing public libraries today. According to Smith, public libraries offer patrons one vital service the private sector has no incentive to provide: “an indoor public space in which you do not have to buy anything in order to stay” (emphasis added, n.p.).

In the modern state there are very few sites where this is possible. [...] There aren’t many institutions left that fit so precisely Keynes’ definition of things that no one else but the state is willing to take on. Nor can the experience of library life be recreated online. It’s not just a matter of free books. A library is a different kind of social reality (of the three dimensional kind), which by its very existence teaches a system of values beyond the fiscal (emphasis added, n.p.).

Smith argues that public support for libraries does not have an “ideological or ethical” basis. “I would even agree with those who say it’s not especially logical. I think for most people it’s emotional. Not logos or ethos but pathos. This is not a denigration: emotion also has a place in public policy. We’re humans, not robots” (n.p.).

Due to the mounting financial pressures on public institutions, the survival of public libraries will increasingly depend upon consistent public advocacy and support. This study explores how public libraries can cultivate strong “constituencies of library supporters” through participatory approaches to library planning and policymaking.

1.5 Outline Structure

Chapter 1—Introduction

This chapter provides background information on the impact of the urban reform movement on the TPL. The research focus, overall research aim and the individual research objectives are described. The implications of this research—in terms of adult education, community
development, understanding the role of public libraries in civic life, and the uncertain future of public libraries—are also addressed.

Chapter 2—Issues of Agency and Power in Public Library History and the Role of Public Libraries in Civic Life
This chapter identifies issues of agency and power in public library history by exploring the origins of the public library and library philanthropy, and the use of libraries as both tools of assimilation and resistance. This chapter also attempts to describe the role of the public library in civic life by exploring the relationship between libraries and social capital, and by expanding upon the five features of public libraries identified by Marshall (1984d) (*ubiquity*, *propinquity*, *availability/neutrality*, *flexibility/versatility*, and *capability/potentiality*) and by proposing a sixth feature: *inclusivity* (pp. 297-301).

Chapter 3—Research Methods
This chapter describes the research strategy (historical research) and data collection techniques employed in this study. The framework for data analysis (historical contingency, libraries and marginality, and the origins and impact of patron participation) is presented, and limitations and potential problems are addressed.

Chapter 4—“Citizen Participation” and Urban Reform in Toronto
This chapter explores themes in the history of the urban reform movement, including the emergence of “citizen participation,” the impetus for citizen participation, the composition of the urban reform movement, and the legacy of urban reform.
Chapter 5—Urban Reform-Era Library Activism and the Evolution of Patron Participation at the TPL

This chapter builds on the material in Chapter 4 by exploring themes in the history of urban reform-era library activism, including the emergence of library activism, the impetus for library activism, the identity of the library activists, and the legacy of library activism at the TPL. The evolution of patron participation at the TPL during the urban reform era is also explored through an analysis of key reports and documents produced during this period, including the Shaw Report (1960), the Forrester Report (February/March 1975), the East End Survey (May 1975), EEAG Goals and Recommendations (July 1975), the Beckman Study (June 1975), and the Stinson Report (August 1975).

Chapter 6—Discussion: “Deepening Democracy” at the TPL

This chapter addresses the recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues in the U.S.A., the U.K., and in Toronto. The chapter also discusses issues related to the creation of new venues for patron participation, including defining “participation” at the TPL, entry points for patron participation at the TPL, the “educational habit” of patron participation, and building a “common language” of patron participation.

Chapter 7—Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the findings and conclusions of the individual research objectives, outlines recommendations related areas for future research, addresses the limitations of the study, and concludes with a personal reflection on this project.
Chapter 2
Issues of Agency and Power in Public Library History and the Role of Public Libraries in Civic Life

2.1 Introduction
This chapter will identify issues of agency and power in public library history and will discuss the role of public libraries in civic life. The literature review relates directly to the first of the research objectives outlined in sub-section 1.3 of the Introduction (identifying issues of agency and power in public library history and exploring the role of public libraries in civic life) and provides a theoretical framework for addressing the remaining objectives. The chapter first discusses the history of public libraries in education and empowerment and then the role of public libraries in civic life.

2.2 Issues of Agency and Power in Public Library History
Chapter 4 (“Citizen Participation” and Urban Reform in Toronto) describes how Toronto’s urban reform movement introduced a spirit of openness to community involvement and commitment to social change into the public library system, creating significant changes in funding priorities, programs, and services. This legacy of activism and participatory democracy left an indelible mark on the TPL. However, communities have always exercised agency and negotiated their relationships with public libraries.

The Origins of the Public Library and Library Philanthropy
“The public library, it is often said, has been dedicated from its earliest days to the economic and cultural improvement of the common man,” Franklin (1976) writes. The public library as an institution embodied “the nineteenth-century belief that education was the key to social advancement” (p. 1). According to Franklin, the antecedents of public libraries were the early
nineteenth-century mechanics institutes (or vocational libraries). These libraries offered users “the pragmatic, utilitarian opportunity for the improvement of skills needed in a time of growing industrialization; hence, for the employee, a hoped-for opportunity for economic advancement.” Employers, in turn, felt that it was important to create a constructive recreational outlet for underprivileged laborers who had newly migrated from Europe or the local rural life and who were all too easily led, it was feared, into the moral delinquency of the saloon and the bawdy house. To its social superiors, the working class very early carried with it the threat of disruption of the peace and the social order. Franklin argues that the public library inherited “twin goals” from the mechanics institutes: “vocational improvement and recreation. Librarians discuss their relative merits to this day” (p. 2).

The development of the public library system at the turn of the century reflected the “broadened view of education” of the Progressive Era that encompassed “the work of many institutions in society: family, workplace, school churches and the entire community” (Elias and Meriam, 2005, p. 61). As Franklin (1976) argues, “The need for educational opportunities intensified as the evils of industrialism and exploitation became apparent in the social deterioration of slums, poverty, and delinquency.” The social reformers of this period firmly believed that education promoted “economic advancement” as well as “the understanding and preservation of democracy.” Within this context, the public library began to perform both an informal educational and social service role in society (p. 3).^[4]

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^[4] “The advocates of free public education envisioned the free public library as the capstone of the educational system: the interdependency of the public schools and the public libraries is a vital issue to us still. What good was it, they said, to teach everyone to read, if we did not provide a source of materials to be read? Librarians, for their part, ‘placed the library alongside sanitation, street lighting, public parks, and hospitals as minimum social services which a democratic society owed itself’” (Franklin, 1976, p. 3).
Like their precursors, the mechanics institutes, public libraries were also viewed as an effective bulwark against social unrest. Franklin describes how the “burgeoning of political and organizational power” on the part of the working class elicited “a faint note of alarmed concern for the preservation of the social structure, from those classes who had derived the most comforts from it. Specters of strikes and communism, anarchy and populism arose as the labor unions for the first time showed their muscle” (p. 5). Garrison (1979) critiques the historical interpretations of the origins of the American public library system found in classic histories of public librarianship, such as Shera’s *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855* (1949) and Ditzion’s *Arsenals Arsena* l*ls of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle Atlantic States from 1850-1900* (1947), on the basis that they “deemphasize or ignore the patrician source of much of the library’s activities and to greatly exaggerate the support given the public library by the working class.” While she acknowledges that “a measure of altruism influenced library founders,” she emphasizes the importance of understanding the “other considerations, less noble but no less pronounced, were also uppermost in their minds” (p. xii). Garrison asserts that library historians must acknowledge “that the building of public libraries was motivated by a fear of egalitarianism and upheaval from below as much as by a desire for democratic extension of education” (p. xiii).

Du Mont (1977) concurs with this view, arguing that “a widespread fear of social convulsion among men of wealth” helped to inspire the library philanthropy of captains of industry such as Andrew Carnegie (p. 52). Carnegie’s library philanthropy had a profound impact on public library systems throughout North America and the English-speaking world. The Carnegie library grants greatly expanded the public library system throughout North America. In
Ontario alone, 111 libraries were built with Carnegie seed funds (Beckman, Langmead, & Black, 1984). As Du Mont (1977) notes, the Carnegie model “encouraged the library community center approach in the branch libraries which were closer to the population and not as imposing as main library buildings” (p. 63). In this way, the Carnegie model “inevitably influenced other public libraries and their services” by emphasizing “their role as community educational and recreational centers” (p. 64). Franklin (1976) notes that “[w]ith the growth of branch libraries, opportunities for the library to become socially active multiplied.” A new “activist role” for librarians led to the creation of many “personal and group services generally gathered under the banner of Adult Education” (p. 8).

Carnegie’s library philanthropy reflected his views on wealth and commerce as well his personal experiences with libraries during his formative years. Bobinski (1969) notes that Carnegie’s father had helped to establish the first circulating library in his hometown of Dunfermline, Scotland, and that “Carnegie frequently spoke with pride of his lineage as the son of a library-founding weaver.” As a “working boy” in Pittsburgh, Carnegie became a frequent user of the J. Anderson Library of Allegheny City (p. 12). In The Gospel of Wealth (1900), Carnegie recollected that “it was when reveling in the treasures which he opened to us that I resolved, if ever wealth came to me, that it should be used to establish free libraries, that other poor boys might receive opportunities similar to those for which we were indebted to that noble man” (p. 28).

According to Ditzion (1947), Carnegie genuinely believed that [i]f the worker were better informed […] he would see the possibilities for advancement and would therefore become more ambitious; he would recognize his just rights and at the same time understand his employer’s problems; he would learn that evolution, not revolution, was the salvation of his class. Ignorance was the source of all difficulty between capital and labor, ignorance of the employer and employed alike. Each would learn the virtues and aspirations of the other. Conference would replace struggle (pp. 154-155).
Carnegie was not averse to allowing library patrons access to “communist, socialist, cooperative, and individualist points of view” and nominally supported the notion of a “free exchange of ideas” within the library. Ditzion (1947) argues that Carnegie held steadfast to the belief that “[t]hrough investigation and discussion the worker would soon get to know his employer’s aches and pains” (p. 155). In other words, Du Mont (1977) argues, Carnegie assumed that the “study of library materials would encourage acceptance of this system and dreams of economic advancement in the tradition of Horatio Alger rather than Karl Marx” (p. 62).

However, library usage did not guarantee the passive acceptance of Carnegie’s worldview on the part of working-class library patrons. One unintended consequence of Carnegie’s vision of an expansive and accessible library system was the opportunities it provided for individuals to educate themselves and draw their own conclusions about society and power. For example, Allman (2007) notes the fact that “[b]y law, every book, journal, pamphlet, report and magazine published in Britain had to be deposited in the Museum (now the British Library),” made it possible for Karl Marx “to access unrivalled resources on his topic of interest, capitalism” (p. 3). The New York Public Library system made a profound impression on Lenin, who marveled at “the extent to which books circulate among the people” (quoted in Lerner, 2009, p. 137). Lenin’s wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, would become an important figure in the history of Soviet public librarianship (Richardson, 2000). Pateman (2005) emphasizes that

5 Lenin later wrote, “As the proletarian revolution wants you to be sober and clear minded you should not fail to obtain a single book at your local library. We are sure that neither a single teacher nor a single school will enlighten you as much as your local library” (quoted in Lerner, 2009, p. 137). However, self-education public libraries in the Soviet Union did not exactly encourage independent thought. Lerner notes that since “[s]tate entities controlled the publication and distribution of all forms of literature, […] there was never any opportunity for the production of books or periodicals that attached the Soviet system or called into question the principles of communism.” Public library collections in the Soviet Union were carefully monitored and controlled to reflect subsequent leadership and policy changes (p. 138).
“[w]orking-class people who used libraries were the exception rather than the rule.” In the United Kingdom, he notes that the early public libraries “appealed, in particular, to working-class autodidacts, whose mission statement was to be more than passive consumers of literature, to be *active thinkers and writers*” (emphasis added, p. 192). While the public library system would not necessarily become an incubator for working-class radicalism, the outcome of individual learning through library usage was—and remains—inherently unpredictable.

**Libraries as Instruments for Assimilation**

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, public libraries were also expected to aid in the assimilation of immigrants. The widespread anxiety over the influx of European immigrants to North America was also connected to concerns about social upheaval. Canada’s Frontier College, which began as a sort of “travelling library” in lumber camps, was shaped by the social gospel, imperialism, and notions of masculinity and citizenship (McLean, 2002, p. 227-229). As McLean (2002) notes, the College’s “emphasis on fostering British ways was often combined with contemporary fears of revolutionary politics among Eastern European immigrants” (p. 234). Likewise, McMullen (1976) argues, in the United States, “All sorts of organizations, including libraries, set about ‘Americanizing’ the foreign population.” This term, which “took on a new, aggressive meaning about 1915,” entailed “insuring the loyalty of the foreign-born population through the teaching of English and citizenship” (p. 48). While some libraries “attempted to encourage the maintenance of the immigrants’ own culture,” eventually, Du Mont argues, “Librarians could not maintain a purely humanitarian rhetoric in working with the immigrants […] for many Americans were alarmed by the source and number of immigrants, their religious, political, and economic thinking, and the conditions under which they lived” (p. 101).
While an agenda of assimilation informed the programs and services offered in many public libraries (especially those located in urban centers), many librarians argued that “the library must attract readers before it could ‘Americanize’ them” (McMullen, 1976, p. 46). To this end, librarians began to acquire multilingual materials, and defended this course of action “on the basis that thousands of men and women had such a limited knowledge of English that they would not be able to use the public library if books in their own tongues were not provided” (Du Mont, 1977, p. 102). While Du Mont argues that librarians “wished to provide this service so that they could have a maximum influence on these newly arrived peoples,” she acknowledges that librarians also believed that “since the immigrant was as much a taxpayer as any other resident, the public library as a tax-supported institution was obligated to aid him as a member of the community.” As a result, immigrants were inclined “to regard the library as a neighbourhood center wherein [they] could get help in many areas” (Du Mont, 1977, p. 103). By including multilingual materials in public library collections, the public library was one of the only public institutions that valued the retention of the languages and cultures of newcomers during this period, subtly undermining the rationale for assimilation. Multilingual collections remain a vital and popular feature of many public library systems (including the TPL) to this day.6

Library services to immigrant communities during this period often led to significant exchanges and encounters between library staff and immigrant patrons. In spite of the undercurrent of imperialism and paternalism inherent in the Frontier College program, the experiences of the labourer-teachers who worked alongside lumbermen during the day and tutored in the evenings often “challenged prior ethnic stereotyping” (McLean, 2002, p. 233).

6 Franklin also describes how librarians “pioneered successfully in many of the techniques of community involvement which we now take for granted: foreign language collections, exhibits, tutoring, deposits, classes, meetings, conferences, and entertainment” (p. 7).
Similarly, some public librarians developed an awareness of the lived experiences of immigrants in their communities by “translating letters, explaining official American documents, and even, at times, accompanying women to doctors to help explain their symptoms” (McMullen, 1976, pp. 42-43).

In the United States, public librarians ostensibly had more contact with immigrant communities than the average citizen, and some thus were able to adopt a more critical view of the rhetoric of Americanization. Some librarians were thus able to transcend the prejudices of their time, and demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of the immigrant experience through their interactions with these communities. However, they were also highly constrained by their social context, professional obligations, and the ambiguous motivations behind their outreach work. As McMullen (1976) notes,

One authority, writing about the Americanization movement as it existed in the United States in the early twentieth century, has said, ‘The impulse of fear and the impulse of love ran throughout its whole course, clashing in principle through in practice sometimes strangely blended.’ The librarians considered themselves a part of the movement and definitely had the impulse of love, even though they sometimes worked side-by-side with those who feared (p. 42).

Similarly, Garrison (1979) argues, turn-of-the-century public librarians “maintained conflicting desires—to elevate public thought and to meet public demand. It was not authoritarianism which dominated their thought. It was, rather, the tensions within their code—between the censorship and the consumership models of the library” (emphasis added, p. xiv).

The work of revisionist public library historians such as Du Mont (1977) and Garrison (1979) introduced new perspectives on how ethnicity, gender, and class were deeply embedded in library services to communities. However, library historians still tend to adopt the librarian’s

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7 For example, in an article in Library Journal in 1920, Della R. Prescott of the Newark Free Library wrote, “However well concealed, the insistent note in Americanization is, either force,—learn English or get out; or, a virtuous note of paternalism which sings the personal pleasure of doing ‘something nice for the poor foreigner’” (quoted in McMullen, 1976, p. 50).
perspective, overlooking the ways in which communities have influenced the development of public libraries. This is partly because library usage has always been highly individualized and inherently unpredictable, complicating the historian’s task of reconstructing how patrons experienced and responded to library services.

**Reclaiming Libraries as Tools for Resistance**

Research that explores how library services were perceived and used by specific populations can help us to understand the agency and influence of library patrons. In his research on libraries and Aboriginal communities, Edwards (2005) describes how “some Aboriginal students became discriminatory and selective in what they chose to take away from their schooling, articulating the messages of Western education and literacy for their own political, social, and cultural purposes” (p. 7). In spite of the fact that Aboriginal communities “often sought libraries and embraced the printed word,” governments were disinclined to establish libraries in Aboriginal communities, preferring to maintain them in the more controlled environment of schools. According to Edwards, this “was […] an indication that Indian Affairs wished to maintain a certain level of control over the reading materials available to First Peoples, which effectively limited the degree to which the people could educate themselves and articulate Western practices on their own terms” (p. 166). This anxiety over libraries in Aboriginal communities signifies a level of recognition on the part of the Canadian government that “Western education and literacy” could be used as tools for resistance.

In spite of the painful legacy of forced education and assimilation in Canada, there are notable historical examples of individuals who attempted to create a new type of library for Canada’s Aboriginal populations that would nurture and preserve traditional knowledge and culture. Edwards (2005) cites the example of Charles Angus Cooke (Thawennensere), a Mohawk
clerk in the Records Branch of the Department of Indian Affairs, who envisioned the creation of an “Indian National Library” at the turn of the century (pp. 89-101). Smith (2007) recounts the life history of Honoré Jaxon, Louis Riel’s secretary, an enigmatic figure who amassed a substantial collection of historical documents during his lifetime in the hopes of establishing a library for Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan. Obonsawin and McFarlane (1984) describe the attempt to establish a Native People’s Library in the context of the Urban Reform-era changes that took place in the Toronto Public Library system.

Libraries were also viewed as tools for resistance during the American civil rights movement. As Battles (2009) notes, “southern library service to African Americans marched in lockstep with southern socioeconomic policies and that these policies were solidly based upon a notion of separation of the races in every possible circumstance” (p. 108). In 1964, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and other civil rights associations organized a “Freedom Summer” focused on voter registration and community work through “Freedom Schools” and “Mississippi Freedom Libraries.” Civil rights workers and local volunteers established 25 Freedom Libraries using donated books and shared spaces in communities. In addition to fostering relationships between whites and African Americans within the Civil Rights movement, the “Freedom Libraries” made reading materials accessible to local populations and aided in the delivery of literacy education. “By 1965, their appetites whet by this new availability of information and their hopes buoyed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” Battles (2009) argues, “Mississippi African Americans finally began to make some headway in integrating public libraries, utilizing sit-ins, strikes, and other methods to get white officials’ attention” (pp. 135-136).
Since their inception, public libraries have attempted to strengthen their ties to the communities they serve. However, issues of agency and power in public library history have left an indelible mark on the library profession and on the public library as an institution. The competing visions of social reformers, philanthropists, and public librarians of the Progressive Era created an eclectic and idiosyncratic educational institution that has retained its associations with lifelong learning, adult education, citizenship learning, and services to immigrant and marginalized communities. The learning that takes place through libraries has always been highly individualized, tacit, and unpredictable in nature, making it difficult for historians to understand how patrons have used and perceived public libraries in the past. However, the behavior, attitudes and usage patterns of library patrons had exerted a considerable influence over the nature of public library service to communities. Just as historian E.P. Thompson (1963) emphasized “the agency of working people [and] the degree to which they contributed, by conscious efforts, to the making of history,” the intention of this research is to highlight the agency of library patrons and the degree to which they contributed to the making of the public library as an institution (p. 12).

2.3 The Role of Public Libraries in Civic Life

In spite of the paternalism inherent in early approaches to public librarianship, Garrison (1979) emphasizes “the undeniable contribution made by the public library to a free society.”

Despite its conservative origins, the public library developed as a less intellectually restrictive institution than the public school. Because it was a marginal institution, the public library was able to establish a more flexible, less coercive attitude toward its users. Certainly use of the public library increased social mobility for a few and opened educational opportunity for many (emphasis added, xiii).
Garrison presents the library’s status as a “marginal institution” with respect to its role in the public education system. Does this marginal status also apply to the public library’s multifaceted role in civic life?

**Public Libraries and the ‘Third Place’**

Oldenburg (1999) describes the ‘third place’ as “a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (p. 16). In their brief study of the social impact of branch libraries in Chicago, Putnam and Feldstein (2003) characterize the modern library as “the New Third Place” (p. 49). Following the lead of Putnam and Feldstein (2003), researchers studying the civic role of public libraries often cite Oldenburg’s definition (Aabø, Audunson & Vårheim, 2010; Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Audunson, 2005; Johnson, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Lawson, 2004; Vårheim, 2007). Many public libraries appear to accept the ‘third place’ label and use it to describe their various functions within communities. For example, the TPL quoted journalist Philip Marchand’s argument that “libraries are a prime example of what […] Oldenburg […] calls a ‘third place.’ The first place is home, the second place is your workspace, and the third place is a public space where you can simply drop in, relax, read a book or magazine, talk with other people” (Marchand quoted in Toronto Public Library, 2008a, p. 38).

Oldenburg’s third places share a few general characteristics: they are “neutral” (p. 22) and “levelling” (p. 23) spaces where “conversation is the primary activity” (p. 26). They offer “accessibility and accommodation” (p. 32), and are patronized by “regulars” (p. 33). They maintain “a low profile” (p. 36), but are also places where “the mood is playful” (p. 37). It also offers a sense of comfort and familiarity by providing a sense of “a home away from home” (p. 38). Third places offer “personal benefits” (p. 43) including “novelty” (p. 44) “perspective” (p. 45)...
48), “spiritual tonic” (p. 55) and “friends by the set” (p. 60). Third places also contribute to “the greater good” through their “political role” in democratic life (p. 66), by promoting “the habit of association” (p. 72), by acting as “an agency for control and a force for good” (p. 75), by providing opportunities for “fun with the lid kept on” (p. 80) and by maintaining themselves as “outposts on the public domain” (p. 83).

While public libraries certainly share some of these characteristics, classifying them as third spaces is problematic for several reasons. First, Oldenburg explicitly contrasts “hospitals or libraries, which have exacting, complicated, and expensive internal requirements” with the third places he describes, which “are typically modest, inexpensive, and small by comparison” (p. 203). Second, some of Oldenburg’s bizarre statements regarding “wife-beating”8 and “male bonding”9 undermine his argument that the third places he has in mind are “inclusive” in nature (p. 24). Third, as completely public institutions, libraries operate differently than other typical “third places.”

Putnam and Feldstein (2003) acknowledge that “the library is not as purely a social place as the coffee shop or tavern—it may be more purposeful than the ideal third place” (pp. 50-51). According to Aabø and Audunson (2012), this lack of sociability indicates a significant difference between public libraries and other “third places.” Arguably, libraries behave like other

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8 “I recently chatted with a practicing psychiatrist all too familiar with wife-beating. He lamented the decline of the neighbourhood tavern in which he felt men could ‘let off steam’ and ‘not have to take everything out on their wives.’ He was convinced that much of the irrational aggression and violence of the wife-beater is due to the lack of safety valves such as the lively tavern once offered to a far greater proportion of the population than it does today. My suspicion is that a good tavern keeps ‘steam’ from building up more than it provides a means to blow it off,’ but there seems to be evidence to support both views” (p. 80).

9 “Heterosexual interest everywhere coexists with patterns of male bonding; where men are at east and comfortable with one another, homosexual relationships are minimal. Where competition between men is great and institutionalized patterns of male bonding are weak or nonexistent, homosexuality becomes far more common” (p. 250).
“third places” in that they attract “regulars” (in the form of regular library users). However, unlike “third place” regulars, returning library patrons use the library as a space for individual—rather than social—pursuits. Library users also appear to view “the library as a place related to work and education, that is, a second place. The library is an extension of the school or work place.” While the authors note that libraries and “third places” perform similar roles in civic life, based on the types of “user-initiated activities” that take place within libraries, they cannot be classified as “third places” (p. 148).

Oldenburg asserts that “poverty loses much of its sting when communities can offer the settings and occasions where the disadvantaged can be accepted as equals” (p. 25). However, many of the third places identified by Oldenburg are privately-owned commercial spaces. While people with modest incomes may experience a sense of belonging and camaraderie in these spaces, it is hard to imagine many privately-owned establishments that would welcome the presence of those who have no income and would be unable to pay for their services. Outwardly convivial commercial spaces can be subtly exclusive. As Worpole and Greenhalgh (1996) observe, “private spaces such as shopping malls often act to exclude non-consumers (groups of schoolchildren, the elderly, the poor) either by moving such people on, by actual physical means, or by ‘designing out’ opportunities for such people to make themselves comfortable […]” (p. 27). Unlike “third places,” public libraries exist entirely within the public realm. Libraries’ longstanding history as wholly public spaces ensures that they remain accessible to nearly all members of the community “because they are free, non-judgemental [sic], equipped with seats and toilets […], and are still felt to ‘belong’ to people in their identity as citizens” (Worpole & Greenhalgh, 1996, pp. 27-28).
Public Libraries and Social Capital

Christenson, Fendley, and Robinson (1994) define community in terms of four elements: “people,” “place or territory,” “social interaction” and “identification” (pp. 6-7). In an age of growing economic disparity within cities, communities are increasingly defined by a fifth element: socio-economic status. In “Poverty by Postal Code: The Geography of Neighbourhood Poverty, 1981-2001,” the United Way (2004) maps out areas of concentrated poverty across the City of Toronto over a twenty-year period. The organization reported a staggering increase in the number of “higher poverty neighbourhoods” from 30 in 1981 to 120 in 2001 (p. 4).

While our lives are circumscribed by the places where we live, our ability to advance in life depends, to a large extent, on the people we know. Putnam (2000) describes this process in terms of the accumulation of social capital, which he defines as “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (emphasis added, p. 19). Drawing on Granovetter’s research on “The Strength of Weak Ties,” Putnam argues that people can use “bridging social capital” (outward-looking networks) to improve their life chances (p. 22). Putnam argues that social capital is thus “disproportionately important to [the] welfare” of people living in poverty (p. 318). Unfortunately, Putnam argues that “residents of extreme-poverty areas […] possess lower volumes of social capital.” He concludes that “social networks are absent in precisely the places where they are needed most” (p. 321). For residents in low-income areas, an unequal distribution of social capital thus accompanies the topography of poverty.

Putnam and Feldstein (2003) explore the role that branch libraries play in the creation of social capital using the example of Chicago’s Near North Branch. Constructed in 1997, the location effectively “bridges” two disparate neighbourhoods. The library is used by white residents from the affluent Gold Coast, as well as African-American residents from the
economically depressed Cabrini Green. The selection of the branch location was strategic: in addition to initiating urban renewal in Cabrini Green, the Near North Branch was constructed with an explicit aim to “bring together residents of two neighbourhoods who had virtually no contact with one another” (p. 38).

While the authors note that urban renewal in Cabrini Green has led to gentrification and the displacement of some area residents, the Near North Branch has created new opportunities for learning and community engagement in the area. The authors suggest that local residents derive a sense of pride and new possibilities from the presence of the new library in their neighbourhood. “Putting this library here was more than just adding a building,” one patron told the authors. “It was about changing a perception. Before, I thought no one cared about people around Cabrini. And so we didn’t care. Now I feel like someone is watching, trying to make things better. So I am trying to better myself and my children” (p. 37). Pateman and Vincent (2010) present a similar argument that “the sheer physical presence of a public library on a ‘run down’ estate can help to give the area a lift as it is evidence that someone cares about the local people” (p. 86).

In addition to fostering civic pride and social cohesion within communities through the provision of inclusive public spaces and specialized services, local branches connect patrons with resources available to them through larger library networks. System-wide library services (such as digital access and interlibrary loans), provide patrons with equal access to information, learning opportunities, and library materials regardless of their geographic location. As Japzon, Chen and Gong (2010) argue, through “inside connections with library users and local institutions in the neighbourhood and outside connections with other branch libraries in the library systems, branch libraries have the potential to build social capital and become an agent
for change in disadvantaged neighbourhoods” (emphasis added, p. 12). As “agents for change,” libraries may promote awareness of other venues for community engagement. For example, Johnson (2010) claims that “it is reasonable to assume that library use and membership in community organizations is a symbiotic relationship with attendance at one making more aware of, and more likely to become involved in, the other” (p. 152).

The multifaceted role of the public library allows it generate social capital in various ways. Aabø and Audunson (2012) theorize that the library “exposes its users to the pluralism of today’s community,” which may play a role in creating “bridging social capital between people belonging to different groups” (p. 148). Johnson (2012) observes that social capital is created through the relationships that develop between patrons and library staff. Vårheim (2007) posits that public libraries (in collaboration with “voluntary associations”) can “find ways of enhancing participation in these organizations and thus increasing participation in local community activities.” Libraries can also create social capital by enhancing “their capacity as informal places for people,” focusing on “their role as providers of universal services to the public,” and adding to “the social capital-forming potential of the family” through the provision of services for families and children (p. 421).

The public library also generates social capital through its status as a highly trusted public institution. Aabø and Audunson (2012) note that “[s]ocial capital is usually measured by asking people about trust, that is, asking them about the extent to which they feel that people in general can be trusted and to what extent they have trust in institutions in the community and society at large” (p. 141). According to Vårheim, Steinmo and Ide (2008), “the public library, by being an institution where everybody is welcome regardless of social status, is likely to be a generator of generalized trust, and that the main way the public library can increase societal generalized trust
is by making itself more accessible to new groups of users” (p. 889). An inclusive approach to public librarianship, Vårheim (2008) argues, can draw strength and credibility from “the high trust in the public library institution expressed by most people, whether users or non-users. Trust creates trust. New library initiatives, strategies and activities are based upon trust built over time and built into the institution itself” (p. 7).

**Marshall on the Role of the Public Library**

In order to understand the role that public libraries play in civic life, it is important to understand their unique features as public institutions. Marshall (1984d) cautions that “[e]very attempt to define the public library is other than polymorphous terms founders in multiple confusions. Every attempt to isolate one function, one type of clientele, one kind of context is doomed to failure” (p. 297). However, he outlines five important features that differentiate the public library from other types of organizations: **ubiquity** (public libraries can be found in most cities); **propinquity** (public libraries are located in close proximity to the places where people live); **availability/neutrality** (libraries are accessible to all members of the community, and library usage is always free and self-directed); **flexibility/versatility** (public libraries are proficient at adapting to the needs of patrons); and **capability/potentiality** (public libraries have immense potential but rarely perform to the fullest of their capability) (pp. 297-301).

**Ubiquity**

Marshall (1984d) notes that “[l]arge urban centers all possess central libraries, a network of branch libraries, often mobile libraries” (p. 298). In addition to their ubiquity, libraries typically maintain their presence in communities over long periods of time. Pateman and Vincent (2010) note that public libraries in the U.K.
tend to have relatively stable governance structures—other organisations may come and go, change their names or vary their catchment areas, but public libraries stay in the same location and offer community-based services which have endured for over 150 years. This makes them trusted, respected and valued by local communities because they are not ‘here today and gone tomorrow’ (p. 134).

In other words, public libraries play a role in civic life as common fixtures of the urban landscape.

Public libraries could be described as one of the features found in “complete communities,” a land use planning term that described “communities that include all of the different elements that are needed for residents to live a full life.” Residents in “complete communities” can access “jobs, schools, stores, health services, community services, housing for all the different stages of life, housing that is affordable for all of the people who live and work in the community, parks, recreational facilities, and transportation infrastructure and services to meet the needs of residents” (Toronto Public Health, 2009, p. 9).

As common reference points in the urban environments, libraries also foster social and economic inclusion by contributing to a distinctive sense of place. According to Pateman and Vincent (2010), “[l]ibraries can also play a lead role within the place-shaping agenda by acting as the voice of the whole community and an agent of place” (p. 138). Lorinc (2006) argues that the substantial sense of place created by “aesthetic experiences are essential to urban liveability (p. 314). Similarly, Fulford (1995) argues that “[t]he built city can join its citizens together or push them apart, hide our collective memories or reveal them, encourage our best instincts or our worst. In a pluralistic society that lacks common beliefs, public physical structures provide an experience we all share, a common theatre of memories” (emphasis added, p. 14).

Apart from their ubiquitous physical presence in cities and communities, libraries can be described in terms of the universal functions they perform as public institutions. According to McKenzie, Prigoda, Moffatt, and McKechnie (2006), “The public library cannot be seen as a
single kind of space, but should rather be understood as a site that supports a variety of relationships and hosts a variety of realms” (p. 131). In a similar fashion, Aabø and Audunson (2012) outline how libraries are used as various types of meeting spaces. The library can be a “community square” (facilitating the spontaneous encounters of community members); a public space where patrons are “exposed to diversity and otherness”; a “public sphere” (enabling patrons to “live out their role as citizens”); a venue supporting “joint activities with family and friends”; a “meta-meeting place” (or a portal allowing patrons to discover “other social arenas and organizations in the community”); as well as a “virtual meeting place” (p. 139). As ubiquitous public institutions, libraries incorporate these universal attributes (and the values of openness and inclusivity embedded within them) into the local programs and services they provide to patrons.

**Propinquity**

The term propinquity refers to the tendency for public libraries to be located in close proximity to the places where people live. According to Marshall (1984d),

In most urban centers, there is a library within walking or easy riding distance (by car or public transport) of everyone. Ideally there should be a library within half a mile of every family. Toronto comes as close as any to this ideal, with its 28 branches10 reasonably well spaced and fairly conveniently located for most residents (p. 298).

Propinquity has emerged as one of the public library’s most distinctive and valuable features. Johnson (2010) asserts that the role of public libraries is being undermined by “two converging events: the prevalence of the Internet and the recent economic downturn.” In this context, the public library must “reposition itself to remain relevant to municipal funders” by emphasizing and renewing its commitment to “its very position, in the heart of the community” (p. 147).

10 The TPL is currently comprised of 98 branches.
Propinquity emerged as an important theme in the public library activism at the TPL during the Urban Reform era. Glenys McMullen, a member of the East End Citizen’s Advisory Group, noted that the TPL did not anticipate the extent to which “people were attached to their neighbourhood libraries and liked to be able to walk to them” (p. 142). Several of the reports and studies generated by the advisory groups and the TPL Board argued that local branches occupied a central place within communities because most patrons arrived on foot. The library system that emerged out of this period of community involvement represents a vision of a city comprised of walkable neighbourhoods with strong local identities and access to opportunities for learning, leisure, and engagement.

Walkable neighbourhoods offer important benefits in terms of public health and civic life, and remain highly valued by Toronto residents. In the *The Walkable City: Neighbourhood Design and Preferences, Travel Choices and Health*, a 2012 report by Toronto Public Health, 61% of Toronto residents surveyed preferred to live in “walkable” neighbourhoods “with stores, libraries and restaurants within a 10 minute walk” while only 8% preferred “auto-oriented” neighbourhoods “where stores are kept separate from the houses, even if it means I cannot walk to stores, libraries or restaurants” (p. 13). The report argues that walkable neighbourhoods offer significant health benefits to residents. The findings from the report also indicate that many of Toronto’s less walkable neighbourhoods “are home to low income residents who can experience increased rates of illness and injury. This is important because walkable neighbourhoods provide so many health and social benefits that are particularly important for low income populations.

Walkable neighbourhoods can facilitate physical activity, social interaction, and access to jobs,

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11 Residents in Toronto’s walkable neighbourhoods “are more physically active with less chance of developing chronic diseases, than those who live in less walkable neighbourhoods. They also suggest that there could be significant air quality, climate and traffic congestion benefits associated with walkable neighbourhoods and the travel options they support” (p. 30).
services, and healthy foods” (p. 30). Predictably, research demonstrates that individuals who live in walkable neighbourhoods possess high levels of social capital (Leyden, 2003).

Walking plays an important role in our civic life. Solnit (2000) views walking as a means of “exploring the unpredictable and the incalculable” (p. 10). Her interest in walking is related to her concern about the loss of public space, which she argues is “a crisis both for the private epiphanies of the solitary stroller and for public space’s democratic functions” (p. 11). In a similar fashion, the propinquity of public libraries supports the “private epiphanies” of readers, students, and scholars, as well as the “democratic functions” of neighbourhoods and communities.

Availability/Neutrality

The exploratory type of walking that Solnit describes is related to the experience of browsing that occurs in libraries. “Browsing is an honourable past-time, very much part of our normal evaluation processes,” Jeffery Stinson and his fellow architects wrote in their reform-era report to the TPL Board. “It allows us to extend our awareness beyond those things which we actually know about to associated things and on to new fields” (Corneil, Stinson, Montgomery and Sisam, 1975, p. 42). Stinson and his co-authors were strong advocates for the patron’s right to browse, to explore, to become inspired, and to move “beyond those things which we actually know” through self-education. On a similar note, in a report on the future Toronto Reference Library, architect Raymond Moriyama (1971) and his collaborators observed that “[l]ibraries are among the few public resources which allow self-directed education” (Raymond Moriyama Architects and Planners, 1971, p. 13).

Stinson and Moriyama’s remarks about the self-directed learning relate to the availability and neutrality of public libraries. In addition to emphasizing the fact that libraries offer
collections free from “sectarian, religious, political, economic or other bias,” Marshall (1984d) makes the same comparison as Garrison (1979) between libraries and the public education system:

“[l]ibraries are free, too, in a way that schools are not—their use is voluntary. Schools are universal and physically accessible. But so long as schooling is compulsory, schools have an aura, for adults as well as children of rigid authority and bureaucratic officialdom. Very often, the practice reflects the image (p. 298).

In addition to being free from bias and the “rigid authority” of schools, libraries are also free in the sense that they do not charge patrons for their services.

According to the U.K.’s Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (2003), “The kind of informal, self-motivated learning libraries promote is central to the creation of a deeper learning culture in the UK, in which people expect and want to learn, pursue their hobbies and interests, develop their information literacy skills, be creative and gain inspiration, develop vocational and non-vocational skills, well after they have left formal education” (p. 28).

Providing access to new ideas and learning opportunities to library patrons may yield economic returns. Newman (2008) cites Florida’s (2000) observation that creativity and innovation are essential to the prosperity of cities. She argues that “[u]niversal access to ideas, which is the public library vision and ideal, stimulates creativity” (p. 10).

The neutrality of public libraries may also have broader social implications. Worpole and Greenhalgh (1996) note that library users attach importance to “an opportunity to meet other people whether they are neighbours, relatives, close or casual friends, and to have their social identity confirmed in the process of these spontaneous, unorganized encounters” (emphasis added, p. 33). Audunson (2005) observes that contemporary life involves confinement within “high-intensive arenas” defined by “social and cultural boundaries and demarcations.”

We tend to live in places dominated by those like ourselves socially and culturally, frequent cafes, and join organisations frequented by our likes, visit web-places tailor-made to suit our
interest, listen to radio-channels and read magazines which, according to modern ideas of segmentation, are tailor-made to reach a specific target-group (p. 437).

According to Aabø, Audunson & Vårheim (2010), “low-intensive meeting spaces” that facilitate “exposure to (and thus accept as legitimate) other values and interests than the ones people already cherish need to be consciously planned and constructed” (emphasis added). The authors contend that the public library is an exemplary “low-intensive meeting space” and “could be a point of departure for developing low-intensive meeting places that civil society needs” (p. 17).

Libraries also embody availability and neutrality through the provision of free resources and services. Neoliberal solutions to the financial pressures facing many library systems may pose a direct threat to the role of libraries as neutral public spaces. In their study of central libraries, Leckie and Hopkins (2002) are alarmed by “the ongoing ideological shift within libraries away from their neutral status as public institutions toward that of an active agent for private interests in the market economy” (emphasis added, p. 360). According to the authors, a loss of neutrality could alter the nature of the public library as an institution:

As the fundamental promise of neutrality (a place largely free from private interests) is subtly eroded, central libraries stand to lose more than their status as purely successful public places. Like shopping malls, theme parks, and other large, commercialized ventures, they may well remain vibrant, valued, and successful places but not entirely public ones. Such an ideological shift may shape or redirect the public’s access to information and may well change the public’s use of library space in ways which we simply do not understand as yet (emphasis added, p. 360).

Worpole and Greenhalgh (1996) also infer that “there does seem to be something different about life in the free, noninstrumental sanctuary of the library or the park, where one is a citizen rather than a consumer” (p. 34). On a similar note, novelist Zadie Smith (2012) defends public funding for libraries in the U.K. (2012) by emphasizing that “[a] library is a different kind of social reality (of the three dimensional kind), which by its very existence teaches a system of values beyond the fiscal” (emphasis added, n.p.).
Flexibility/Versatility

The “marginal” position of public libraries has also granted them outstanding flexibility and versatility in terms of the services they are able to provide. Marshall (1984d) proposes that libraries “can serve a ‘spin-off’ or ‘nurturing’ function, initiating projects which may later be turned over to another agency or to an inter-agency grouping” (p. 299). Libraries often continue to “nurture” new initiatives through partnerships with other agencies and organizations. For example, City Librarian Jane Pyper has noted that local libraries are likely to be “the first civic institutions” many new Canadians encounter upon arrival in Toronto (Pyper, 2009). The ability of libraries to connect with newcomer populations has enabled them to develop innovative services in collaboration with other agencies. Newman (2008) observes that public library systems in Hamilton, Regina, Vancouver, Ottawa, and Toronto have established partnerships with the settlement sector in order to introduce newcomers to the services available to them through libraries and other community resources (p. 17).

In their research on public libraries, Worpole and Greenhalgh (1996) describe “the very wide cross-section of use by different groups in the community and the range of needs they sought to meet,” and conclude that “it is flexibility of use and pluralist cultural values which define the success of public space, not its location, design or even legal ownership” (original emphasis, p. 13). Libraries demonstrate flexibility and versatility in terms of their ability to function effectively as communal spaces and cater to the diverse needs of patrons. DCMS (2003) highlights the intergenerational character of libraries, noting that they “are one of the few places where young and old, school children, college students and adult learners can all participate in learning” (p. 29).

The institutional versatility of libraries shapes the experiences and perspectives of library patrons. For example, Pateman and Vincent (2010) suggest that library use can “demonstrate the
benefits of *sharing resources, rather than competing for them*. A well-stocked and managed public library will provide resources for the whole community and will respond to need as well as demand” (emphasis added, p. 88). The flexible environment of libraries may also have a liberating effect on library patrons. According to Aabø and Audunson (2012), “[f]luidity is what remains as the dominating impression, and this is also with regard to life spheres. Users float between roles and spheres—between that of a student, that of a family member, that of a friend and neighbor, that of a citizen, and so forth” (p. 148).

Marshall (1984d) notes that the library “possesses (given adequate resources) a remarkable range of possible responses to emergency needs, interests, pressures” (p. 299). Libraries can demonstrate remarkable versatility in times of crisis. During periods of recession and financial hardship (Rooney-Brown, 2009) and natural disasters (Jaeger, Langa, McClure and Bertot, 2006), well-equipped libraries demonstrate a remarkable capability to assume additional roles and responsibilities in their service to communities.

**Capability/Potentiality**

According to Marshall (1984d), libraries rarely performed to their full *capability/potentiality*:

Among municipal agencies, the library’s status is low. To the public (as well as to the legislators) its image is blurred, its functions confused, its potential unrecognized. Unfortunately, librarians themselves often share these deficiencies in vision. The consequences are serious inadequacies in the human and material resources needed to realize the potential which does exist (pp. 299).

Marshall (1984d) believed that the “ultimate role” of the public library was to operate as the “*intelligence center* of its community.” In this “intelligence center” role, the library would perform a “monitoring function” that would enable it to recognize and alert other organizations to significant patterns and changes in the community (e.g. changes in demographics or socio-economic status) (original emphasis, pp. 299-300). Pateman and Vincent (2010) propose a similar role for modern public libraries. As institutions with “their ‘ear to the ground,’” libraries
are still “in a unique position to help develop both human and social capital at a neighbourhood level” and are well-situated to organize “the efforts of service providers to create a consistent and coherent approach which local communities can understand and engage with” (p. 133).

Marshall (1984d) believed that the library could also “act as an experimental center for needed projects which other agencies cannot or will not initiate” (p. 300). The library’s substantial contribution to bridging the digital divide is one such undertaking. Putnam and Feldstein (2003) identify two components of the digital divide: “[o]ne is that many people still do not have computers, computer skills, or access to the internet. The other is that institutions increasingly assume that ‘everybody’ uses computers” (p. 47). Based on this assumption, many government services have been placed online. A small body of research has emerging on the role of libraries in facilitating the use of “e-government” services (Bertot, Jaeger, Langa, and McClure, 2006; Gibson, Bertot and McClure, 2009; Jaeger and Bertot, 2011). Research indicates that the recent financial crisis has intensified in-library use of e-government services “for social support and to try to find new employment” (Jaeger and Bertot, 2011, p. 103).

In addition to providing access to computers and the internet, libraries help patrons to evaluate online information and incorporate new technology into their lives in meaningful ways. Kinney (2010) argues that libraries enhance computer and internet use through their role as mediators:

It may in fact be non-technical roles of public libraries—e.g. literacy, training, and community building—that give public technology its greatest value. It is a mistake to think that libraries are relevant only because they provide computer and Internet access. Rather, technology is imbued with greater power to help individuals and communities precisely because it is provided in a public library (original emphasis, p. 151).

As critical access points for computer and internet access in communities, public libraries play an important role in reconciling “the gap between the geographic and physical organisation [sic]
of political institutions and the increasingly digital life-world more and more people find themselves in” (Audunson, 2005, p. 439).

Browsing, whether it occurs within library stacks or online, “allows us to extend our awareness beyond those things which we actually know about to associated things and on to new fields” (Corneil, Stinson, Montgomery & Sisam, 1975, p. 42). However, Audunson (2005) warns that “[d]igitisation, which holds such great promises of increasing communication, might instead add to the process of fragmentation and individualisation” (p. 433). Confinement within online (and increasingly commercialized) “specialised information universes” may prevent users from encountering new ideas and perspectives. For Audunson (2005), this has serious implications for the future of civic life. The foundation of democracy, he argues, rests upon “a public sphere where those living in a community can meet and exchange views” as well as “a critical mass of common identity between people belonging to different cultural groups.” In order to develop “tolerance,” we need venues “where we are confronted with other interests and views than our own, and have to accept that also these might be of value” (p. 434). As exceptionally inclusive public spaces, public libraries may play a part in the cultivation of tolerance and its incorporation into our daily lives in the digital age.

**Libraries and Inclusivity**

The features of public libraries identified by Marshall (1984d) (*ubiquity, propinquity, availability/neutrality, flexibility/versatility* and *capability/potentiality*) provide us with an understanding of the multifaceted role that public libraries perform—or have the potential to perform—in civic life (pp. 297-301). However, public libraries possess another feature that sets them apart from other public institutions: a profound commitment to inclusivity.
As inclusive public spaces, libraries play a special role in responding to the needs of newcomers. Ciadi and Allard (2005) note that “[t]he particular circumstances of newcomers, the social capital that they have access to, and the environment in which they find themselves often put them in a vulnerable position and can lead to feelings of marginalization or even exclusion” (p. 319). As “the first civic institutions” many newcomers encounter, public libraries promote inclusion by bringing newcomers into the fold of civic life (Pyper, 2009). In his research on library programs for immigrants, Vårheim (2011) postulates that the trust established in these programs could be converted to “generalized trust and bridging social capital” over time (p. 18).

As inclusive public spaces, Aabø and Audunson (2012) argue, libraries allow patrons to personally experience and appreciate “pluralism in the sense of different ethnic groups, different cultural expressions, different age groups, and marginalized people in the library” (p. 146). However, by providing all members of the community with the same privileges, libraries can also allow individuals to “hide being different or marginalized” (p. 144). For example, patrons “in difficult and transitory life situations” may feel a sense of belonging within the library as “a place that structures everyday life in the same way the work place does to the employed” (p. 148). In their study of central libraries, Leckie and Hopkins (2002) observed newcomers “using the library as a place to make the transition into Canadian society, particularly through the learning of English.” The library allowed these patrons to “feel included and productive in a way that would be almost impossible in other public spaces, such as cafes, parks, museums, areas, and municipal offices” (p. 354).

Public libraries contribute to social inclusion by welcoming marginalized populations into the library, by providing patrons with venues to encounter and appreciate diversity, and by providing all patrons with the same library privileges. While barriers to full inclusion persist, the
mandate of libraries to provide access to information, resources, and public space to all ensures that libraries will continue to work towards inclusivity through their programs and services. For example, the Canadian librarians involved in the Working Together Project (2008) emphasize the importance of community development work in public librarianship, asserting that “[p]ublic libraries have a civic responsibility to serve all community members” (emphasis added, Working Together Project, 2008, p. 23).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the first research objective outlined in sub-section 1.3 of the Introduction (identifying issues of agency and power in public library history and exploring the role of public libraries in civic life) and provided a framework for the remaining objectives. The first section of this literature review identifies issues of agency and power in public library history by examining the Progressive Era origins of the public library and library philanthropy, as well as the use of public libraries as tools for assimilation and resistance. These readings illustrate the early tensions “between the censorship and the consumership models of the library” (Garrison, 1979, xiv). They also demonstrate how communities have exercised agency in their relationships with public libraries, providing a historical context for the library activism at the TPL.

The second section of the chapter explores how communities interact with libraries by describing the multifaceted role of public libraries in civic life. Oldenburg’s ‘Third Place’ definition was deemed unsuitable for our purposes. After exploring the relationship between public libraries and social capital, Marshall’s (1984d) five features of public libraries (ubiquity, propinquity, availability/neutrality, flexibility/versatility, and capability/potentiality), along with a sixth feature, inclusivity, were expanded upon to provide a framework for understanding the contribution of libraries to civic life in Toronto, and elsewhere (pp. 297-301).
The next chapter will build on this material in order to outline the research strategy used to address my second and third research objectives (understanding the influence of urban reform movement on library activism in Toronto and exploring the evolution of urban reform-era library activism and its impact on TPL policy). The chapter will also address data collection as well as the framework for data analysis.
Chapter 3
Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this research is to explore the long-term impact of patron participation on library planning and policymaking at the TPL. This chapter—Research Methods—will summarize the research strategy used to address the second and third individual research objectives identified in sub-section 1.3 of the Introduction (understanding the influence of urban reform movement on library activism in Toronto and exploring the evolution of urban reform-era library activism and its impact on TPL policy). This chapter will also discuss data collection and the framework for data analysis.

3.2 Research Strategy

This study uses historical research as a research strategy to explore the profound organizational changes that occurred at the TPL during the 1970s within the context of the urban reform movement. Secondary sources related to the history of Toronto’s urban reform movement and primary sources have been employed to reconstruct a narrative of events and interpret their significance in terms of the long-term impact of patron participation on library planning and policymaking at the TPL. The primary sources consulted include a series of reports and institutional documents generated during this period, as well as the reminiscences collected by John Marshall in Citizen Participation and Library Decision-Making: The Toronto Experience (1984) provide additional insight into these issues through first-person commentary and observations.

According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz, effective social research demands a combination of “experience-near” (interpretivist) and “experience-distant” (positivist)
approaches. Reliance upon “experience-near” approaches “leaves an ethnographer awash in immediacies as well as entangled in vernacular.” On the other hand, overemphasis on “experience-distant” approaches “leaves him stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon” (quoted in Howe, 1988, p. 14). Historians often utilize “experience-near” approaches to research to carefully re-construct historical realities with great specificity. However, “experience-distant” perspectives can enable historians to draw comparisons between societies and historical periods and make vital connections with the present. Is it possible for historians to strike a balance between writing narrowly-focused studies “awash in immediacies” and broad historical narratives “stranded in abstractions”?

The approach to historical research used in this study is influenced by historian E.P. Thompson’s (1963) emphasis on agency and the imperative to write histories that are rich in human terms, rather than the mere products of abstract and impersonal forces. While Thompson’s approach to history may appear to be “awash in immediacies as well as entangled in vernacular,” his use of historical detail is both selective and deliberate. In his essay, “The Peculiarities of the English,” Thompson (1978) declares that history cannot be compared to a tunnel through which an express races until it brings its freight of passengers out into sunlit plains. Or, if it can be, then generation upon generation of passengers are born, live in the dark, and die while the train is still within the tunnel. An historian must surely be more interested than the teleologists allow him to be in the quality of life, the sufferings and satisfactions, of those who live and die in unredeemed time (p. 86).

According to Trimberger (1984), Thompson’s “unique contribution to historical sociology” was “a theoretical method intended to capture historical process and to integrate an analysis of culture and human agency into a macrostructural analysis of social change” (p. 212). Similarly, this study seeks to incorporate an analysis of the culture of ‘citizen participation’ and the agency of library activists and patrons into a broader analysis of social change as it unfolded at the TPL during this period.
Greenblatt (2010b), another historian concerned with issues of agency in historical interpretation, argues that the new field of mobility studies must address “the tension between individual agency and structural restraint” (author’s emphasis).

And it is important to note that moments in which individuals feel most completely in control may, under careful scrutiny, prove to be moments of the most intense structural determination, while moments in which the social structure applies the fiercest pressure on the individual may in fact be precisely those moments in which individuals are exercising the most stubborn will to autonomous movement (emphasis added, pp. 251-252).

Greenblatt’s arguments regarding cultural mobility and migration could also be applied to social movements. Periods of conflict, struggle, and rapid social change expose the “intense structural determination” inherent within the status quo, as well as the “stubborn will” of those seeking to change it. The library activism at the TPL that arose within the context of the urban reform movement was defined by many of the issues of agency and power in public library history discussed in the previous chapter.

An exploratory approach to historical research emphasizes the use of source material as a starting place for interpretation. Darnton (1984), another historian who grounds his research in the lived experiences of men and women, actively seeks out anomalous or exceptional fragments of the past in his research:

When we run into something that seems unthinkable to us, we may have hit upon a valid point of entry into an alien mentality. And once we have puzzled through to the native’s point of view, we should be able to roam about in his symbolic world. To get the joke in the case of something as unfunny as the ritual slaughter of cats is a first step toward ‘getting’ the culture (p. 262).

For Thompson, Darnton, and other leading social historians, this anthropological concern with “‘getting’ the culture” provides us with a more nuanced interpretation of the past. However, as Greenblatt (2009) notes, these types of investigations “achieve their sense of authenticity not only by uncovering remarkable, intimate details from what Shakespeare calls ‘the dark backward and abyss of time,’ but also by leaving certain doors closed on principle, that is, by frankly
acknowledging the limits to the recovery of the past” (emphasis added, n.p.). The compelling historical subjects often resist interpretation. As Natalie Zemon Davis (1983) writes of her most famous work, “The story of Martin Guerre is told and retold because it reminds us that astonishing things are possible. Even for the historian who has deciphered it, it retains a stubborn vitality” (emphasis added, p. 125).

In a similar fashion, the approach to historical research employed in this study was inspired and shaped by the “stubborn vitality” of an exceptional primary source: Marshall’s Citizen Participation in Library Decision-Making: The Toronto Experience (1984). As a collection of reminiscences by those who participated in the library activism of the reform era, it provides valuable insight into the role that Toronto residents played in the re-shaping of library policies and planning priorities during this period. As Hann (1988) argues, Despite the variety of research into popular history that has been undertaken, for the most part, the people themselves remain silent. Only infrequently do we hear the authentic voice of a humble actor describing in his own words his role in and his perceptions of history. Few historians have ventured into the broad and uncharted regions of everyday life where the best witnesses are the participants themselves. Where there are no surviving witnesses, it is understandable that historians should concentrate on data that describes the common life of the community. This strategy often leads to the notion that history happens to the bulk of the population and drastically underestimates the contributions of the ordinary members of the community (pp. 43-44).

The historiography of the urban reform movement largely consists of first-hand accounts by and biographical treatments of its leadership. While a few leading reformers participated in the library activism of this period, Marshall’s collection of reminiscences highlights the contributions of a different set of participants.

Marshall (1984f) notes that his “informal case study” was intended, first and foremost, “to capture the immediacy of the experience” of library activism during the urban reform era and was not necessarily unbiased or “scholarly in the narrower conventional sense of being based on a consistent and unified plan of research.” However, Marshall asserts, “[w]hat the book does
claim to be is a faithful account of a *many-sided experience, approached from as many angles as possible by a select but representative group of participants and observers, each honestly reporting what was experienced and relating it to the overall context and central theme*” (emphasis added, p. xii). In addition to the reminiscences of key figures, *Citizen Participation in Library Decision-Making* includes Marshall’s theories and observations regarding the role of libraries in civic life, the impact of the urban reform movement on the TPL, and the benefits of patron participation. This study capitalizes on Marshall’s “informal case study” by interpreting the accounts of his contributors as well as his own commentary within the historical context of the urban reform movement.

The interpretation of contemporary issues at the TPL explored in Chapter 6 (Discussion: “Deepening Democracy” at the TPL), could be considered a continuation of Marshall’s work in two ways. First, this interpretation revisits and utilizes many of the themes and concepts presented in *Citizen Participation in Library Decision-Making*. Second, it attempts “to capture the immediacy of the experience” of the recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues.

### 3.3 Data Collection

The primary sources consulted in this study include the first-hand accounts collected in *Citizen Participation in Library Decision-Making* by Dorothy Thomas, Mary L. Chipman, James Lorimer, an “Insider,” Glenys McMullen, Phyllis Clarke, Roger Obonsawin and Grace McFarlane, Alan Dudeck, Jeffery Stinson, Marian Engel, José Carlos de Sousa, as well as Marshall’s commentary and observations. The study also relies upon primary sources in the

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12 Other contributors include James Draper, who wrote the Foreword, James Lemon and Michael Goldrick, who submitted chapters on the Urban Reform Movement, and Meyer Brownstone, who contributed a chapter entitled “Political Economy of Participation.” The Epilogue is a report by Mary Vise (“Citizen Participation 1981”).
form of reports and institutional documents produced during this period, including the Shaw Report (1960), the Forrester Report (February/March 1975), the East End Survey (May 1975), the East End Advisory Group Goals and Recommendations (July 1975), the Beckman Study (1975) and the Stinson Report (August 1975).

3.4 Framework for Data Analysis

The Literature Review in Chapter 2 identified issues of agency and power in public library history and provided a framework for understanding the contribution of libraries to civic life in Toronto. The framework for data analysis is based on three related themes: historical contingency, libraries and marginality, and the origins and impact of patron participation.

**Historical Contingency**

Greenblatt (2010b) argues the field of mobility studies should illustrate “the way in which seemingly fixed migration paths are disrupted by the strategic acts of individual agents and by unexpected, unplanned, entirely contingent encounters between different cultures (emphasis added, p. 252). Greenblatt (2010a) notes that research within the field is especially concerned with “what the medieval theologians called contingentia, the sense that the world as know it is not necessary: the point is not only that the world will pass away, but also that it could all have been otherwise.” Greenblatt (2010a) contends that “mobility studies also need to account for the intense illusion that mobility in one particular direction or another is predestined. They need to account as well for the fact that cultures are experienced again and again—in the face of overwhelming contrary evidence—not as contingent at all but as fixed, inevitable, and strangely enduring” (p. 16).
Similarly, Stephen Jay Gould (1989) argues that “contingency” is “the essence of history” (p. 51) and “the central principle of all history” (p. 283). If we were to replay life’s tape, he argues, “the divergent road of the replay would be just as interpretable, just as explainable after the fact, as the actual road. But the diversity of possible itineraries does demonstrate that eventual results cannot be predicted at the outset” (p. 51). Gould applies this principle to the history of life, as well as the American Civil War. However, outside of the imagined “replay” scenarios within film and literature, he implies, it is difficult for us to embrace wholly the notion of “contingency.” Gould argues that entertaining the possibility that “life may not, in any genuine sense, exist for us or because of us” challenges the view enshrined in our ubiquitous “iconographies of progress” (p. 44). The notion of contingentia/contingency is a useful one for historians. It places us alongside people from the past, and forces us to come to terms with their beliefs, their choices, and their limitations as individuals and as historical actors.

The notion of contingency is powerfully illustrated by the physical transformations that have shaped Toronto’s urban landscape throughout the city’s history. Architectural historian William Dendy has documented the destruction of many of the city’s historically significant buildings in Lost Toronto: Images of the City’s Past (1993). “The preservation of most of the buildings in this book as living, cared for, respected elements in the ongoing life of Toronto,” he argues, would have provided a touchstone for the development of the twentieth-century city. In cities as diverse as London, Paris, and St. Petersburg, this is exactly how the preserved and renovated monuments of earlier periods are used and appreciated. With the disappearance of so many historically important and potentially useful buildings from the Toronto streetscape, many of the city’s links with its past and its cultural heritage have been broken (xv).

Dendy’s collection of archival photographs allows us to envision a “streetscape” quite unlike the one that exists today, had any of these buildings and neighbourhoods survived intact. Replay the tape, as Gould would argue, and Toronto would look like an entirely different city.
Toronto’s public library branches are familiar and cherished features of the “Toronto streetscape.” If the intervention of the urban reform-era library activists had not succeeded, a radically different type of library system would exist today. At this critical moment in the history of the TPL, the library was embarking on an ambitious building plan that involved the construction of large-scale district libraries at each end of the city. For many urban reformers, the proposal seemed to be reminiscent of other massive development projects that threatened to destroy the fabric of the inner city. Public scrutiny of the district library plan forced communities to reflect on the role of local libraries and to imagine an alternative course of action for the TPL. The subsequent shift in TPL policy towards greater inclusion and accessibility was contingent upon various currents in the political culture of the period: a growing awareness of and respect for multiculturalism and minority rights, a burgeoning Canadian nationalism, and a demand for more inclusive, accountable, and accessible public institutions.

Caulfield (1974) emphasizes the fact that the rise of urban reform was contingent upon “a brief congruence of the interests and sentiments of a diverse array of groups and individuals, whose interests and sentiments were otherwise often in conflict. The reformist movement was a coincidence” (p. 138). After 1972, Toronto’s urban reform movement began to fracture along class and party lines, and the movement ceased to be a viable force in city politics. At the same time, the particular “interests and sentiments” of library patrons all helped to shape the various facets of the Toronto public library system that exists today.

Greenblatt (2010a) argues that “a sense of contingentia (and its counterbalancing illusion of fixity)” cannot be found in “new grand narratives,” but rather through “detailed, intellectually vital engagements with specific cases” (p. 16). This study attempts to capture the sense of
contingency that is embedded in the history of Toronto’s urban reform movement and affiliated library activism of this period.

**Libraries and Marginality**

According to Garrison (1979), “the public library developed as a less intellectually restrictive institution than the public school. Because it was a *marginal institution*, the public library was able to establish a more flexible, less coercive attitude toward its users” (emphasis added, xiii). The marginality of the library as a public institution led to the development of unique features, including the “availability/neutrality” and “flexibility/versatility” described by Marshall (1984d, pp. 298-299). These features have fostered an openness on the part of libraries to meeting community needs (including the needs of marginalized populations). The theme of marginality also figures prominently in the history of Toronto’s urban reform movement.

During the 1960s, many public intellectuals and activists challenged the authority of “experts” and “technocrats” in various fields. Fulford (1995) describes the appearance of several influential and popular books in the 1960s that examined “old phenomena in new ways,” including Paul Goodman’s *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Marshall McLuhan’s *Understanding Media* (1964), Ralph Nader’s *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965). Fulford classifies these works as “acts of intrusion on specialized territory by authors who lacked academic credentials” (or credentials specific to the “specialized territory” being intruded upon13). In addition to questioning “the reigning assumptions of the subjects they dealt with,” these new perspectives “all were resisted at first by specialists” (p. 78).

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13 Although Marshall McLuhan taught at the University of Toronto, his groundbreaking work in the field of media studies could be considered a departure from his background in English literature.
Fulford places Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* alongside *Silent Spring* in terms of its explicitly humanistic views:

Just as Rachel Carson was principally interested not in pest-killing chemicals but in their effects on the life forms she studied, Jane Jacobs was concerned not so much with planning theory as with the people affected by it. Jacobs depicted cities as intricate working organisms, the way naturalists see ecosystems. *Silent Spring* and *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* can be read side by side as similar commentaries on the hubris of technology (p. 78).

This approach placed Jacobs “firmly on the side of the spontaneous inventiveness of individuals, as against abstract plans imposed by governments and corporations […]” (p. 80). As a leading figure in the urban reform movement, Jacobs articulated and reflected many of the movement’s central concerns, including greater citizen participation in civic life.

Fulford notes that Jacobs’ perspective allowed her to formulate new ideas regarding the nature of city life. He argues that her work illustrated how “the great planners had become so enraptured by their own dreams of order and beauty that they had failed to notice how people live. Neighbourhoods, she said, can be created only out of the common experience of the citizens. They can not be devised by a central authority” (p. 79). By revealing the intuitive logic embedded within neighbourhoods, Jacobs and the urban reformers underscored the vital contributions of residents to city life and the need for greater citizen participation in urban planning and policymaking.

Said (1994) argues that “[a] condition of marginality” in intellectual life “frees you from having always to proceed with caution, afraid to overturn the applecart, anxious about upsetting fellow members of the same corporation.” Marginality thus enables intellectuals “to be unusually responsive to the traveler rather than to the potentate, to the provisional and risky rather than to the habitual, to innovation and experiment rather than the authoritatively given status quo” (pp. 63-64). The urban reform movement unfolded against the backdrop of a broader cultural receptivity to marginal and unconventional perspectives on specialized fields, such as urban
planning. As a “marginal” public institution with a historical orientation towards openness, the TPL was in a position to be receptive to the “innovation and experiment” proposed by the urban reformers and library activists of the period.

The Origins and Impact of Patron Participation

The Literature Review in Chapter 2 provided a framework for understanding the contribution of libraries to civic life in Toronto by expanding upon on Marshall’s (1984d) five features of public libraries (ubiquity, propinquity, availability/neutrality, flexibility/versatility, and capability/potentiality) and by proposing a sixth feature, inclusivity (pp. 297-301). Chapter 4 (“Citizen Participation” and Urban Reform in Toronto) will describe how the urban reform movement provided the impetus for patron participation in library planning and policymaking. However, it is important to note that the features of the library as an institution made it especially responsive to the aims of the urban reformers. The recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues at the TPL provides the context for a discussion of the capability/potentiality for greater patron participation in Chapter 6 (Discussion: “Deepening Democracy” at the TPL).

At the time of writing, Marshall (1984d) concluded that “[w]hatever else has been achieved by the process recorded in this book, it is clear that the directions of policy for the Toronto Public Library have been set—irrevocably—for the foreseeable future” (p. 278). These “policy directions” included the repudiation of the district library model, the renewed commitment to neighbourhood-based library services, the equalization of library services across the City of Toronto, a re-orientation towards meeting the needs of all patrons (and a new focus on “outreach” activities), expanding the breadth of multilingual materials, programs and services, and the inclusion of Canadian and popular materials within library collections (pp. 278-279).
In addition to shaping library policy, Marshall (1984d) noted six benefits of participatory approaches to library planning and policymaking at the TPL: creating library policies and services responsive to “neighbourhood, ethnic and specialized needs, interests and aspirations”; creating a “feedback mechanism” that enabled the library to assess how policies, programs and services were being received by the community; increasing the number of library patrons by converting non-users; recognizing, supporting and recruiting leaders from community and ethnic groups to participate in advisory groups and serve on the Library Board; creating a robust “constituency of library supporters” and advocates; and building “a knowledgeable network of citizens” who would uphold the library’s commitment to freedom of speech (p. 279). This study will explore some of the benefits of participatory approaches to library planning and governance identified by Marshall, with a special emphasis on the impact of Toronto’s “constituency of library supporters” during the 2012 City of Toronto budget process.

3.5 Limitations and Potential Problems

One of the limitations of this study is the reliance upon the first-hand accounts of library activism at the TPL collected in Citizen Participation in Library Decision-Making. Marshall (1984f) acknowledged that the first-hand accounts he had collected were “impressionistic.” However, he argued, “the personal quality of the writing lends the book whatever vitality it possesses, and subjectivity and objectivity can co-exist as naturally and as effectively in the written account as they do in life” (p. xii). In order to address certain gaps in the narrative, several archival documents in the form of reports and institutional documents are examined in Chapter 5 (Urban Reform-Era Library Activism and the Evolution of Patron Participation at the TPL). Interviewing the contributors and other key figures about their involvement during this period could have also provided additional insight into the impact of patron participation at the TPL.
Unfortunately, due to time constraints, supplementing the primary sources with oral history proved to be beyond the scope of this study.

In defense of his work within the field of paleontology, Gould (1998) argues, “I label my view as a valid reading of paleontological evidence [...] that I have worked out by considerable thought, practice, and intellectual struggle, and that I always explicitly identify as tentative, undoubtedly wrong in places (but not, I hope, in general approach), and embedded (as all ideas must be) in my own personal and social context” (emphasis added, n.p.). While the primary sources cited in this study exist and may be easily consulted within the public domain, the interpretive work reflects a subjective reading of these sources rooted within my “personal and social context.” I openly acknowledge that my scholarly interest in the role of libraries in communities has been shaped by my involvement as a volunteer tutor in the TPL’s Adult Literacy Program. Through my participation in this program, I have observed firsthand the transformative impact that library services can have on the lives of patrons, their families, and their communities. These personal experiences have shaped many of my ideas about the multifaceted role that public libraries play in civic life, in Toronto and beyond.

This research also bears the imprint of my current social context. In the wake of the global financial crisis, the budgetary pressures on public library systems has led to debates over library funding in Canada, the United States, and the U.K. These pressures seem to be leading to a decisive moment in the history of public libraries in Canada and around the world. The privatization of library services and the replacement of paid library staff with “volunteers” are frequently touted as the only viable solutions to the funding issue. In order to capture this overwhelming “sense of contingentia (and its counterbalancing illusion of fixity)” described by Greenblatt (2010a), this study—originally intended as a relatively self-contained piece of
historical research—expanded in order to address the contemporary resurgence in civic engagement on library issues at the TPL in response to the 2012 City of Toronto budget process.

This study does not attempt to generalize based on the findings of the historical research. However, it does attempt to generate discussion regarding the creation of new opportunities for patron participation in public library planning and policymaking, and reflects key areas of concern within the diverse field of adult education, including community development, citizenship learning, and participatory democracy. As both a study and a continuation of Marshall’s work, this research is also attempt “to set the record straight, or at least to begin to fill a gap in the public record of a phenomenon unique to Toronto: a phenomenon which in my opinion has implications not only for other libraries, other institutions, and other communities, but also for the political process itself” (1984f, p. x).
Chapter 4
“Citizen Participation” and Urban Reform in Toronto

4.1 Introduction
This chapter is related to the second of the individual research objectives outlined in sub-section 1.3 of the Introduction (understanding the influence of the urban reform movement on library activism in Toronto) and will explore themes in the history of the urban reform movement. These themes include the emergence of “citizen participation,” the impetus for urban reform, the composition of the urban reform movement, and the legacy of urban reform. The impact of the urban reform movement on the TPL will be expanded upon in Chapter 5 (Urban Reform-Era Library Activism and the Evolution of Patron Participation at the TPL).

4.2 Themes in the History of the Urban Reform Movement
In 1970, Jane Jacobs, a seminal figure in the “Stop Spadina” movement to halt the Spadina Expressway, warned that “the widespread uprooting of people and disintegration of city neighbourhoods” caused by expressways would have severe and lasting repercussions, including “vast and mounting social costs” (Jacobs, 1970, p. 93). The outcome of this struggle was far from certain. “As a relatively recent transplant from New York,” she wrote,

I am frequently asked whether I find Toronto sufficiently exciting. I find it almost too exciting. The suspense is scary. Here is the most hopeful and healthy city in North America, still unmangled, still with options. Few of us profit from the mistakes of others, and perhaps Toronto will prove to share this disability. If so, I am grateful at least to have enjoyed this great city before its destruction (Jacobs, 1970, p. 97).

Marshall McLuhan echoed this sentiment, stating that “Toronto will commit suicide if it plunges the Spadina Expressway into its heart” (quoted in Nowlan & Nowlan, 1970, n.p., inside jacket).

Forty years later, Toronto remains “unmangled” by the Spadina Expressway. While other struggles of the urban reform movement during this period have largely faded from popular
memory, the halting of the Spadina Expressway remains a tangible achievement. Today, on the southeast corner of Spadina and Bloor, a series of historical plaques describes how the “Stop Spadina” movement “helped give a voice to citizens in the planning of their neighbourhoods, and encouraged greater respect for the historic urban fabric during a period of intense redevelopment.” In the aftermath of the Spadina dispute, “[n]ewly elected municipal politicians […] and other movements of civic activism would shape the City of Toronto in the 1970s” (Heritage Toronto, 2010).

These “other movements of civic activism” arose in response to a variety of pressing urban issues, including the construction of high-rise and commercial development projects, “urban renewal” initiatives, and housing and tenants’ rights. Manifestations of “civic activism” in Toronto and other Canadian cities during the 1960s and 1970s have been well documented in several case studies14 (Fraser, 1972; Granatstein, 1971; Harris, 1988; Lorimer, 1970; Pasternak, 1975; Quigley, 1971) and biographical and first-hand accounts of key players (Caulfield, 1974; Sewell, 1972). Marshall also collected accounts from several participants in the transformation of the Toronto Public Library (TPL) during this period in Citizen Participation in Library Decision-Making: The Toronto Experience (1984).

Although these case studies and individual accounts provide valuable insight into the various strands of urban reform, they also reflect a lack of cohesion within the movement. Even at the height of its momentum and popular appeal, urban reform was “an ambiguous, loosely aligned movement” dedicated to “curtailing the excesses of government it replaced and increasing its responsiveness to the public” (Goldrick, 1984, p. 34). The divergent interests

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14 A useful resource on this topic is Stinson’s Citizen Action: An Annotated Bibliography of Canadian Studies (1977). This volume compiles several Canadian case studies (published prior to 1977) related to these issues, indexed by theme as well as by geography.
within the movement became apparent as it began to fracture along class and party lines. After the 1972 election of Mayor David Crombie, city politics became less “polarized” as “[t]he emotional debate that used to be held about developers destroying neighbourhoods became rarer and rarer. […] Issues came to dominate the political debates that were more complicated, abstract, and hard for the citizen to relate to” (Freeman, 1982, p. 295).

The transformation of the TPL into an expansive and responsive library system during this era does not occupy a central place in the narrative of Toronto’s urban reform movement. This is partly because the activism surrounding library issues largely unfolded after the heyday of the urban reform movement (following the 1972 election), and the subsequent process of organizational change unfolded more steadily and quietly than the contentious public battles over transportation and development projects. While the library-focused activism was initially sparked by public opposition to the district library plan, the citizen advisory groups examining the feasibility of the plan uncovered other issues that were “complicated, abstract, and hard for the citizen to relate to,” such as collection development policies. While the emphasis on citizen participation in library governance gradually diminished, the TPL has retained its commitment to being a highly accessible and responsive system comprised of neighbourhood branches. Many of the TPL’s distinctive features—the ongoing expansion of multilingual resources and services, the commitment to community programs and initiatives, and the extensive branch system—evolved over time as a result of the citizen participation and activism around library issues during this critical period.

The transformation of the TPL will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to provide some insight into how these changes unfolded within the context of urban reform. Providing a detailed account of the various struggles of Toronto’s
urban reform movement is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, I will attempt to outline some of the underlying themes of Toronto’s urban reform movement, including the emergence of the notion of “citizen participation” in civic life, the conditions that created the impetus for urban reform in Toronto and elsewhere, the composition (and eventual disintegration) of the movement, and the legacy of urban reform. In many ways, the TPL as it exists today embodies many of the shared values of the urban reformers, which have been obscured by their oppositional stance as well as by the movement’s eventual dissolution. Along with the defeat of the Spadina Expressway, the TPL should be considered one of the most significant and enduring achievements of urban reform in Toronto.

4.2.1 The Emergence of “Citizen Participation”

“It is assumed that power lies in the hands of those who make decisions,” Draper (1971) argues. “It is equally true, however that power lies in the hands of those who define the alternatives upon which decisions are made” (emphasis added). Draper defines “citizen participation” in terms of “certain principles and beliefs” embodied by “community development or social animation.” The difference between “community development” and “community improvement,” he explains, “is the process, or lack of it, that involves persons in making decisions. The process is an essential part of community development” (emphasis added).

To present an analogy, in travelling from point A to point B, where B is better housing, the value of the activity is not only arriving at B but the journey itself. In community development the journey is the learning, the skills and confidence acquired by those participating in the process (Draper, 1971, n.p.).

In a similar vein, Clague (1971) describes “a growing concern today for the processes of decision-making. Indeed for some the values and norms expressed in how a decision is arrived at are more important than the decision itself.” Underlying this new popular interest in the decision-making process, Clague observed that “[t]here is the implicit assumption that if people
are effectively involved, then the decision will be correct” (emphasis added, Clague, 1971, p. 32).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, a growing popular interest in citizen participation and the decision-making process had permeated various organizations and institutions. This shift towards more meaningful “participation and involvement in neighbourhood and community affairs” was unfolding against the backdrop of “a world-wide movement by the poor and other disadvantaged people,” as well as the American civil rights movement, counter-cultural youth movements, the women’s movement, and Canada’s First Nations’ pursuit of treaty rights (Head, 1971, pp. 15-16). These various social movements contributed to the tone of Toronto’s urban reform movement. For example, Caulfield (1994) identifies an “attitudinal element” within the urban reform movement comprised of “young people of middle-class background gravitating toward alternative communities and styles of life to be found in the city—the bohemian, artistic, radical-political, and gay communities.” Many of these urban “counter-cultural and avant-garde communities” had found acceptance and a sense of belonging in cities in the 1960s (Caulfield, 1994, p. 69). Members of these communities were thus likely to be deeply attached and committed to protecting urban spaces, and found common cause with other city dwellers demanding greater citizen participation in civic life.

The urban reform movement also “drew strength from a new nationalist spirit” (Harris, 1988, p. 17). As this “nationalist spirit” revitalized Canadian politics in the 1960s, politicians began to employ the language of “participation” to enhance their popular appeal. Lyon (1981) describes how the Liberals’ 1968 federal campaign highlighted the “politics of participation,” and Trudeau “raised great expectations by his use of the rhetoric of participatory democracy” (p. 112). The promise of “the politics of participation” remained largely unfilled, and many
Canadians were deeply shaken by the Prime Minister’s response to the October Crisis of 1970. “Any delusions about the security of democratic participation in Canada should have been dispelled by the events […] in Quebec and the implementation of the War Measures Act,” Clague (1971) asserts. “Wherever one might stand on the issues involved, no one with a commitment to civil liberties can be complacent about the results of those turbulent days” (p. 30).

Governments were well-aware that events such as the October Crisis, the Vietnam War, and Watergate undermined public faith in elected officials and representative democracy. Significant shifts in general social attitudes were also reshaping the tenor of civic life. In a 1973 pamphlet issued by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, Francis Bregha warned that “[w]hen middle-class housewives opt willingly, almost on the spur of the moment, for sit-ins, confrontation with officials or police, there is, indeed, a significant attitudinal change taking place.” The “polarization” caused by this confrontational approach to politics would prove to be a disruptive influence in the long term, making it difficult for governments to “follow any cogent strategy of overall development” (p. 6). By building opportunities for greater “citizen participation” in decision making into the political process, Bregha argued, governments could contain the energies of its citizens, diffuse volatile political situations, and stabilize attitudes towards civic life.

Bregha examined the growing popular interest in the process of decision-making, highlighting that the “shift from preoccupation with ‘what’ the decisions are to ‘how’ they were reached means in practice greater participation.” Echoing the sentiments of Arnstein’s “Ladder of Citizen Participation” (1969), Bregha connects this interest in planning issues with this growing concern with the “‘how’ of decision making”: 
Precisely because planning is so intimately linked to the ‘how’ of modern decision making, people want to play a role in it, knowing quite well as they do that their influence is best felt at the time when the process is getting under way. In other words, they have discovered that it does not pay to wait for a fait accompli. Nor is this realization merely their own; governments and planning bodies of all kinds are also adapting to the notion that the soundness and political viability of a decision depend to a very high degree upon the form chosen for the planning process itself (p. 2).

In other words, planning was an ideal arena for greater participation in civic life. In addition to providing citizens with the opportunity to fully engage in the decision-making process, public buy-in could also enable governments to secure and maintain popular support.

It is possible to overstate the case that Canadian governments were becoming more receptive to the notion of citizen participation. Separating the rhetoric of participation from the political reality, the urban reform movement gained political clout and influence over planning matters by electing reform-minded aldermen, such as John Sewell, Dorothy Thomas, and Karl Jaffary, to represent them at City Hall. Prior to the 1972 municipal election, urban reformers were regarded as obstacles to development, rather than as valued partners in the decision-making process. However, the rhetoric of participation and its ubiquity in the public discourse of the period undoubtedly validated the efforts of the urban reform movement. These were not Bregha’s middle-class housewives staging spur of the moment sit-ins; they were informed citizens exercising their right to participate in the decisions that shaped their cities and their lives.

4.2.2 The Impetus for Urban Reform

For many urban reformers, the participatory approach appeared to be “a philosophical stance badly needed in a technocratic age” (Clague, 1971, p. 32). The proponents of greater participation in civic life were also reacting against the authority of the “technocrats” or “experts” who were re-shaping the urban landscape. Marshall McLuhan (1970) claimed that “the Nowlans reveal our planners as 19th-century men with a naïve faith in an obsolete technology. In
an age of software Metro planners treat people like hardware—they haven’t the faintest interest in the values of neighbourhood or community” (quoted in Nowlan & Nowlan, 1970, n.p., inside jacket). By the early 1970s in Toronto, Lemon (1974) argues, “The pollution issue, reaction against the wholesale destruction of Viet Nam, the fear of over-consumption of resources, and the rise of opposition to expressways in the U.S. all had taken root. The seemingly inevitable tyranny of expressways and of cars (especially in rush hours) had given way to strong anti-technocratic views” (p. 43).

In spite of the negative characterizations of the figure of the “technocrat,” it is important to note that many urban planners and policymakers were sympathetic to the concerns of citizens’ groups. Caulfield (1994) stresses that new perspectives on the planning and governance of Toronto “also arose from within the ranks of the city’s technocratic elite; and the planners’ ideas were often strongly endorsed by spokespersons from related professions—architecture, social services, urban social science—who provided briefs and studies supportive of reformist objectives.” In spite of its anti-technocratic stance, the urban reform movement was thus bolstered by a significant “upheaval in the way that urban ‘experts’ perceived and theorized inner-city neighbourhoods” (p. 69).

In addition to the demands for greater participation in civic life influenced by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, various economic, demographic and physical changes revealed new aspects of the urban landscape and created the necessary conditions for urban reform movements to emerge. Within a global context, Harris (1988) notes, “the unfreezing of the Cold War coupled with the post-war economic boom made social criticism and social reform seem both acceptable and affordable. As a result, in every country there was an upsurge of political dissent” (p. 5). City governments provided a convenient target for escalating popular
dissent because they controlled “the built environment and, therefore, the immediate context of community life” (emphasis added, Harris, 1988, p. 15). As urban issues became increasingly tangible and contentious issues among city-dwellers, urban reform movements became a widespread phenomenon in North America.

The urban reform movement found a political base in Toronto’s inner city, where new groups of residents were politically inclined to oppose City Hall’s “growth-boosterism and its version of modernism […]”. In addition to these “shifts in the city’s demographic and subcultural make-up,” economic and physical changes were also shaping how people perceived the city (Caulfield, 1994, p. 75). During the 1970s, the ascendancy of the urban reform movement coincided with “the massive reconstruction of former inner-city industrial and warehousing sites” in Toronto. As a result, the deindustrialized landscape became a highly contested space “strongly influenced by reformist planning values” (Caulfield, 1994, p. 76).

These dramatic physical changes to the urban landscape—as well as the proposed transportation and development projects—raised new questions about the future of city life. The impending destruction of various features of the urban landscape raised the profile and “visibility” of urban issues. Nowlan and Nowlan (1970) observed that “[p]erhaps to the transportation experts in the 1950’s, as to most of us, the real environment of the expressways was, in McLuhan’s term, invisible. Since then, expressway technology has become a technology of the past and is terribly visible” (emphasis added, p. 10). Urban spaces that were essentially invisible to planners and developers, such as downtown residential neighbourhoods and inner-city ethnic communities and business districts, were valued as lively urban spaces. “To some people,” the Nowlans wrote,

15 “In downtown Toronto alone,” Caulfield (1994) notes, “more than a half million square metres of industrial space were demolished for redevelopment between 1976 and 1986” (p. 76).
Spadina has become the street that most represents Toronto. It does not have the coldness of institution-laden, boulevarded University Avenue; and it has more graciousness and domesticity than Yonge Street. It has so much life that a considerable challenge has been handed the traffic engineers for whom roads serve a purpose other than to be lived beside (emphasis added p. 8).

In a similar fashion, Spadina’s garment industry was based on “a delicately textured network of personal contacts among the people working along Spadina and between them and visiting buyers who invariably move into nearby hotels when they arrive from out-of-town. An expressway marching right down Spadina could mortally disrupt this network” (emphasis added). The proposed expressway also threatened the existence of “a stable neighbourhood which serves as the launching pad for a large number of new immigrants” (p. 34).

Opponents of the Spadina Expressway viewed the project as an outmoded and anachronistic approach to planning that promoted “technocratic” and “suburban” values, including the veneration of the automobile. Salutin (1985) characterizes the proposed Spadina Expressway as “a concrete and asphalt assault weapon aimed at the heart of downtown.” He states further:

It was designed to load up with thousands of cars in the suburbs, hurtle them toward the city, faster and thicker the closer they came; then spew them like buckshot when they hit the Avenue—shattering neighbourhoods, slashing rights-of-way, killing the garment district and thousands of jobs, spreading pollution. The project based itself on the private ethic of the automobile; it was the antithesis of Spadina with its streetcar tracks, busses and all those people in the street (original emphasis, p. 30).

The urban reformers highlighted the incongruity between the technocrat’s attachment to the “private ethic of the automobile” and the actual lifestyle preferences of Toronto residents. Nowlan and Nowlan (1970) noted that “[a]ccording to the latest census, in 1961 a full 29 per cent of the households in Metro Toronto did not own even one car; and many of the households who do own a car, especially those in the suburban areas, would like to leave it at home for family use during the day” (p. 13). While they acknowledged that “suburban commuters” required improved transportation options, the Spadina Expressway represented “a 1940’s
solution to the problem of the dormitory suburb. It was a bad solution even then” (p. 52). Rather than creating a system of expressways that would make automobile use a virtual necessity for suburban and city residents alike, the Nowlans argued, “[m]ost people probably prefer the situation that is developing in Toronto—one where people increasingly live near their work and where the suburbs acquire more business, entertainment and shopping facilities” (p. 52).

The technocratic approach to planning, defined by an obsession with efficiency and progress, was incapable of addressing urban issues on a human or social scale. The activism of many citizens groups focused on protecting and maintaining healthy and vibrant communities. As Dorene Jacobs (1971) explains, “[n]eighbourhood associations […] have consistently placed ‘quality of life’ values ahead of the ‘this is the price of progress’ approach, which paid little heed to the positive values of living within an urban neighbourhood” (p. 305). These “positive values” were described as being deeply embedded in the physical fabric of city neighbourhoods, and were often described in stark contrast to the technocratic values embodied by suburban spaces. For example, in Why Suburbia Hasn’t Worked (1977), John Sewell describes a lack of suburban “informal meeting places”:

Usually there is one restaurant and one main supermarket and a few other small stores in the ‘town centre.’ But a hotel or tavern where one can sit with neighbours and drink is rare—particularly since you will have to drive to get home. These small amenities, taken for granted in cities and towns, are simply not present in suburbia (p. 32).

In contrast, the urban reformers argued, the “physical amenities” commonly present in cities fostered certain “positive values,” such as neighbourliness and sociability. The urban reformers saw themselves not only as the defenders of local neighbourhoods and infrastructures, but also as guardians of the urban way of life. For Jacobs (1971) and others, “‘progress’ is being seen more and more as a process of destroying much of the quality of life and, indeed, possibly life itself within the urban environment […]” Recognizing and honouring “the concerns of urban
residents” was a first step towards ensuring that “urban living” would remain “viable and satisfying for the future” (p. 305).

4.2.3 The Composition of the Urban Reform Movement

During the early 1970s, Lemon (1974) writes, “‘citizen power’ was the watchword as new residents’ associations blossomed and old ratepayers’ groups sparked with new vitality” (p. 48). Who belonged to these groups, and how did their concerns shape the direction of the urban reform movement? Caulfield (1974) calls the urban reform movement “an ambiguous, loosely aligned movement without any formal structure” (p. 12). Similarly, Higgins (1981) states that “it seems to me to be claiming too much for what happened in city politics in Canada in the late Sixties and early Seventies to call it a political movement” (p. 87).

Changes to Toronto’s ward structure played a role in allowing urban reformers to gain a foothold in city politics. In 1969, citizen organizations convinced the Ontario Municipal Board to reorganize the “long strips” of city wards into a “block ward system.” This new system created a more cohesive ward structure and introduced party politics into municipal governance. Urban reformers with various political affiliations—including “left Liberals, downtown New Democrats, Red Tories, and others of varying mixtures of radical, conservative and populist notions”—were thus able to run for City Hall and challenge the status quo. The changing tone in city politics mobilized resident and ratepayer associations, and the Confederation of Resident and Ratepayer Associations (CORRA) provided a popular platform for reform-minded politicians to run for Council (Lemon, 1985, p. 152).

Caulfield (1974) emphatically states that the urban reform movement represented “only a brief congruence of the interests and sentiments of a diverse array of groups and individuals, whose interests and sentiments were otherwise often in conflict. The reformist movement was a
coincidence” (emphasis added, p. 138). In his later research on this period, Caulfield (1994) outlines “two distinct wings” of the movement. The first wing was “derived largely from the city’s more affluent communities, mainly in North Toronto, and focused primarily on matters of land-use planning” (p. 61). The second wing included individuals “from working-class neighbourhoods, economically or culturally marginal middle-class communities, and inner-city political networks whose attitude was left-of-centre, was left-populist in character” (p. 62). These two “wings” of the movement were comprised of several groups of citizens, including “traditional city-dwellers at each social stratum, the emerging generation of urban planners and professionals, young political and cultural activists, and the city’s growing middle class.” The overlapping concerns of these groups provided a fragile foundation for “the popular base of civic reformism and the formation of revised civic attitudes toward older inner-city neighbourhoods” (p. 75).

From the outset, the urban reform movement focused on tackling specific urban issues and projects. In Democracy Is Us: Citizen Development in the City of Toronto, a report commissioned by the Ontario Department for Municipal Affairs in 1971, Maureen Quigley observed that “an ‘issue’ is crucial to the initiation of citizen participation in development. Usually the issue is perceived by the residents of the designated area whether for private or public development as a direct visible threat to property and immediate surroundings” (p. 85). These issues needed to be “concrete and visible” to communities. Quigley also noted that citizens groups in Toronto were more inclined to “concentrate their efforts on fighting issues and influencing decisions which were within their grasp” (p. 86). On issues related to transportation and development projects, Caulfield (1994) acknowledges that the “concerns of the two reformist groupings were sometimes congruent,” allowing them to work together to achieve
common goals (p. 62). However, the inability to articulate a shared vision for the city of Toronto limited the long-term sustainability of this loose confederation of activists and citizens’ groups.

The urban reform movement began to fracture along class and political lines, particularly after the 1972 municipal election of Mayor David Crombie. “Ironically, the reformers’ victory lead to a weakening of the reform impulse,” Lemon (1985) explains. Since municipal government had regained “control of development,” the urban reform movement lost some of its sense of urgency and purpose. When some reform-minded politicians pushed for “further improvements,” the lack of solidarity among the reformers became apparent (p. 152). Freeman (1982) describes how the more left-of-centre Sewell and Alderman Dorothy Thomas proposed a “city-sponsored community organizing program which would pay for full-time organizers to work in […] neighbourhoods.” This proposal was voted down by the “old guard” politicians (who denounced it as “ultra radical, anarchistic, and communist”) as well as the “middle class reform politicians” (who deemed it “unnecessary”) (p. 294).

Similarly, Caulfield (1994) recounts how “urban conservative” and “left-populist” politicians at city hall often clashed over development issues, such as the construction of “up-market” housing projects that ignored the need for more affordable housing in the city, and the construction of commercial projects such as the Eaton Centre (Caulfield, 1994, p. 63). A new set of antagonistic struggles at City Hall ensued as reformers who had managed to “come together to fight city hall’s former style of doing business battled one another as bitterly as they had opposed the boosters.” Over time, a partnership between the “‘urban conservative’ reformers” and the “old-guard boosters” became the foundation for “a new municipal orthodoxy no less oriented to urban growth than the policies of the councils of the 1950s and 1960s but guided by new ground
rules of neighbourhood protection, architectural conservation, and ‘good planning’” (Caulfield, 1994, p. 64).

Toronto’s urban reform movement made a significant impact on the urban landscape, the tenor of municipal government, and the city’s approach to planning and policymaking. However, the eventual collapse of the movement as a viable force in city politics has often obscured its long term impacts, including its profound effect on Toronto’s public library system. By 1981, Higgins was able to announce that “[t]he urban reform movement in Canadian city politics is dead: that is the conventional view now” (p. 84). Similarly, Caulfield (1974) predicted that “[r]eformism may continue to dissipate and fragment, and may become just a minor footnote in Toronto municipal history. While reformism has been, in some sense, a real force, it has been a mushy, fuzzy force” (p. 144).

4.2.4 The Legacy of Urban Reform

Toronto’s urban reform movement was a product of an antagonistic era in city politics. Its key players were united in opposition to unchecked urban development and shared a belief in more participatory approaches to planning and governance. The “ad hoc, issue-by-issue” nature of municipal politics often made it difficult to pursue these goals in a consistent and cohesive manner (Goldrick, 1984, p. 39). The “dominant liberal middle-class faction” was the ultimate “winner” in this scenario (p. 41). The “losers” appeared to be those who saw in the reform movement a path leading to social change. They had started out politicizing the working class, pragmatically identifying and working to change problems in the city. […] By proceeding pragmatically, by intuition, progressive elements in the reform movement succumbed to a liberal temptation and failed to exploit the opportunity that they had won (p. 42).

Lacking a firm sense of solidarity and a set of common long-term goals, the urban reform movement was particularly susceptible to fragmentation and decline.
In spite of these later fissures within the movement, the urban reformers’ emphasis on “neighbourhood preservation” helped to shape Toronto’s sense of itself as a city comprised of unique local identities and infrastructures. Writing in 1976, American journalist Anthony Astrachan called Toronto “a city that works,” proclaiming that “Toronto is still a city where neighbourhoods still mean something.” Astrachan explains:

A neighborhood in this sense is a district whose residents know at least some of their neighbors, help each other in emergencies, and organize part of their lives around common institutions like a school, a church, or a taxpayers’ association. In Toronto there are at least fifty such neighborhoods, many with different ethnic or class orientations but hardly racial or economic ghettos (p. 278)

Astrachan’s remarks do not necessarily reflect the characteristics of Toronto’s neighbourhoods as they exist today. The preservation of local neighbourhood identities and infrastructures would have unforeseen consequences. As Bentley Mays (1994) argues in his cynical—but not entirely inaccurate—reading of the legacy of Stop Spadina:

And as intended, comfortably antique neighbourhoods approximating the anti-Modernist visual ideal have survived downtown—at least in the minds of the aging urban professionals who took up the populist slogans of Stop Spadina, and occupied and gentrified the Victorian houses of Cabbagetown and the Annex. The massive internal migrations of well-heeled citizens during the astonishing real-estate boom of the 1980s, incidentally, did more to destroy the social fabric of “traditional neighbourhoods” than the Spadina Expressway ever would have. But the visually homey streetscape is as important to the architecturally savvy as to the upwardly mobile. It’s also the principal criterion of what’s a neighbourhood and what’s not. A number of mobile Torontonians I know staunchly claim they live in “vibrant neighbourhoods,” even though they don’t know the names of the people next door. Nor do these educated, middle-income invaders, of which I am one, spend much time wondering publicly where the indigents, addicts, students and artists who once found cheap housing in these zones have gone (pp. 174-175).

Bentley Mays is correct in his assertion that gentrification has radically altered the social fabric of many communities. As a lasting achievement of the urban reform era, neighbourhood preservation has not benefitted all Toronto residents equally, to say the least. However, as Harris (2010) argues, “[w]hether comforting or confining, Toronto’s neighbourhoods help define our sense of urban identity” (p. 125).
“Reformists have failed to come to grips with their politics’ lack of clarity,” Caulfield declared in 1972. “It remains unclear who they are, what they stand for and what sort of city Toronto would be if they had their way” (p. 145). The next chapter will explore the evolution of urban reform-era library activism and its impact on TPL policy. In many ways, library activism fulfilled the initial promise of the urban reform movement through the creation of tangible, long-term changes in planning priorities and policies. To paraphrase Caulfield (1972), these policy changes reflect who the library activists were, what they stood for, and what sort of city Toronto would have become if the urban reformers had achieved a similar level of success on a city-wide scale.
Chapter 5
Urban Reform-Era Library Activism and the Evolution of Patron Participation at the TPL

5.1 Introduction
This chapter will build on the material addressed in the previous chapter to explore the second and third of the individual research objectives outlined in sub-section 1.3 of the Introduction (understanding the influence of the urban reform movement on library activism in Toronto and exploring the evolution of urban-reform era library activism and its impact on TPL policy). The themes related to patron participation raised in the chapter will be further explored in Chapter 6 (Discussion: “Deepening Democracy” at the TPL).

5.2 Themes in the History of Urban Reform-Era Library Activism
The previous chapter identified themes in the history of the urban reform movement, including the emergence of “citizen participation,” the impetus for urban reform, the composition of the urban reform movement, and the legacy of urban reform. This chapter will explore the emergence of library activism, the impetus for library activism at the TPL, the identity of the library activists, and the legacy of library activism at the TPL.

5.2.1 The Emergence of Library Activism
Marshall (1984a) described four phases in the “participation process” at the TPL: the “board initiatives” phase, the “East End phase,” the “full-fledged citizen participation” phase, and the “institutionalization” phase (pp. 128-129). While Marshall’s phases are not necessarily sequential, they roughly describe the evolution of patron participation during this period. The “Board Initiatives” phase involved the debate over the acquisition of Canadian materials, challenging the district library proposal, and scrutinizing capital expenditures. The Canadian
materials debate provides insight into the TPL Board’s contribution to the emergence of patron participation at the TPL.

The literature of the urban reform movement frequently describes the 1972 municipal election as a “watershed” moment for urban reformers (Lemon, 1974, p. 48). As this new cohort of city politicians familiarized themselves with the inner workings of City Hall, many city agencies and boards, including the Library Board, came under close public scrutiny for the first time. New Library Board appointees, including Canadian writer and publisher James Lorimer, began to examine TPL policies and planning issues from a reform perspective.

As noted the previous chapter, the urban reform movement in Canadian cities “drew strength from a new nationalist spirit” (Harris, 1988, p. 17). Similarly, Marshall (1984c) notes, the debate over Canadian materials in library collections unfolded against the backdrop of “a remarkable revival of Canadian culture, the development of a new maturity in Canadian literature, and the beginnings of an indigenous social science” (p. 193). For many, the emphasis on the acquisition of Canadian materials also reflected a burgeoning Canadian nationalism. As writer and TPL Board member Engel (1984) argues, “the opponents of Canadian materials were afraid of the removal of ENGLISH books from the Toronto libraries; they would not allow ENGLISH books to be moved over for Canadian; in other words, they were making me come into my own country as an immigrant; history was repeating itself” (p. 204).

When Engel joined the TPL Board, Canadian materials comprised a mere 12 per cent of library collections (p. 202). Engel argues that libraries “refused to buy Canadian books on the grounds that they reflected a low taste. Others didn’t know enough about Canadian books to know what to buy” (p. 201). For Engel and other Canadian writers and publishers, public library collections needed to reflect Canadian literature and culture:
French libraries buy French books, Portuguese libraries buy Portuguese books and the Greeks have this odd way of buying in Greek. Why shouldn’t Canadians buy, where they can, Canadian books? To fail to put them in decent quantities [...] in Canadian libraries is to deprive Canadians of a chance of knowing what their literature is (p. 204).

While subsequent debates over the “quality” of library materials “led nowhere but into the swamp,” Engel notes that the systematic review of book selection policies “opened a lot of windows, a lot of doors. Not only Canadian materials, but also what is called Popular Culture and Foreign Language materials spending were analyzed and discussed” (p. 207). In addition to increased funding for multilingual materials, Engel notes that the review also led to “an allocation of funds for each branch-head to spend on popular materials […] effectively freeing each branch from total central control, which was revolutionary” (p. 207). As a result of these Board-initiated policy changes, library collections began to represent “to a greater degree the true reading habits and nature of the population” (p. 208).

During this period, the TPL Board also began to review the proposal to expand services through large-scale district libraries and other capital expenditures. Chipman (1984) describes how input from community groups forced the TPL Board to reassess its priorities in this regard. At a meeting on December 10, 1974, the Chief Librarian presented its plans regarding “the district libraries proposed in the north, east, and eventually the western end of the city, and the renovations to a few existing branches.” In response, community attendees “described the improvements needed in the branch libraries in their neighbourhoods, most of which were not included in the library’s plans” (p. 70). This meeting led to the formation of a Long Term Planning and Priorities (LTPP) Committee comprised of Board members, aldermen, school trustees and representatives from the separate school board, as well as citizen members representing east, north, west, and mid-town Toronto. In 1975, after public meetings with librarians and citizens in different areas of the city, the LTPP Committee presented the Board
with several recommendations focused on branch-level services. These recommendations included using funds earmarked for capital facility and program development to “equalize the level of library service,” focusing on “the development of neighborhood library services,” and capitalizing on “the use of existing facilities through renovation, additions and longer hours” (p. 76). Significantly, the Committee emphasized “that priority be given to fulfilling the library service requirements of residential neighbourhoods” (p. 77).

The previous chapter highlighted how Toronto’s urban reform movement gained momentum, political clout, and influence over planning matters by electing reform-minded aldermen to City Hall. This influx of reform-minded city politicians gained influence over many municipal agencies and boards. As new appointees to the TPL Board scrutinized library policies from a reform perspective, they challenged established views and created new inroads for patron participation in library planning and policymaking.

5.2.2 The Impetus for Library Activism

As illustrated by example of the debate over Canadian materials, the policy changes that occurred at the TPL during the urban reform era were interrelated. Reviewing and revising the TPL’s collections policies led to the increased acquisition of Canadian books, as well as multilingual and popular materials. While the district library proposal—a massive building scheme that appeared to threaten existing neighbourhood identities and infrastructures—captured the wider public’s attention during the urban reform period, the proposal was tied to other contentious policies and planning issues, including the unequal distribution of library resources across the City of Toronto.

Two key reports mobilized a broad base of activists on library issues during the reform period. Like the Spadina Expressway proposal, the district library concept was based on a study
that had been conducted more than a decade earlier. The Shaw Report (1960) provided the rationale for the TPL’s contentious building scheme. The Forrester Report (February/March 1975) revealed the TPL’s two-tier funding model and was the first of a series of reform-era reports that “provided the ammunition (facts and information; analysis and conclusions) with which the status quo ante was systematically demolished and new policies and structures were set up in place of the old” (Marshall, 1984b, p. 58). The rejection of the district library model in Toronto’s east end presented opportunities for library activists to envision an alternative future for the TPL.

**The Shaw Report (1960) and the Rationale for the District Library Model**

In 1960, Dr. Ralph Shaw of Rutgers University was commissioned to produce a report on the state of Toronto’s library services. During this period, the municipalities of Metro Toronto (Toronto, York, East York, North York, Scarborough, and Etobicoke) each administered their own library systems, while ostensibly sharing the reference and other services provided by Toronto’s downtown Central Library. Shaw observed “the changes in location of factories and regional facilities factories” as well as the “shifting of population to the suburbs” taking place during this era, and emphasized that “the social as well as the economic pattern of metropolitan areas has changed.” He concluded that neighbourhood-based library services were important, but emphasized that “there are some intellectual levels of service that […] must, in fact, be provided by a central library in the core city which serves the larger area” (p. 5). Shaw cautioned that “neighbourhoods change rapidly and a building that appears to be well located soon becomes poorly located.” He predicted that if the library continued to follow its “conventional pattern,”

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17 Toronto’s Central Library was located at College and St. George Streets during this period.
which involved “the almost equal distribution of space between adult and children’s services, and the spacing of such buildings within three quarters of a mile of everybody,” many library buildings would be made “obsolete” as a result of inevitable demographic shifts (p. 89).

Marshall (1984b) argues that during the late 1960s, “there was a great preoccupation […] with trying to find a way of building a new central facility; this effort coexisted somewhat uneasily with plans to build a series of District Libraries or regional centers for reference and other back-up services.” He attributes both “preoccupations” to Shaw’s recommendations, “which de-emphasized neighbourhood libraries in order to concentrate major resources at the area or district level.” According to Marshall, “this was a policy exactly contrary to what was needed in Toronto, i.e., the expansion and vitalizing of the existing branch network” (p. 53).

While the district library model was a rallying point for the library activists involved with the TPL in the 1970s, Shaw’s original proposal must be considered within the context of its time. Shaw was particularly concerned with the “wide disparity in quality and quantity of library service available to people living within Metro.” Long before reform-minded Library Board members called for the equalization of library services in the 1970s, Shaw argued that “[t]he equalization of opportunity for all people within the governmental area is one of the primary responsibilities of government and […] Metro must eventually assume responsibility for equalization of educational and recreational opportunities through public libraries as it has for schools, and for many other public services” (p. 92).

The district library model was presented a means of expanding the scope of library services to communities within Toronto. Shaw observed that work with “national, cultural, religious, ethnic, and subject interest groups” was “urgently needed in the melting pot situation of Metropolitan Toronto and should be one of the most valuable services to be rendered by each
regional branch.” In his final report, Shaw included a “Memorandum on Adult Education in Libraries” by Canadian adult educator Roby Kidd, and concluded that “a vastly expanded program of adult education services and work with groups in general is urgently needed throughout Metro” (p. 82). Many of these same concerns would be expressed by citizen groups and reform-minded Library Board members in the 1970s.

**The Forrester Report (February/March 1975)** and Equalization

George Forrester’s report was commissioned to provide statistics and information on the library system for the Board as well as the newly established Long Term Planning and Priorities Committee (LTPP). According to Marshall (1984e), George Forrester’s report to the LTPP Committee was the first report that “revealed the striking disparities in allocation of funds to the different areas of the city and the resulting uneven distribution of resources.” Reform-minded Board members such as James Lorimer used Forrester’s findings “to analyze the existence and nature of the ‘two systems’ (North Toronto and the rest of the city) and to demonstrate the need for equalization” (p. 338).

Forrester’s report indicated that while the library branches of the East District (Beaches, Danforth, Eastern, Gerrard, Jones, and Riverdale) served 22.6% of the total population of the city, they were receiving a smaller budget allocation than libraries in the North District (Deer Park, Forest Hill, Locke, and Northern), which served 18% of the population (p. 4). In their July 1975 recommendations to the TPL Board, the East End Advisory Group proposed that “for 1976, east end libraries serving 22% of the city’s population receive 22% of the total amount of funds available for the operations the public service. This would include 22% of the total book budget,

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and 22% of the budget for library staff.” The Group emphasized that “it is only just that in 1976 and thereafter the 22% of the city’s population living in the east end have as a minimum 22% of the available funds for library resources” (p. 21).

According to James Lorimer (1984), Forrester’s statistics revealed that the TPL was comprised of “two systems.” The “well-endowed, well-serviced, well-provided library system” in North Toronto provided 121,000 people, many of whom resided in the city’s “highest-income neighbourhoods” with an indisputably high quality of service. Meanwhile, a “poorly-endowed, poorly-staffed, and under-stocked” system served 584,000 people in the east, west, and central areas, “with many pockets of the city having no service at all” (p. 83). Other statistics on books per capita, spending on staff, branch floor space per capita, and capital spending affirmed this unequal distribution of library resources. This unequal distribution of resources was reinforced by the fact that usage determined funding priorities for each subsequent year. As library collections and services were largely geared towards middle-class, English-speaking patrons, libraries located in areas catering to this group of patrons continued to receive a greater share of funding than libraries in less affluent areas (Lorimer, 1984).

Lorimer argues that Forrester’s findings “described the basic characteristics of the library system which were producing the specific problems which citizens and others had identified” prior to the report’s release. He notes that “no board members, few staff members, and no city politicians were really aware of the situation the Forrester report revealed. Nor could they have been; the necessary information had never before been put together.” By replicating the “economic and social geography of the City of Toronto,” Forrester was able to uncover “the two sub-systems” later identified by Lorimer and others (p. 85). This collection of branch-community
statistics provided a strong quantitative foundation for the reform-minded Library Board’s demands regarding the equalization of library services in Toronto.

**The Rejection of the District Library Model**

The TPL believed it could expand its services and address some of the equalization issues through the construction of large-scale district libraries in northern, eastern, and western parts of Toronto. After the opening of the Northern District Library in 1975, the issues of resource allocation and the district library proposal coalesced as the TPL prepared to construct its second district library in Toronto’s east end. According to Marshall (1984g), library staff in the underfunded east end branches “had been told for years: just wait, relief is in sight, the Eastern District Library is on the books. With this promise held out as a panacea, and with the staff desperately needing to believe that something—anything—would provide relief, the staff bought this hope as a solution to their problems” (p. 116). Beyond the TPL context, Marshall argues, the district library model had emerged as “a major fixture in the mental furniture of the library profession, an essential plank in the platform of ‘liberal’ librarianship. It was such a fixed article that no one could question it with impunity” (p. 117).

In other words, the TPL viewed the district library proposal as a viable solution to certain pressing issues. For many staff, it also appeared to be an inevitable development in the expansion of public library services. The reform-minded Board members were less invested in the district library model and were thus more skeptical regarding its suitability for Toronto’s library system. At a TPL Board meeting in January 1974, the reform-minded TPL Board member and publisher James Lorimer pressed the TPL to hold a community consultation meeting regarding the proposal. At this meeting in June 1974, committee member Glenys McMullen (1984) recollected how “[a] dramatic moment occurred when two of the Board members present
(Jim Lorimer and Dorothy Thomas) accused the Board of leading the public up the garden path and merely paying lip-service to the concept of citizen participation in its decision to build the new library” (p. 139). The timely intervention of Lorimer and Thomas led to the formation of the East End Advisory Group (EEAG). After some preliminary work, McMullen argues, the EEAG “felt strongly that people were attached to their neighbourhood branches and liked to be able to walk to them; some admitted the fear that a district library would absorb most of the east end budget, leaving no money for renovations or expanded collection in the branches” (p. 142).

Within the context of the urban reform movement, district libraries seemed to represent an outmoded, suburban planning perspective. Marshall (1984g) notes that the district library plan reflected “the centralizing tendencies of the ‘50s and ‘60s and the virtual abandonment of the American inner city […] in favor of suburban development.”

Inner-city libraries, so it was argued, were and would be little used, while the readers (white, middle class) were moving out to the suburbs. Let the inner city decay, while suburban library systems are planned which depend, not on the principle of walkable access, but on access by motor car (in the suburbs, everyone drives, with at least one car per family). Therefore, the principle of large district libraries, spaced several miles apart, will meet the major needs of these mobile suburbanites, with the minor exception of children, whose normal needs can be met by the satellites (p. 117).

Similarly, Sewell (1977) used the example of the suburban library to illustrate the defects inherent in suburban planning, arguing that “things are spread out so much that it is a long walk to almost any destination you can think of. A quart of milk requires a drive or a long walk. Going to the library is the same, just as is finding nearby recreational activities” (p. 32).

For many communities, the district library proposal was reminiscent of other development and transportation projects that threatened to destroy the fabric of the inner city. Marshall (1984g) notes that the Northern District Library—the only district library that was constructed in Toronto—was located “in the area which has least need of it, in terms of the
traditional skewing of resources in the system” (p. 115). However, some Toronto residents regarded the District Library as an intrusion rather than as an additional service improvement. In 1968, TPL Board member Dorothy Thomas (1984) recounts, the original plans for the site involved the displacement of local residents, as well as the construction of an 11-story commercial office tower and retail space. Community members presented the TPL Board “with its first political issue, demanding that the height be reduced, that the commercial component be removed, and that a local park be provided on the site” (p. 62). According to Anne Johnson (who later became the Ward 11 alderman and a TPL Board member),

The Library Board was worse than any developer [...] They had completely misread the north end. While we were a community of readers, we were interested in books, not a shiny new building. We liked our St. Clement’s Library, and wanted to keep it. They had no interest whatsoever in anything we had to say. I couldn’t believe that one could deal with a city body and receive such an unsympathetic hearing (quoted in Thomas, p. 62).

Eventually, the tower and retail space were eliminated from the plans and the construction of the Northern District library proceeded (p. 63). However, this example illustrates how Toronto residents were becoming increasingly sensitive to planning issues and protective of their neighbourhood identities and infrastructures, which included local TPL branches.

The dismantling of the district library proposal unfolded gradually and reflected a broad public interest in improving neighbourhood-level library services. Lorimer also notes that the emphasis on expanding library services at the neighbourhood level was reinforced by the “political geography” of Toronto. Since only two of Toronto’s eleven wards were located in north Toronto, “equalization was a policy which could be attractive to a fairly large number of city politicians of various political convictions.” In addition to the “popular changes in library materials” which appealed to a broad cross-section of their constituents, city politicians were also inclined to support “using capital funds for a broad program of renovation and expansion of
existing branches, which meant concrete improvements in a large number of libraries spread across the city instead of concentration on only two new district libraries” (p. 87).

5.2.3 The Identity of the Library Activists

Thomas (1984) compares the “ politicization of libraries” to urban reformers’ concern with “neighbourhood preservation,” in that “there was something for everybody” in the struggle. The “educated, reading middle class” emphasized the preservation of neighbourhood branches. The “nationalists” protested “the shockingly low percentage of Canadian books on library shelves.” The city’s “ethnic communities” questioned “the anomaly of branch libraries chockfull of good English literature in the midst of non-English-speaking populations.” The “largely working-class non-users” raised the issue that they were underwriting, “through their tax dollars, a system that routinely excluded them, by ignoring or disparaging the material they might be interested in.” Finally, for library patrons in the east, west, and central parts of the city, “there was the inequity of the Library spending significantly less per capita on them than on the people in the north end” (p. 63).

According to Marshall (1984a), “a diverse and conflicting set of motives, some based on self-interest, some on more altruistic considerations” inspired the library activism of the urban reform era:

Some people wanted better libraries for themselves and their children; others for the community as a whole—whether that community be identified in terms of locality or ethnicity or interest group. There were some who had scores to settle (profound dissatisfaction with the libraries was not uncommon); others who had axes to grind—though surprisingly few of these. Some found the library participation process to be an exciting political activity; a few undoubtedly chose the process to further their own political careers. Perhaps a few came in out of sheer curiosity and reveled, as amateur social scientists, in the opportunity for a rare experience of participant observation (p. 128).

While McMullen describes a similar diversity of interests and perspectives within the East End Advisory Group, she notes that most members were galvanized by the proposed changes to
library services. Many members reported that “they were afraid that services in their neighborhood might be reduced or cut off altogether, just when people were beginning to speak up about services they would really like to have. There was a general sense that the tide was turning and they wanted to be part of the wave of change” (McMullen, 140).

Caulfield (1994) argues that the “urban conservatives” at City Hall “often perceived their interests as distinct from those of the left-populist grouping, a perception that was clearly inscribed by class” (pp. 63-64). Eventually, the politicians who entered City Hall under the banner of urban reform began to vote according to their own interests, and the urban reform movement fractured along class lines. In contrast, library activism in Toronto gained momentum and developed a unified approach over time. This sense of cohesion can be attributed to the fact that library activism emerged from within the TPL through the active involvement of reform-minded TPL Board members. As Marshall (1984a) argues, the first phase of the patron participation at the TPL was mainly prompted by “Board initiatives” (p. 128). It is equally important to note that many of the principles and mechanisms related to community responsiveness and patron participation were eventually “institutionalized” by the TPL (p. 129) and/or adopted by the library profession.

Most significantly, citizens often became involved with the TPL based on a specific interest or issue (e.g. the district library proposal). However, many of these policy and planning issues were interrelated. For example, the debate over Canadian materials inspired a thorough review of the TPL’s collection policies. This review, in turn, led to a broader discussion regarding the acquisition of multilingual and popular materials to meet the needs of the TPL’s diverse readership. Similarly, the debate over the district library model was closely tied to the
imperative to equalize library services across Toronto. Groups of citizens and stakeholders thus became accustomed to engaging in collaborative efforts to achieve their goals.

Librarians and library administrators were often equated with technocrats and developers—the traditional opponents of the urban reformers—for their reluctance to engage with the public on library planning and policy issues. As Marshall (1984g) argues in a discussion of the debate over district libraries,

On the one hand, librarians were so blinded by professional conditioning and imported ideology that they were unable to look realistically at the situation and to examine it logically and analytically. Much less so, in fact, than the Board members and the citizens, who had no such preconceptions to confuse them. On the other hand, the very fact that it was uninitiated laymen (Board and citizens) who were questioning the received wisdom of the profession intensified the emotional reactions of the staff” (p. 118).

However, like the planners who sympathized with Toronto’s urban reformers, TPL librarians were not completely unresponsive to citizen participation in library planning and policymaking. As Bundy and Stielow (1987) argue, the social movements of the 1960s—including the antiwar movement, the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the gay liberation movement, and the student movement—empowered many librarians and library school students to confront the middle-class bias of public librarianship. These movements also ushered in new perspectives on public participation in library planning and governance.19

Overall, the process of organizational change at the TPL unfolded in a collaborative rather than a combative manner. The parameters of change were defined by the distinctive features of public libraries identified by Marshall (1984d) (ubiquity, propinquity, availability/neutrality, flexibility/versatility, capability/potentiality) (pp. 297-301). Libraries’ inclination towards inclusivity also shaped this process of change. Public libraries were

19Several of John Marshall’s library school students at the University of Toronto embarked on projects related to citizen participation, community development and libraries.
increasingly recognized as being multipurpose facilities; it was generally assumed that libraries should strive to accommodate the needs of various stakeholder groups. As Clarke notes of libraries in the west end, “young people came to the libraries looking for a corner in which to study. Others came in search of information or for books in their own language. Still others wanted a meeting place and community programs. West Toronto had a wide network of social and political organizations looking for places to meet and do research” (p. 151).

The creation of the Bloor-Spadina Library (now the Spadina Road branch) provides an exceptional example of community collaboration in library planning. As citizens’ advisory groups formed across the city to examine library issues, the Central Area Citizens’ Advisory Committee reported that the Annex neighbourhood did not have a local public library branch.\(^\text{20}\) In spite of the fact that Annex residents played an active role in the Stop Spadina campaign and the urban reform movement, Obonsawin and McFarlane emphasize that “[w]hat precipitated the library’s response to the needs of the Annex were […] the efforts of another group of citizens, the Native people of Toronto” (p. 160).

In 1973, the Native Concerned Citizens Committee set up a library committee, which began meeting at the Native Canadian Centre to discuss the creation of a library for Toronto’s First Nations peoples. In 1976, the Native Canadian Centre relocated to a new site at the intersection of Bloor and Spadina that was able to accommodate a library. Centre staff and members of the library committee reached out to the Central Area Citizens Advisory Committee to consider the possibility of creating a shared library facility. The TPL Board approved their

\(^\text{20}\)According to Obonsawin and McFarlane, “There was no public library in the Annex. The closest libraries were either children’s libraries (Palmerston; Boys and Girls House) or the Yorkville Branch, then serving only adults” (p. 160).
proposal to lease the space from the Centre and to collaborate on the development of its collections in 1976. The new Spadina-Bloor branch opened the following year.

Obonsawin and McFarlane emphasize that Centre staff and the members of the library committee recognized the benefits of a collaborative approach to library planning in the Annex:

As early as 1973, the Native Canadian Centre’s library committee was concerned to point out that the objective of a native library, in addition to providing a relevant library service to the Native community, was “to break down the negative stereotype of Native people held by the general community.” From there, it was a relatively short step to seeing that this could best be accomplished in the context of a TPL branch library. This in turn led logically to perceiving the benefits of a total public library service to Native people as well as to residents of the Annex (p. 163).

Subsequent research suggested that the First Nations stakeholders had lost some of their influence in operations of the facility by the early 1980s. However, as Obonsawin and McFarlane argue, this alliance provides a compelling example of “an experiment in partnership with the most profoundly disadvantaged and exploited group of Canadian citizens. Both its history and its future hold lessons for us all” (p. 164).

5.2.4 The Legacy of Library Activism at the TPL

The substantial accomplishments of reform-era library activism—including the commitment to developing inclusive library collections and services, the rejection of the district library model and the renewal of the neighbourhood branch system, and the equalization of library services across the city of Toronto—have left their mark on the TPL as it exists today. Several reports—including the East End Survey (May 1975), the East End Advisory Group Goals and Recommendations (July 1975), the Beckman Study (June 1975), and the Stinson Report (August

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21 In a footnote to this chapter, Marshall cites a 1981 study by University of Toronto library science students Herta Shortt and Rob Rolfe: “One of the objectives was to assess the current state of the Bloor-Spadina Library, its connections with the Native community, and the adequacy of its resources and services in meeting the needs of that community. The authors observed a weakening of the Native emphasis and a blurring of the Native focus originally assigned to the Library” (pp. 165-166).
1975)—illustrate how this process of organizational change began to unfold during the reform period.

*The East End Survey (May 1975)*[^22]

The East End Advisory Group (EEAG) received funding from the Board to hire Information Consultants (a group comprised of librarian Anne Woodsworth, sociologist Lorna Marsden, and architect Richard Seligman) to conduct a user/non-user study of Toronto’s east end libraries. The scope of the study was eventually expanded to include an architectural survey of the branches in the area. Information Consultants (1975) echoed the sentiments of the reform-minded Library Board members in their assessment that “the east end’s six public library branches did not fulfill either present user needs as expressed by the users themselves not did they meet published and accepted minimum standards for public library service.” In no uncertain terms, the authors presented their case that the east end libraries were “deficient in space, staff, books and audiovisual materials.” Patrons were surveyed in libraries and interviews were conducted in residents’ homes in order to determine why, in the east end, “the majority of residents do not use libraries and what might attract such non-users to libraries” (p. ii).

In terms of the individual branches, the authors noted that “all (with the exception of Jones) are as old as the districts they serve. They have altered little in physical size and only one branch has had any renovations since it was built.” In spite of these issues, there was potential for this “group of libraries full of character and historical charm,” largely due to the work of “willing and imaginative staff.” The libraries themselves were not inherently dysfunctional; rather, “physical and budgetary restrictions” were the main barriers to “innovative and flexible

service in the area” (pp. 11-12). The authors also emphasized that “innovative and flexible service” could not always be measured in quantitative terms, or according to “minimum standards”:

Goals which relate to human requirements, staff and procedures which are sensitive and responsive to changing needs and, finally, the vision to translate needs into functional objectives, are factors which can never be measured by standards but which must be considered if the best possible library service is desired (p. 14).

While the Forrester report provided the reform-minded Library Board members with the statistics they required to present the case for equalization, the Information Consultants’ report helped to articulate many new qualitative goals and objectives.

In their survey of library users and non-users, the authors discovered that most east end patrons walked to their local library (p. 54). They also reported that the branches in question “tend to attract the best-educated members of the community, or reciprocally, fail to attract the majority of the members of the community who do not have education beyond the legal minimum” (pp. 60-62). The majority of patrons were English-speakers, female, and predominantly belonged to the “middle socio-economic group” (p. 66). However, there were notable exceptions to this trend, including substantial groups of Greek patrons at the Danforth (now Pape) Branch and Chinese patrons at the Riverdale Branch (p. 72). The libraries were also highly visible institutions and appeared to be known to most residents in the area, including non-users (p. 82).

In terms of the barriers to more widespread library use, the authors identified some common themes. While many non-users reported that their local library was “convenient even though they do not use it,” the authors highlighted responses indicating that

[…] librarians should be ‘regular Joes,’ ‘more down to earth,’ ‘not a social service type,’ a ‘more warm human being’ and ‘should not get mad when you don’t know what you want.’ They implied that librarians are in some ways intimidating (p. 85).
The authors also observed a demand for “larger numbers of books in languages other than English.” Other participants expressed “the need for the library to be the centre of the community,” arguing that “[t]he library should be oriented to community activities” (p. 86).

The results of the user/non-user study appeared to be somewhat inconclusive. According to the authors, neither group expressed “specific needs […] other than to gain access to books which they are unwilling or unable to get elsewhere.” They argued that “[t]his lack of response itself constitutes a critique of the library as a neighbourhood resource except in the most conservative notion of what a library should be.” While the authors acknowledged the genuine “pride in, and affection for, the branch libraries of the east end,” they argued that [t]he fact that no one expressed an explicit dissatisfaction with the library system, that no one felt that the library excluded members of the community, or that no one requested specific special services in the neighbourhood, in the community, or for library users in particular, is not reason to believe that the library facilities are offering the community all that they might.

In fact, the authors surmised, these findings suggested “that the library facilities are perhaps not exciting or stimulating to the area’s residents” (p. 122). They also indicated that many residents lacked “standards or levels of prior knowledge” to assess their local branches. Most respondents seemed to be unaware that their libraries “can and do provide materials and services other than book lending.” The authors also commented on the reluctance of satisfied users to propose changes or improvements to existing library services (p. 122).

Throughout the report, the authors emphasize that “one of the foremost criteria to be used in shaping future library services (and hence physical facilities) should be the degree to which the services and facilities allow for responsiveness to changing needs of people, whether individually or in groups” (emphasis added, p. iii). In terms of the expansion of library programs and services, the authors emphasize “the need for more and smaller library collections within walking distance of people’s homes, especially those with children” (p. 109). Most respondents
(including active patrons, non-users, and library staff) appeared to believe “that the intimacy and local identity of neighbourhood branches are important characteristics to maintain since they are what keep users coming back” (p. 129). To preserve the integrity of the neighbourhood branches while responding to the need for expanded collections, programs, and services, the authors argued that a “warehouse storage facility with 24-hour delivery service” could be a viable alternative to the district library model (p. v). They also suggested that if a district library were to be constructed in the east end, it should share space with other public services or businesses, rather than functioning as “an isolated sole-purpose building” (132-133).

**EEAG Goals and Recommendations (July 1975)**

McMullen (1984) recalled that reactions to the Information Consultants’ report “varied immensely but could be summed up as follows: the sampling of non-users was rather small, the tabulation of user and non-user responses was extremely interesting but there was a giant leap between the data and some of the conclusions” (p. 144). Towards the end of the report, McMullen (1984) wrote, the authors included “their ideas on how to improve individualized services to users and how to reach more non-users, ideas which were reasonable and enlightening but ruffled a few feathers” (p. 144). Many of these ideas, such as installing “foreign language kiosks in subways,” were an attempt to address the inconclusive results of the non-user

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23 The full title of this report as it appears in the list of references is: East End Advisory Group. (1975, July 8). *Report to the Toronto Public Library Board from The East End Advisory Group. July 8, 1975. Accepted with slight revision by the Toronto Public Library Board at a Special Board Meeting, July 8, 1975.* Toronto: Author.
portion of the survey. According to McMullen, these “experimental ideas” upset some stakeholders, and “[t]he debate became focused on the context of their presentation, rather than on the ideas themselves, which was unfortunate” (p. 144).

The EEAG used the Information Consultants’ report to formulate its own report to the Library Board in July 1975. In their submission, the EEAG outlined four major goals regarding the improvement of the library system in the east end: doubling area library usage in three years time (and tripling usage by the five-year mark); renewing the commitment to “the provision of print materials for people to consult and borrow”; ensuring that library services were meeting the needs of “a much more balanced group of users than at present, so that in terms of ethnic background, age, occupation and incomes the users of east end libraries are representative of the population of the east end as a whole”; and enhancing “cooperation between public and school libraries” in the area (p. 1). An amended report, with input from TPL staff, was adopted in November 1975.

McMullen believed that “confrontation” with TPL staff over some of the recommendations the EEAG put forward in their presentation to the Board had some unexpected benefits, including an increased appreciation for the staff’s “competence and practical grasp of the report’s implications,” as well as the “stimulation of ideas and mobilization of staff to articulate them with unprecedented eloquence” (p. 146). She also emphasized that “the Board, management, staff and citizens were debating crucial questions concerning library services, not

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24 In addition to the kiosks, Information Consultants also suggested that the library could play a role in offering “community-related social service information to individuals about government programs, social welfare benefits, employment, learning and educational opportunities,” leaving “deposit collections” of books in recreational centres and other community spaces, creating TPL “promotional catalogues (along lines of Eaton’s catalogue) describing book, record and film titles and information services to known non-users and provide them with a telephone order system and mail delivery,” and sponsoring “educational television programs in some branches on an experimental basis […]” (p. 138).
just in the East End but throughout the city. Never before had meetings been so well attended, so lively or so full of conviction” (pp. 146-147). In due course, many of the recommendations of the EEAG were implemented in the east end libraries, including renovation projects on specific branches, the expansion of paperback and foreign language collections, and the enhancement of the interloan system.

The process also strengthened the EEAG, both in terms of membership and resolve. According to McMullen, the EEAG claimed a membership of about thirty individuals by 1977, with participation from TPL staff (p. 147). In its July 1975 recommendations, the EEAG argued that its existence should be recognized by the Library Board “as a permanent library board body, with membership determined by the library board after consultation with east end community groups,” and that its advisory role be upheld in meetings with east end TPL staff “to review progress in the implementation of these recommendations and to make such reports and recommendations to the library board as it deems appropriate” (p. 22).

The Beckman Study (June 1975)\(^{25}\)

According to Marshall (1984e), Margaret Beckman’s *Toronto Public Library Management Study* (June 1975) “arose from the Library Board’s realization that management structures and procedures were inhibiting rather than encouraging necessary changes and reforms in library service, as well as processes of communication and participation within the library system” (p. 339). Beckman notes that the report was also intended to examine the Board’s role within the system. She notes that “the composition and outlook of the Toronto Public Library Board […] changed substantially” within a relatively short period of time, and that newer members

\(^{25}\) The full title of this study as it appears in the list of references is: Beckman, M. (1975, June). *Toronto Public Library management study/submitted by Margaret Beckman*. Guelph, Ontario: Beckman Associates.
recognized “that they may have put undue pressure and burdens on library staff members in the production of analyses and reports” (p. 2).

Beckman places her study within the context of the broader changes occurring at the TPL, noting that “[c]ollections are the prime concern of the system, and the opportunity for shifting emphases to meet changing and different social environments is difficult to achieve.” While she acknowledges that exploring these “shifting emphases” is beyond the scope of her study, she argues that she “does envisage a structure which would allow the Toronto Library to be more service oriented, reflecting the concerns and desires expressed by many of the branch librarians, and which we hope will be reflected in more relevant library objectives” (p. 15).

Beckman also embraced the neighbourhood-centered outlook on the library system, arguing that “the strength of the Toronto Public Library resides in its branches and the branch librarians, and that any new structure must provide them with the authority which they require in their daily work with the public” (emphasis added, p. 21).

While Beckman’s report does not explicitly comment on the district library proposal, she does advise that the library implement a district model regarding staffing, “even without the intended physical facility” (p. 32). Beckman’s description of the proposed District Coordinator’s position includes collaboration “with community groups to ensure a current awareness of changing local requirements” (p. 71). She argues that this management model would make it possible for branch librarians to “work more effectively with their users,” particularly through the “structured forum” of citizens advisory groups similar to the EEAG. This would also create “a more positive mechanism for participation in decisions which affect their work and their users” (p. 32). According to Beckman’s model, the advisory groups, branch librarians, and District Coordinator would all have opportunities to provide “major input into decisions with
respect to what services are required and what priorities should be given” at various branches (p. 35).

Marshall (1984e) asserts that Beckman’s recommendations failed to address “the implications of citizen participation or […] the emerging potential for a staff role in management […] which would go beyond the selective tokenism of so-called ‘participatory management’” (p. 339). While Beckman’s study did not have the impact of the Forrester Report and the East End Study, it reflects the tenor of the times in its emphasis on the importance of neighbourhood branches and branch librarians, the decentralization of management structures, and the acceptance of citizen advisory groups as useful liaisons between libraries and their communities.

*The Stinson Report (August 1975)*

*Toronto Public Libraries: Building Priorities 1976-1985 Phase One* (August 1975), by architects Carmen Corneil, Jeffery Stinson, Terry Montgomery, and David Sisam, was widely known and referred to as the “Stinson Report.” While it was originally intended to assess the physical state of Toronto’s libraries and provide recommendations regarding capital spending, the authors expanded the scope of the study to explore broader questions about the role of libraries in communities and the future of the library system. Marshall (1984e) describes the Stinson Report as “a fascinating, stimulating compendium of observations, quotations, ideas and reflections which did much to hasten and enhance the basic turn-around in the system” (p. 340). Stinson (1984) later wrote that “[t]he process of citizen participation adopted in the ‘70s by the Toronto Public Library has had the unanticipated effect of making evident these different perceptions of what a library ought to be” (p. 182). While many of the other reports produced during this period

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could be described as more instrumental in nature, the Stinson Report stands alone in its more philosophical, creative approach to the question of what Toronto’s public libraries “ought to be.”

In his contribution to Marshall’s volume, Stinson (1984) writes that the group “used the story of six blind men who attempted to define an elephant as a sort of leitmotiv.” For Stinson and his collaborators, this was an apt metaphor for a library system that “could be perceived in such contrary ways by its staff, its administration, its users and others who might reasonably be regarded as its ‘constituents’” (Stinson, 1984, p. 182). On the one hand, the architects argued in their report, the library could point to a loyal following of committed patrons and library staff, strong collections and circulation statistics, and “a multitude of community programmes reflecting newly-expressed desires of citizens.” On the other hand, they argued, the library system “does NOT touch, in any way, the lives of over 2/3 of its population,” and appeared to be ignoring patrons with the “most need for its information and entertainment services” by allocating a greater proportion of funding “to those parts of the system already best provided with services—presumably reflecting voiced demand rather than need.” The authors argued that both perspectives could be considered to be “substantially true” (p. 182).

In spite of the fact that this report was produced by a group of architects, Stinson and his colleagues were adamant that “‘LIBRARY’ must be considered as a service rather than a building” (p. 13). Throughout the report, the authors emphasize service to neighbourhoods and communities, arguing that for potential users (as it is for many present users) the key issues are SENSITIVITY and RESPONSIVENESS. In all cases it is clear that there is a real need to deal with people ‘at a small scale’… ‘on the local level’… ‘in their own place’… ‘where the individual identifies the service with other neighbourhood facilities’… and we have concluded that from this point of view the basic unit for the library system should (continue to) be at the neighbourhood scale (p. 41).
The architects state that “the LIBRARY’s grasp of its traditional role […] seems to be its present strength, its ability to respond to community needs, its weakness” (p. 15). Expanding upon this “traditional role” would require significant organizational changes. For example, Stinson’s report criticizes Beckman’s study because of its failure to “include any new people or groups (non-‘librarian’)” in the decision-making process or suggest an alternative “framework for decision-making by all constituencies” (p. 11).

Stinson and his collaborators were particularly concerned with understanding the perspective and experience of the non-user. Stinson and his colleagues concluded that “the library is at present simply not offering its services in a way which is useful to many (most?) people” (p. 34). They offer several reasons for this non-use, including a lack of interest in available library materials, a lack of interest or need in library services among some members of the population (p. 35), a sense that “the library is part of an alien world,” inaccessible facilities (p. 36), and a lack of knowledge regarding library programs and services (p. 37). While the authors acknowledge the difficulty inherent in understanding the mindset and disinclination of the non-user, they also note that the library system makes very little effort to “reach a majority of them at all” (p. 39).

In addition to their exploration of the library as “service,” the authors also emphasize the importance of the library as place (or public space), noting that “[n]otwithstanding our definition of ‘LIBRARY’ as a SERVICE, we have encountered very rarely the suggestion that the library as a PLACE should disappear.” Library buildings can be understood as “intrinsically a set of useful places,” and the branch’s “increasing importance as a real community place is likely to add many new demands” (emphasis added, p. 53). The notion of the library as “a real community place” was particularly significant because “in an age increasingly mechanized and
depersonalized (from computerized supermarkets to catalogue shopping by credit card),” the library appeared to be resisting these trends by continuing to offer patrons “personal contact.” The architects contend that “the personal contact between library staff and library user” should be maintained, as this connection functioned as “a bridge between the information which the system has and the person who wants it.” They appear to be confident that this will remain the case even as “communication devices become more sophisticated” (p. 39). They note that “personal contact” could possibly “become even more important if people presently described by our non-user category begin to use the system.” Anticipating the current research on libraries and social capital, the architects observe that “it is the old, the foreign, the poor, the culturally deprived who seem to have most difficulty in coping with the mechanisms of modern life and for whom sympathetic personal assistance is most needed” (p. 40).

In addition to providing “personal contact,” the architects also note that libraries functioned as vital public spaces in communities. They cite the “overwhelming number of requests which people put forward for a communal library ‘place.’” Many of these requests “referred to the lack of real community places—non-commercial, free, all-ages, all-weather places. It seems as though our emphasis on private acquisition has left us very poor in this regard.” Libraries as physical spaces also provided patrons with opportunities to “browse,” enabling patrons “to extend our awareness beyond those things which we actually know about to associated things and on to new fields.” Library buildings themselves also serve as “reminders of the service, as symbols of the place of the institution in our society (at the heart of the city or in every small community or wherever properly placed) and as links to the past, even if they themselves are not old” (p. 40).
The architects link the changes occurring within the TPL with larger social movements, such as the urban reform movement. They describe the “many movements toward smaller scale organizational structures—a general disenchantment with the values and responsiveness of big government, big business, big industry (even big cities).” These movements are comprised of “eminent [sic] theorists as well as the people whom the ‘big’ world tends to ignore or oppress,” as illustrated by the diverse membership of “local ‘citizen movements.’” (The Information Consultants’ report to the EEAG is placed within this context.) Paradoxically, they argue, “many organizations both public and private are promoting and pursuing the advantages of more centralization and even larger enterprises.” According to the architects, “[t]raditional library thinking” embraces the latter trend, foreseeing a need for “larger systems, overlapping networks, national and regional resources, while the neighbourhood library is often condemned to wither away” (p. 43).

The architects present three alternative visions for Toronto’s future library system: a network of neighbourhood branches with medium-sized (district) libraries (“as proposed for Toronto”); several neighbourhood branches supported by one larger central library (“as Toronto was”); or, “[a] system with a high proportion of medium (district) libraries and greater distances between them—North York, Etobicoke.” They express certain reservations about the district model, such as the fear that the new locations would “bleed the nearby branches to the extent that service will be reduced and minority groups of users suffer” (p. 44).

The architects question whether the district library model’s “four-district division” would be appropriate for Toronto and how best to determine the “ideal size” of each district. Previous reports accepted the configuration of the North, East, West and Central Districts, and thereby “considerably reinforce their importance.” While the architects accept that the East District
reflects the fact that the area was a geographically “discrete section” of the city, they argue that “[b]etween the West and the Centre and the Centre and the North, there are no such recognized demarcations and division can be confusing. We looked for a rationale for the four part division, other than expediency, but we found none” (p. 45).

The architects point to a “similar lack of definition” regarding “neighbourhoods.” They acknowledge that the city “certainly has neighbourhoods—political campaigns have been waged to ‘protect’ them—and there is no doubt that many people feel that they are part of one.” However, there were more neighbourhoods than libraries in the city, and thus “many people (a majority?) certainly do not have a ‘neighbourhood’ library.” While they admit that it is difficult to prove the significance of “this psychological tie between a person and ‘his’ facilities,” they infer that this particular tie “might be quite important in connecting the non-user to the library […].” They tentatively suggest that “the traditional ½ mile walking radius” between residents’ homes and their local branches could be paired with an awareness of “physical and psychological barriers, major movement routes and recognized neighbourhood ‘centres’” to determine appropriate locations for neighbourhood branches (p. 46). They conclude that “the primary unit in the library service is likely to remain the local branch facility, and […] numbers of them should probably be grouped into effective ‘systems’ smaller than that of the whole city” (p. 47).

Throughout the report, the architects refer to the need for “responsive” library services. In addition to “sensitivity to a wider range of people,” reaching out to “potential users” requires the library to take “an ACTIVE rather than a passive role in the community” (p. 51). They also argue that the library’s “particular contribution” to community outreach involves “those activities which accord with the definition of library and for which NOBODY ELSE TAKES RESPONSIBILITY.” However, this development was viewed as an expansion, rather than a
reinvention of public librarianship: “print material will maintain its primary role and that much of new ‘outreach’ activity will be concentrated on extending its use” (p. 52).

One of the most compelling aspects of the Stinson report is the architects’ presentation of “a set of ideas about an ‘ideal’ small library.” Some of the features include location in a public place, alongside other activities, visibility, accessibility, an association “with sympathetic ‘open’ institutions,” with a suitable “relation to ‘neighbourhood’” (i.e. the branch “is perceived as ‘central’ to the area which it serves”) (pp. 58-59). Similarly, the library should “seem to be more than a building,” should endeavour to be “truly visible,” and exude a particular “character” (“generosity, quality, simplicity, openness”), with appropriate signage (pp. 60-64). The “inside” of the building should be a “casual, easily accessible, comfortable, browsable public space with casual reading material” (p. 66). Stinson and his colleagues conclude by arguing that libraries have customarily “been PRIMARILY places for staff to work and for collections to be housed.” In contrast, they envision “libraries that are explicitly places for people to be—staff and book accommodation are to be supportive of this primary role although there is no reason why this dominance should limit the latter function—indeed they give the place its special character” (p. 71).

In their assessment of the state of the TPL, the architects state that their “overall impression remains one of a traditional system with modern additives,” rather than an innovative, forward-thinking institution (p. 78). They note that “[l]ibraries have been with us for a long time and like many other institutions whose worth is difficult to assess in dollar profit (and which are associated with ‘culture’), they are often assumed to have continuing, if somewhat undefinable, value.” However, they warn, institutions such as the library “ARE being subjected to public scrutiny” and will be forced to “become more specifically accountable to
those who pay for them. That this has not so far happened may be as much to do with the power of that small segment of the population who uses them as it has to do with our society’s respect for their intrinsic worth or tradition” (p. 88)

5.3 Conclusion

“Reformists have failed to come to grips with their politics’ lack of clarity,” Caulfield argued in 1972. “It remains unclear who they are, what they stand for and what sort of city Toronto would be if they had their way” (p. 145). Fulford (1995) complains that “when we speak nostalgically of 1970s reform politics,” the main triumphs of the urban reformers “tend to be negative, the avoidance of this or that, the saving of something” (p. 73). However, Fulford presents one example of a tangible achievement of the urban reformers. He argues that St. Lawrence Neighbourhood should be considered “the tour de force of the reform era, proof that on at least one occasion the reformers could deliver on their promise of a more liveable city” (pp. 73-74).

The changes that occurred at the TPL as a result of library activism and patron participation are another such “tour de force.” The features of the library as an institution—ubiquity, propinquity, availability/neutrality, flexibility/versatility, capability/potentiality, and inclusivity—made the TPL especially responsive to the aims of the urban reformers. Thomas (1984) identifies certain thematic similarities between the “politicization of libraries” and the urban reformers’ concern with “neighbourhood preservation,” noting that “there was something for everybody” in the struggle. Both issues galvanized communities and led to citizen engagement in planning issues. However, unlike the nebulous concept of “neighbourhood preservation,” the “politicization of libraries” became a catalyst for long term organizational change at the TPL.
This chapter has discussed many of the urban reform-era policy shifts at the TPL identified by Marshall. These changes include the repudiation of the district library model, the renewed commitment to neighbourhood-based library services, the equalization of library services across the City of Toronto, a re-orientation towards meeting the needs of all patrons (and a new focus on “outreach” activities), and the inclusion and expansion of Canadian, multilingual, and popular materials within library collections (1984d, pp. 278-279). As a result of these changes, Toronto’s public library system reflects the urban reformers’ vision of a city comprised of walkable neighbourhoods with strong identities and local opportunities for learning, leisure, and engagement.

Library activism also fulfilled the initial promise of the urban reform movement through the creation of new opportunities for meaningful patron participation. Marshall (1984d) contends that patron participation would permit libraries to develop policies and services responsive to diverse community needs; create a “feedback mechanism” enabling the library to assess the impact of its policies, programs and services; increase in the number of library patrons by converting non-users; recognize and recruit advisory group and Library Board members from various community and ethnic groups; build of a robust “constituency of library supporters” and advocates; establish “a knowledgeable network of citizens” who would sustain the library’s commitment to freedom of speech (p. 279).

“Nowhere among public institutions was citizen participation as widespread or as deep-going as in the library,” Marshall (1984f) argues of the reform era (p. x). The library activism of this period was unique because it emerged from inside the TPL (through the efforts of reform-minded library Board members). In the early 1970s, Thomas (1984) notes that “it became quite common-place for the Council to appoint small neighbourhood working committees […] made
up of local citizens and politicians and serviced by city hall staff” (p. 64-65). However, she emphasizes that this scenario “was never really followed […] except in the Library system” (p. 65). Once library planning and policy issues attracted the attention of the wider public, patron participation continued to evolve within the system.

The forward-thinking Stinson Report emphasized the fact that change was inevitable, and the survival of the TPL would depend on its ability to meet public demands for greater responsiveness and accountability to both users and non-users alike (p. 88). Similarly, Marshall (1984d) argued that one of the benefits of patron participation was the creation of “a constituency of library supporters who may be called upon for help in applying pressure to City Hall, in backing budget requests, etc.” (p. 279). The following chapter will discuss the creation of new opportunities for patron participation within the context of the recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues in Toronto, and beyond.
Chapter 6
Discussion: “Deepening Democracy” at the TPL

6.1 Introduction
This chapter addresses the fourth objective outlined in sub-section 1.3 of the Introduction: 

*generating discussion regarding the creation of new opportunities for patron participation within the context of the recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues.* This chapter will explore the current popular interest and engagement in library issues in Toronto and other jurisdictions, as well as issues related to the creation of new inroads for patron participation. These issues include the “civic mission” of the public library, “community building” and “community development” in libraries, defining “participation” at the TPL, building on the legacy of urban-reform era activism to create new entry points for patron participation at the TPL, the “educative habit” of patron participation, and building a “common language” of patron participation.

6.2 Recent Resurgence in Civic Engagement on Library Issues
When I began researching the impact of the urban reform movement on the TPL in 2009, library systems in some American cities were turning to outsourcing and privatization initiatives to cope with budgetary pressures in the wake of the financial crisis. Private companies, such as Library Systems & Services (LSSI), challenged the notion that libraries should remain within the public sphere and dismissed concerns that privatization would diminish the quality of library services. “There’s this American Flag, apple pie thing about libraries,” L.S.S.I.’s CEO, Frank A. Pezzanite told *The New York Times.* “Somehow they have been put in the category of a sacred organization.” Pezzanite was dismissive of the library profession as a whole:
A lot of libraries are atrocious. [...] Their policies are all about job security. That’s why the profession is nervous about us. You can go to a library for 35 years and never have to do anything and then have your retirement. We’re not running our company that way. You come to us, you have to work (quoted in Streitfeld, 2010).

In spite of librarians’ self-explanatory distaste for the rhetoric of privatization, a number of cash-strapped American library systems have been forced to privatize or engage in other unpalatable cost-cutting measures. As Marilyn Johnson (2010) notes, “The public library is an increasingly threatened institution. In one year, the trickle of public libraries in financial straits has turned into a cascade: in cities like Boston, Dallas, New York, Las Vegas, Charlotte, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, and Newark; in the states of Illinois, Ohio, Florida, and New Jersey” (p. 260).

Public library systems in the U.K. have faced similar financial challenges. In response to widespread cuts to library funding, a number of prominent figures have defended the notion of the library as a public good and as a sound social investment. Novelist Zadie Smith (2012) notes that public libraries offer communities one vital service that has no private sector equivalent: “an indoor public space in which you do not have to buy anything in order to stay” (emphasis added, n.p.). Public libraries exist within the public sphere for a reason:

It would seem the most obvious thing in the world to say that the reason why the market is not an efficient solution to libraries is because the market has no use for a library. But it seems we need, right now, to keep re-stating the obvious. There aren’t many institutions left that fit so precisely Keynes’ definition of things that no one else but the state is willing to take on. Nor can the experience of library life be recreated online. It’s not just a matter of free books. A library is a different kind of social reality (of the three dimensional kind), which by its very existence teaches a system of values beyond the fiscal (emphasis added, n.p.).

In response to those who argue that public libraries are a luxury (and therefore must be sacrificed into order to adequately fund essential public services such as education and healthcare), Smith argues, “If the losses of private companies are to be socialized within already struggling communities the very least we can do is listen to people when they try to tell us where in the
hierarchy of their needs things like public space, access to culture, and preservation of environment lie” (emphasis added, n.p.).

In response to the proposed closure of libraries in Oxfordshire, author Philip Pullman (2011) criticizes the notion that “Big Society”-type initiatives will resolve the financial issues facing public libraries. He excoriates county council leader Keith Mitchell for his proposal that libraries could remain open with the support of volunteers:

What patronising nonsense. Does he think the job of a librarian is so simple, so empty of content, that anyone can step up and do it for a thank-you and a cup of tea? Does he think that all a librarian does is to tidy the shelves? And who are these volunteers? Who are these people whose lives are so empty, whose time spreads out in front of them like the limitless steppes of central Asia, who have no families to look after, no jobs to do, no responsibilities of any sort, and yet are so wealthy that they can commit hours of their time every week to working for nothing? Who are these volunteers? Do you know anyone who could volunteer their time in this way? (n.p.).

He is equally contemptuous of the suggestion that “[p]eople who want to save their library […] are going to be ‘allowed to bid’ for some money from a central pot” (n.p.). Pullman argues that this type of “bidding culture” has introduced “the worst excesses of market fundamentalism into the one arena that used to be safe from them, the one part of our public and social life that used to be free of the commercial pressure to win or to lose, to survive or to die, which is the very essence of the religion of the market” (n.p.). While market-driven solutions can be made to sound more palatable with “Big Society” rhetoric, this does not change the fact that the market is fundamentally incompatible with “enterprises that don’t make a profit” such as libraries “because they’re not set up to do that but to do something different” (n.p.).

When I embarked on this research in 2009, the TPL appeared to be firmly entrenched in the public realm. I intended to explore how urban reform-era library activism had transformed the TPL into an adequately-funded, robust library system firmly embedded within the fabric of city life in Toronto. Toronto’s municipal election in the fall of 2010 marked a palpable change in
the tenor of city politics. Mayor Rob Ford’s campaign promises to “Stop the Gravy Train” and restore “Respect for Taxpayers” resonated with voters, and significant cuts to city services loomed on the horizon.

In December 2010, in response to a proposed $2.2 million cut to the City’s library budget, the TPL suggested that the Board consider closing the Urban Affairs Library at Metro Hall, a branch frequented by researchers as well as local condominium residents who used it as a pick-up location for library materials. After hearing presentations from members of the public (including former Mayor John Sewell) and reviewing correspondence in opposition to the proposal, the Board ultimately rejected the TPL’s recommendation, making other budgetary adjustments in order to keep the Urban Affairs branch open (Keung, 2011). Unfortunately, this victory proved to be short-lived. City Council voted with the mayor to close the Urban Affairs Library, and more potential service cuts loomed on the horizon.27

In February 2011, Mayor Ford announced his intention to contract out garbage collection in the GTA. “We're going to be outsourcing everything that is not nailed down,” Councillor Doug Ford, the Mayor’s brother and advisor declared (quoted in Levy, 2011). In its City of Toronto Core Services Review, KPMG (2011) suggested that the City could examine cutting hours and library programs, as well as “[c]onsider rationalizing the footprint of libraries to reduce service levels, closing some branches” (p. 80). The Toronto Public Library Workers

27 In September 2011, the TPL Board underwent a significant change in direction with the appointment of eight new citizen members. As Kupferman (2011, September 30) notes, “[t]he new board is composed primarily of people with government and business credentials, including two former provincial Liberal operatives and a lobbyist who used to work as a management consultant at KPMG. Also: a retired optometrist” (n.p.). Many library supporters viewed these appointments as an attempt by the Mayor and his supporters to exert a greater degree of control over the Board. As Adam Chaleff-Fruedenthaler (former vice-chair of the Board) argued, “[r]efusing to reappoint a board that advocated strongly to sustain and improve Toronto’s library system speaks volumes about the Ford administration’s attitude toward libraries” (quoted in Kupferman, n.p.).
Union (TPLWU Local 4948), led by the Union’s president, Maureen O’Reilly, launched a high-profile campaign and online petition (at OurPublicLibrary.to) to draw public attention to the proposed branch closures and cuts to library services. Virtually overnight, it seemed, the fate of the TPL became a hot-button issue in the media.

In spite of the massive public outcry against the proposed cuts, the Mayor and his supporters on City Council appeared to be openly hostile to the library’s supporters. The accessibility and high visibility of the TPL had always been a point of pride for the organization; in the city’s new political climate, it was becoming a political liability. In a now infamous radio interview in July, 2011, Councillor Doug Ford stated (inaccurately) that “[w]e have more libraries per person than any other city in the world. I’ve got more libraries in my area than I have Tim Hortons” (quoted in Our Public Library, July 19, 2011). Margaret Atwood urged her Twitter followers to sign the online petition. “Twin Fordmayor seems to think those who eat Timbits (like me) don’t read, can’t count, & are stupid eh?” she tweeted. Councillor Ford responded by pleading ignorance: “I don’t even know her. If she walked by me, I wouldn’t have a clue who she is.” He added, “She’s not down here, she’s not dealing with the problem. Tell her to go run in the next election and get democratically elected. And we’d be more than happy to sit down and listen to Margaret Atwood” (quoted in Moloney, July 6, 2011).

In response, Atwood noted that “[t]he most staggering thing about (Ford’s) statement is that it implies that only councillors (not voters, not taxpayers, not citizens) are allowed to voice any opinions” (quoted in Peat, August 2, 2011). Many Toronto residents were galvanized by Councillor Ford’s remarks, which became a running joke at the nearly 24-hour long Executive

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28 “According to library union president Maureen O’Reilly, Etobicoke has 13 library branches and 39 Tim Hortons. Three library branches are in areas Ford represents, Ward 2, Etobicoke North, while the Tim Hortons website shows seven of their shops in the ward” (Moloney, July 20, 2011).
Committee Meeting on July 28, 2011. As deputants argued against cuts to City of Toronto services, Margaret Atwood references were in abundance. One of the most popular and widely reported deputations was made by Mary Trapani Hynes, who introduced herself by saying, “I’m a senior, live in North York and have some modest proposals.”

First, the library. You’ve made a good start with closing the Metro branch. Don’t stop there. You should get rid of the entire public library system. As you can see from the thousands of petitions and emails complaining about proposed service cuts, far too many people use the library to improve literacy and to learn about government and politics. You would save millions. [...] Anyone who doesn’t want to live in a city without public transit or public libraries or social services, anyone who can’t manage without buses or streetcars or whose health deteriorates with increased auto pollution can just leave. Those residents that remain in Toronto will be those able to look after their own needs and there will be less need for government services. More money saved. And—win, win—your government can give them a rebate on their property taxes from the savings (quoted in Braganza, 2011).

As the room exploded into laughter and applause, Councillor Adam Vaughn asked, “That was very creative writing. Are you Margaret Atwood?” (quoted in Doolittle, July 29, 2011). 29

Several other deputants voiced their support for the library that day. At the conclusion of Maureen O’Reilly’s deputation, the members of the public in attendance began to cheer and chant, “Save our libraries!” Yet another moving deputation came from fourteen-year-old Anika Tabovaradan, who broke down in tears during her passionate defense of the TPL at 2:00 a.m. “I’m no taxpayer, but when I get to use the computers in the library and do my homework, I’ll be able to get a good job someday ... and when the day comes to pay taxes, I’ll be glad that you supported people paying the extra taxes to keep the system going,” she said (quoted in Poisson, July 30, 2011). Tabovaradan’s deputation was widely reported in the local media, and brought

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29 Hynes’ full deputation can be viewed online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tyKVpaqrI&feature=related (included in list of references under Klopez27 [2011, July 28]).

30 O’Reilly’s full deputation can be viewed online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p--OdJ8jJJo&feature=related (included in list of references under UnionStayshyn [2011, July 30]).
attention to the many children and youth who depend on the TPL’s services. As writer Alan Bennett (2011) has argued in his own defense of local public libraries in the U.K., “For a child a library needs to be round the corner. And if we lose local libraries it is children who will suffer” (n.p.).

Mayor Ford and his supporters on City Council appeared to view the TPL’s expansive branch system as a prime example of wasteful spending and an easy target for timely budget cuts. “Why do we need another little library in the middle of nowhere that no one uses?” Councillor Ford complained. “My constituents, it wouldn’t bother them because you have another library two miles one way and two miles the other way” (quoted in Maloney, July 26, 2011). Based on feedback from their constituents, three of the Mayor’s allies on City Council, publicly opposed the proposed branch closures. Prior to the Executive Committee Meeting on September 19, 2011, Ford ally Councillor Michael Thompson announced that KPMG’s recommendation to close branches would not be discussed at the meeting. Instead, the committee would discuss reducing branch hours as a cost-cutting measure (CBC News, September 19, 2011).

While the Mayor and his supporters were forced to acknowledge that Toronto residents would not accept library closures, library advocates remained wary of the proposed 10% cut to

31Tabovaradan’s full deputation can be viewed online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WE_ehrJec&feature=related (included in list of references under UnionStayshyn [2011, July 29]).

32Councillor James Pasternak (Ward 10, York Centre) and Councillor Karen Stintz (Ward 16, Eglinton-Lawrence) have opposed library closures. Stintz: “My kids have also benefited from the services of the libraries in the community. They each have library cards and love the library. […] I value the Toronto Public Library and can assure my constituents that these are not the type of cuts I support” (quoted in Rider, July 27, 2011). Similarly, Councillor Frances Nunziata (Ward 11, York-South Weston) stated that “I don’t think there’s a will on council to close libraries. […] I think we have to make better use of what we have… these are great facilities for programming” (quoted in Doolittle, August 3, 2011).
the TPL’s budget looming on the horizon (Our Public Library, September 20, 2011). Many wondered how the TPL would reach this budget target without closing branches or cutting hours. Councillor Michael Del Grande, Chair of the City’s Budget Committee, fixated on the library’s purchase of feature films. He also questioned the rationale for providing multilingual library materials to library patrons, stating that “[a]n argument can be made that this is what makes the city great, but I would dare say our common language is English, we’re spending tons of money for ESL, should we not have a discussion of how much of the library budget should go for non-English resources?” (quoted in CBC, November 30, 2011). In an open letter to Del Grande, O’Reilly (2011) echoed the sentiments of many library patrons:

You will not be able to solve the city’s budget woes off of the backs of the library budget, and you will not, [sic] be able to do it by limiting the number of DVDs we purchase, and, especially those in other languages. Torontonians who speak Chinese, Hindi, Tamil, Russian, Urdu, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Spanish, Gujarati and Polish deserve library materials. (that’s the top ten (10) list of circulating library materials in other languages by the way). *Do their tax dollars not count as much as yours?* (original emphasis, n.p.).

Library supporters were equally resistant to suggested cuts to library programs and services such as the Bookmobile service and the TPL’s Adult Literacy Program.

Councillor Ford and the Mayor’s allies on City Council appeared to be unprepared for the strong public reaction to their dismissive remarks about the value of the TPL. For many patrons, their comments seemed to indicate an alarming level of ignorance regarding the actual functions of public libraries, as well as an appalling lack of respect for Toronto residents as citizens and as taxpayers. The TPL did not, by any means, emerge unscathed from the 2012 budget process. However, sustained public interest in and support for libraries prevented many of the deepest cuts from moving forward (Our Public Library, January 18, 2012). Had Toronto residents expressed indifference regarding the fate of their public library system, the outcome would have been quite different. In any case, the future of the TPL remains somewhat uncertain. Like many
public library systems, the TPL will inevitably face the same kinds of financial pressures in the near future.

As I watched these events unfold, my research into the urban reform movement and its impact on the TPL in the 1970s began to take on a new significance. Marshall (1984d) believed that community involvement in library planning and policymaking had helped to create a “constituency of library supporters” who would be willing to advocate for the TPL and ensure its continued existence and growth (p. 279). As the citizens of Toronto rallied in opposition to the potential cuts to libraries, I understood that I was watching Marshall’s “constituency of library supporters” in action. In many ways, this appears to be an ideal time to explore the legacy of Toronto’s urban reform movement and its impact on the TPL.

“It’s only recently that I had any idea that how a person felt about libraries—not schools or hospitals, libraries—could even represent an ideological split,” Smith (2012) argues. “I thought a library was one of the few sites where the urge to conserve and the desire to improve—twin poles of our political mind—were easily and naturally united” (n.p.). Funding for public libraries has recently become a politicized issue in many cities. However, public libraries provide accessible and inclusive library services to a broad cross-section of the population. By building on their strong ties to the communities they serve, public libraries can cultivate a diverse “constituency of library supporters” to champion their cause in times of crisis, and play a role in strengthening democracy and civic engagement at the local level.

6.3 Discussion

The role of the public library in civic life has always been open to interpretation. Shaped by the values and ideas of the Progressive Era, the public library was a product of the competing visions of philanthropists, governments, librarians and patrons. For captains of industry such as Andrew
Carnegie, public libraries were considered to be a bulwark against popular dissent and insurrection. Education through libraries, he believed, would help the working-class patron to “recognize his just rights and at the same time understand his employer’s problems; he would learn that evolution, not revolution, was the salvation of his class” (Ditzion, 1947, p. 155). The socialist Eugene Debs opposed Carnegie’s library philanthropy, and imagined public libraries in glorious abundance when Capitalism is abolished and workingmen are no longer robbed by the philanthropic pirates of the Carnegie class…. Then the library will be, as it should be, a noble temple dedicated to culture and symbolizing the virtues of the people (quoted in Ditzion, 1947, p. 163).

Debates such as these over the ideological basis of the public library system have often overshadowed the agency of library patrons. Previous chapters have explored how patrons have always determined the role and function of libraries in their communities by claiming them as their own, transforming instruments of assimilation and social control into powerful tools for self-education and resistance.

Public libraries are deeply entwined with notions of democracy and human rights. Ditzion’s classic history of the American public library system, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture* (1947), opens with the following epigraph from Franklin D. Roosevelt:

Libraries are directly and immediately involved in the conflict which divides our world, and for two reasons; first, because they are essential to the functioning of a democratic society; second, because the contemporary conflict touches the integrity of scholarship, the freedom of the mind, and even the survival of culture, and libraries are the great tools of scholarship, the great repositories of culture, and the great symbols of the freedom of the mind (n.p.).

Libraries have retained and expanded their commitment to democracy and human rights.

Toronto’s public libraries are a welcoming and inclusive presence in many communities, and are

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33 Carnegie’s philanthropy was also religiously motivated. In *The Gospel of Wealth* (1900), he argued that “[t]he gospel of wealth but echoes Christ's words. It calls upon the millionaire to sell all that he hath and give it in the highest and best form to the poor by administering his estate himself for the good of his fellows, before he is called upon to lie down and rest upon the bosom of Mother Earth” (p. 43).
frequently “the first civic institutions” new Canadians encounter upon arrival (Pyper, 2009). As highly visible and welcoming public institutions, they “evoke consistent, extraordinary public trust among diverse adult users” (Griffiths and King, 2008, p. 3). Perhaps more than any other publicly-funded institution, the library measures its success in terms of its ability to provide services to the entire community.

This chapter will explore the possibility of “deepening democracy” through patron participation in library planning and governance. According to Gaventa (2006), “deepening democracy” refers to “the political project of developing and sustaining more substantive and empowered citizen participation in the political process than what is normally found in liberal representative democracy alone” (p. 7). New perspectives on participatory democracy and public libraries will be drawn from literature on the “civic mission” of libraries and “civic librarianship” (Willingham, 2008; McCabe, 2001), “community building” and “community development” public librarianship and the “needs-based library service” model (De la Peña McCook, 2000; Working Together Project, 2008; Pateman and Vincent, 2010), as well as Marshall’s observations related to reform-era “citizen participation” at the TPL.

Public libraries have the capacity to build on their strong relationships with patrons and communities to “deepen democracy” at the local level. In Chapter 2 (Issues of Agency and Power in Public Library History and the Role of Public Libraries in Civic Life), the role of public libraries in civic life was examined using the five unique features of libraries outlined by Marshall (1984d) (ubiquity; propinquity; availability/neutrality; flexibility/versatility; and capability/potentiality), along with a sixth feature, inclusivity (pp. 297-301). Building on this material, this chapter will explore how specific features of the public library—including its strong foothold in the community, its historical affiliation with democracy and human rights, its
support for various forms of lifelong learning, its inclusive orientation, its connection with
children and youth, and its imaginative dimension—as platforms for patron participation. The
educative dimension of patron participation will also be discussed.

The “Civic Mission” of the Public Library

Throughout their history, North America’s libraries have maintained strong symbolic ties to
notions of democracy, free speech, human rights, citizenship, and civic life. Some public
librarians are building on these ties to redefine the role of the public library in the twenty-first
century. Willingham (2008) argues that “at a time when […] the public is frustrated with politics,
problems seem insurmountable, and there is little trust in many of our public institutions,” public
libraries are in a unique position to “use their unique positions of trust and credibility to solve
community problems.” She argues that libraries have started “reclaiming and expanding their
civic mission” by

pursuing an active role in community building—directly engaging in partnerships with others to
solve community problems. They are helping constituents learn about complex public issues and
practice deliberative democracy, and are listening deeply to members of their community and
developing strategies to help them work together on divisive issues. They are civic agents
creating civic agency.

According to Willingham, addressing this “civic mission” necessitates “a new way of thinking
about how libraries contribute public value, the distinct competencies they can contribute to their
community, and how they may be uniquely positioned to respond to a community’s social and
political needs” (p. 99).

Willingham envisions “communities of relationships between disparate groups formed
for the purpose of solving community problems brought together by the library.”

These communities of relationship would not stifle debate and differences; rather they would be
spaces where people could develop their civic efficacy and find connective threads that are the
tapestry of the community. Communities of relationships help people see how they as
individuals, members of a community or profession, or actors within the system, can participate in the difficult job of community problem-solving (p. 105).

These activities would also enable participants to understand “how their interests are intertwined and why they should care about a child across town without health care or a youth at risk of dropping out, or a single mother whose food stamps do not last through the month” (p. 106).

While these goals are admirable, the author does identify concrete strategies that libraries can use to enhance their civic engagement activities. Willingham acknowledges the absence of scholarship in this area, as well as the lack of “a common language for talking about this emerging role for the library as a player in the community” (p. 108).

McCabe’s (2001) definition of “civic librarianship” is based on a similar premise. “Civic librarianship,” he argues, “seeks to strengthen communities through developmental strategies that renew the public library’s mission of education for a democratic society” (p. 80). His proposed “reforms” of civic librarianship include items such as “develop[ing] the public library as a center of the community” and creating “strategies to build community through public library service” (p. 79). He argues that libraries can engage in community building by being places of community identity, community dialogue, community collaboration, and community evaluation. […] Civic dialogue can be encouraged by involving the library in activities that promote the institution as a public forum as well as a place for informal social interaction. Sponsoring lectures and discussions on public issues will promote civic dialogue as will simply providing meeting space for community groups. Social interaction can be encouraged through providing coffee and lounge areas of adequate size to meet this need (p. 81).

Fostering civic dialogue is a worthy goal; however, as with Willingham’s “civic agent” concept, McCabe’s model fails to provide comprehensive, concrete strategies to further the “civic librarianship” agenda. While libraries may facilitate some “social interaction” within the library by creating “coffee and lounge areas,” presenting this as a stand-alone program seems unrealistic.
McCabe’s emphasis on “the public library’s historical mission of education for a democratic society” poses other problems (p. 79). He views the period between 1852 and 1972 as being marked by “a series of idealistic efforts to fulfill the public library’s mission of education for a democratic society.” After this period, he argues, libraries relinquished their “social mission” in favour of “libertarian mission of access to information for individuals.” He credits the influence of the “expressive individualism of the Left” as well as the “utilitarian individualism of the Right” with the demise of this “social mission.” However, McCabe’s attempt at political impartiality and a consensus-building, “communitarian” approach to public librarianship contains its own bias. In his discussion of the work of “revisionist library historians” such as Michael Harris and Dee Garrison, he critiques their inability to “accept the possibility than an educated elite might have altruistic motives or that the sharing of the values of the elite might have a positive effect on society. Any such sharing is viewed as an oppressive and authoritarian means of indoctrination” (p. 33).

McCabe’s aversion to a “revisionist” approach to library history reflects a discomfort with issues of power in public librarianship. While the library philanthropy and leadership of the “educated elite” did lead to the creation of an accessible and expansive public library system in the United States, the “values” embedded in this system could indeed be “oppressive” and alienating to certain groups of patrons. Public libraries were not inherently virtuous, democratic, or forward-thinking public institutions. Battles (2009) describes the historical barriers to African-American access to public libraries, and the long struggle to desegregate libraries in the American South. Bundy and Stielow (1987) describe how social movements of the 1960s—including the antiwar movement, the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, and the gay liberation movement, and the student movement—led many librarians to critically examine the
middle-class bias inherent in library services to communities. McCabe’s call to “renew the public library’s mission of education for a democratic society” ignores the injustices and inequalities that undermined this mission. Creating an accessible and inclusive public library is an ongoing political project that has always involved power and conflict.

Another limitation of McCabe’s approach is the emphasis on the role of library leadership. The “reforms of civic librarianship” include “restor[ing] the confidence of public librarians and trustees” and “strengthen[ing] the political efforts of public librarians and trustees” (p. 80). Patron participation in library planning and governance is not presented as a component of this “community building” agenda. The important role that patrons play in shaping library programs and services is overlooked.

Willington and McCabe attempt to describe an expanded role for public libraries in the United States as “agents” of civic life by emphasizing the library’s historic ties to notions of democracy. While these symbolic ties can enrich the theory and practice of public librarianship, overstating their significance can obscure pertinent issues of power and inequality. How can libraries become more accessible and inclusive institutions without addressing these issues? How are public libraries especially equipped to foster “civic dialogue” in communities if this is not a central component of their own organizational culture? Willingham argues that libraries should be more than “passive sources of information or partners on short-term projects,” and should play an important role in “tackling pervasive social problems” (p. 99). The following section will explore how groups such as the Working Together Project have attempted to address “pervasive social problems” by inviting communities to participate in library planning and governance.
“Community Building” and “Community Development” Public Librarianship, and the “Needs-Based Library Service” Model

De la Peña McCook (2000) also emphasizes the “community building” role of American public libraries. However, she is less concerned with resurrecting the public library’s historical “civic mission,” emphasizing instead the “Values of Librarians Who Build Community.” These values include “Community Involvement,” “Awareness of Community Issues,” and “Connection as a Responsibility” (p. 68). De la Peña McCook’s approach to “community building” is drawn from other contemporary “efforts to reinvigorate citizens of the United States with a sense of civic commitment—a new citizenship. This citizenship is the capacity developed by real-world public work that creates both a stake and standing in society through contribution.” She cites the example of The New Citizenship Project (1993), developed by the Center for Democracy and Citizenship of the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. The “partnership between citizens and government based on active citizenship” envisioned by the project “creates an enlarged perspective in which the individual’s sphere of concern becomes transnational” (p. 12).

De la Peña McCook presents examples of how library leaders can effectively engage in “community building” by becoming active members of the community. According to De la Peña McCook,

This means attending civic association meetings, community development corporation meetings, civic networking meetings, comprehensive community collaborative meetings, visioning focus group meetings, town meetings, or neighbourhood council meetings. Comprehensive community initiatives take many forms. The librarian who wants to be a community builder must have an astute sense of the community’s direction and must be a full participant in plans to achieve its goals.

De la Peña McCook’s notion of “community building” within a public library is unique in that it emphasizes understanding and meeting the needs of communities, rather than furthering the agenda of the public library in the community. In any community involvement scenario, she argues, “The librarian should participate as a community member first and as a librarian second”
This approach also acknowledges the importance of patron participation. Prior to embarking on “independent vision projects,” public libraries must reflect on “the tenets of community participation and organic planning […]” (p. 33).

The Canadian librarians involved in the Working Together Project (2008) also emphasize the importance of becoming involved in the community, asserting that “[p]ublic libraries have a civic responsibility to serve all community members” (emphasis added, Working Together Project, 2008, p. 23). According to DeFaveri (2005), the National Coordinator of the Working Together Project, many public libraries uphold a “culture of comfort” at the expense of providing programs and services “socially excluded people.” This “culture of comfort” is perpetuated when libraries only consult patrons who see the library as “reflecting the values and social structures that they are comfortable with.” DeFaveri argues that this practice creates a “self-reinforcing loop,” enabling the library to “mask exclusionary practices by claiming that we respond to community feedback, and that we serve all the people who want to be served” (p. 259).

Campbell (2005) argues that public libraries must address issues of power and how they are reflected in library programs and services because “[t]hose who are socially excluded have nowhere else to go. The library could be an important resource in their life” (p. 272). However, the Working Together Project acknowledges that “[f]eeling unwelcome and alienated from the library is not limited to society’s more marginalized groups. […] Even relatively well-off working class people may not have a tradition of library use and so many feel that their lives, their values, and their concerns are not reflected in the library” (Working Together Project, 2008, p. 21).

The Working Together Project makes a distinction between “working in the community” (“outreach”) and “working with the community” (“community development”). In the outreach
approach, “it is generally the library that defines what the service is, how it is provided and whether it is a success […]” (Campbell, 2005, p. 272). In contrast, “community development in a library context” entails the application and evolution of philosophies and techniques that community developers use to work with communities within the context of library service planning. In particular, we use it within the context of working directly with socially excluded people in our communities to plan services (p. 15).

The Working Together Project cites examples of “public library service to socially excluded communities” at Vancouver’s Carnegie Centre, the Parkdale branch of the Toronto Public Library, and Halifax’s North branch (p. 21).

The Working Together Project presents approaches to library planning and governance along a “Public Involvement Continuum” (Figure 1, p. 16). This continuum bears some similarity to Arnstein’s “Ladder of Citizen Participation” (Figure 2, p. 162). At one end of the spectrum, “the Library plans services and informs the public of the services.” At the other end of the spectrum, the “partnering/collaborating” approach involves initiatives such as “collaborative service development” and “community-led service planning.” According to the Working Together Project, “the Community-Led Service Planning Model […] is what works when trying to engage socially excluded community members in library services.”

It is the model which allows us to truly see the library through the community’s eyes, allows the library to learn from the community’s experiences and perspectives, and allows the library to engage them in decision making and planning. It demonstrates to socially excluded community members that we trust them, believe in them, and value them as highly as other users. This model will allow public libraries to evolve into truly inclusive social institutions (Working Together Project, 2008, p. 16).

They also argue that the “community-led service planning” model creates opportunities for communities to become involved in library planning and governance by “working collaboratively with the library to develop policy recommendations.”
Pateman and Vincent (2010) cite the Working Together Project in their research on libraries and “social justice” in the U.K. The authors note that the “dominant paradigm” within public librarianship is “excellence, which one dictionary defines as ‘to be better than’ and ‘cleverness’” rather than “equity,” defined as “‘acting fairly and justly’ and ‘the principle of fair-mindedness and impartial unprejudiced judgement’” (Pateman and Vincent, 2010, p. 16). A commitment to equity informs what Pateman and Vincent (2010) describe as a “needs-based library service” (p. 118). This approach to public librarianship “involves and engages the whole of the local community in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of library services” (p. 119). Pateman and Vincent (2010) depart from the typically neutral language of public librarianship in their assertion that the “needs-based library service” is not a new concept. It is part of a historical tradition and continuum which stared in the mid-nineteenth century. Public libraries were founded to educate the poor and disadvantaged. They were not established for the rich or the middle class. They were not intended to be neutral, universal or open to all. They were targeted, focused and pro-poor. They were an early form of positive action (not discrimination). Developing a needs-based library service is a return to this tradition and these values of self-help and self-improvement for those who need us the most but use us the least (p. 119).

Pateman and Vincent’s (2010) radical interpretation of this “historical tradition” compels public libraries to focus their efforts on engaging socially excluded populations.

The “needs-based library service” model ostensibly offers library patrons “‘voice and choice’” by granting them “more power and control over the library services they use, to play an active role in service design and delivery, and to express their views and preferences” (p. 139). This definition of patron participation has a “community” component (“community groups are enabled to prioritise the mix of library services in their neighbourhoods through a local user forum”) as well as an “individual” component (“users are able to engage directly with their local library to tailor the service to fit their circumstances”). According to Pateman and Vincent
(2010), “Both avenues—the community and the individual—are key to more responsive library services and increased citizen satisfaction in their locality” (emphasis added, p. 139).

**Defining “participation” at the TPL**

Today, the TPL claims to value a “participatory” approach to public librarianship that is “inclusive and involving in decision-making” (TPL, “Our Vision, Mission and Values). In order to assess this claim, this section will examine how the TPL defines “participation” in its Annual Reports and two Strategic Plans (2004-2007; 2008-2011). While these documents do not provide a complete understanding of the ways that Torontonians contribute to their library system, they do provide an overview of the TPL’s current practices, policies, and priorities. They also provide a foundation for a discussion of participatory democracy in a public library context.

In its 2004-2007 Strategic Plan, the TPL “recognizes that good governance includes a commitment to the principles of participation, responsiveness, transparency, equity, inclusiveness and accountability.” In this vein, the library claims that it will “develop policies and practices that encourage and facilitate civic engagement and public participation” (p. 39). Similarly, in the 2008-2011 Strategic Plan, the TPL aims to “encourage participation in city life” and “promote greater participation in library programs and services.” The TPL plans to achieve these goals through a variety of initiatives, including “resources and programs to engage and encourage discussion in civic and social issues important to the city and our neighbourhoods” (2008b, p. 7).

Have these goals created new opportunities for participation in library planning and governance? What are the existing avenues for patron participation within the TPL? Many patrons become involved with the library in a volunteer capacity, as the TPL relies on a large body of volunteers to support many of its programs (such as its tutoring programs). Various
Friends of the Library groups run fundraising activities benefitting specific collections (such as the Osborne, Merrill, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle collections), as well as other library services. In terms of participation in planning and policymaking, community members can be appointed to serve on the TPL Board. Institutional documents have been shaped, to some degree, by community involvement. For example, the 2004-2007 Strategic Plan was based on community input received through “public meetings,” “stakeholder roundtables,” and “focus groups” (p. 7-8). However, there appear to be no plans to develop platforms for extensive patron participation within the TPL in the future. Overall, opportunities for patrons to engage in a sustained dialogue with the library administration over planning and policy issues—at the branch and system wide-levels—appear to be quite limited.

There is one notable exception to this trend. The TPL does appear to acknowledge that youth participation and leadership in library planning should continue to be cultivated. According to the 2005 Annual Report, 1,255 of the 2,200 library volunteers were youth (p. 14). In the 2007 Annual Report, the TPL states that “Youth are not just customers at Toronto Public Library, they are our partners” (p. 4). Youth Advisory Groups (YAG) located at local branches give young patrons the opportunity to become involved in the development of programs and services for other youth. While there is a strong social element to the YAG activities, members are considered to be volunteers and can attain their high school community service hours by participating. According to the 2007 Annual Report, the YAGs

[…] meet regularly at the library to provide input on collections, programs and services for youth. With staff guidance, members shape the agenda and lead discussions. Over the years, these groups have contributed immensely to making their branches welcoming destinations for their peers. They keep the library in touch with issues affecting youth and provide the perspective necessary to address these issues (TPL, 2007, p. 4).

There is currently a YAG presence at 40 branches across the city.
Why do these opportunities exist for youth, but not for other groups of users, such as children, seniors, women, and newcomers to Canada? Is there a place for sustained adult participation within the TPL beyond the existing volunteer and fundraising programs? In order to understand the TPL’s approach to building a “participatory” institution, it is necessary to explore how “participation” is used in a public library context. In Newman’s (2008) report for the Ontario Ministry of Culture on the future of public libraries, she argues that “[i]t is hard to name a public institution that has retained such high rates of participation and esteem amid volatility and change” (p. 2). Does this term refer to the patrons’ use of library resources, programs and services, or ongoing engagement and collaboration with libraries in planning and policymaking? Does mere use of the library constitute participation? Do libraries believe that greater community involvement is feasible—or desirable?

The term “participation” frequently appears in library and information science literature, but the meaning and implications of this term are often ambiguous. There is a general sense within public librarianship that libraries should be responsive to the needs of their communities, but there are no clear guidelines as to how this should be achieved. According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions and UNESCO (2001), “[p]olicy documents should be made available to the public and, where possible, steps should be taken to involve local citizens in the development of the public library.” There is an expectation that public librarians should be “fully accountable both to their governing bodies and local citizens for their actions by providing reports, holding public meetings and through consultation.” While the library is recognized as the final authority on library policies, IFLA/UNESCO does acknowledge that “ways should be sought to involve the local citizens who are the actual or potential library users” (p. 20).
What strategies can libraries use to enhance “user participation”? IFLA recommends that public libraries and communities collaborate on a “library charter” that “establishes a ‘contract’ between the public library and the users” (p. 20). Other suggestions include using surveys, complaints, and “users’ reactions” to assess programs and services, “ensuring the input received from users is considered” in planning and policymaking, informing patrons “about the effects of their input on service development,” and “providing suggestion boxes and a complaints and commendations procedure” (p. 36). These examples of “user participation” illustrate a reticence on the part of libraries to fully engage patrons in decision-making processes related to library planning and governance.

Based on the Working Together Project’s “Public Involvement Continuum” (Figure 1, p. 162), the TPL’s approach to public involvement—with the notable exception of the advisory activities of the YAGs—is generally limited to “getting information” through consultation-type activities. (Classified according to Arnstein’s scheme, these activities embody “degrees of tokenism” rather than participation.) According to the continuum, full public involvement is classified as “partnering/collaborating.” This entails initiatives such as “collaborative service development” and “community-led service planning.”

Building on the Legacy of Urban Reform-Era Library Activism to Create New Entry Points for Patron Participation at the TPL

As a result of reform-era library activism and patron participation, Marshall (1984d) argued, “the directions of policy for the Toronto Public Library have been set—irrevocably—for the foreseeable future” (p. 278). As outlined in the previous chapter, these “policy directions” included the repudiation of the district library model, the renewed commitment to neighbourhood-based library services, the equalization of library services across the City of Toronto, a re-orientation towards meeting the needs of all patrons (and a new focus on
“outreach” activities), expanding the breadth of multilingual materials, programs and services, and the inclusion of Canadian and popular materials within library collections (pp. 278-279).

In addition to shaping several key “policy directions” at the TPL, Marshall (1984d) also noted six benefits of participatory approaches to library planning and policymaking: creating library policies and services responsive to “neighbourhood, ethnic and specialized needs, interests and aspirations”; creating a “feedback mechanism” that enabled the library to assess how policies, programs and services were being received by the community; increasing the number of library patrons by converting non-users; recognizing, supporting and recruiting leaders from community and ethnic groups to participate in advisory groups and serve on the Library Board; creating a robust “constituency of library supporters” and advocates; and building “a knowledgeable network of citizens” who would uphold the library’s commitment to freedom of speech (p. 279).

In his assessment of patron participation during the reform period, Marshall (1984d) uses Arnstein’s “Ladder of Citizen Participation” with some reservations. He observes that “at different times citizens have found themselves on different rungs of the ladder. For the most part, the process has centered on the middle range of the scale, employing the ‘informing’ and ‘consultation’ levels of participation” (p. 281). However, he argues, “to reach this ‘first degree of

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34 Marshall (1984d) outlines the “limitations” of Arnstein’s model: “(a) a process as complex as that of the Toronto Public Libraries will never appear at any one place on the scale; at different times it may move up or down with surprising facility; (b) different aspects of the process, whether functionally or geographically differentiated, may at one and the same time (as well as different times) be at quite different places on the scale; (c) the scale, represented as a ladder, tends to impute too much significance to the vertical dimension, implying that the process must be ‘judged’ or valued by its upward direction; a process is superior or inferior to the extent that it falls, respectively, into the top or bottom ‘rungs’ of the ladder. It is true, of course, that the fullest degree of citizen control is a logical and desirable end result of all citizen participation. But it is equally true that, for a given process at a given time and in a given place, the higher rungs of the ladder may be either impossible or inappropriate (or both)” (p. 280).
citizen power,’ if only on a temporary basis for specific planning purposes, is a major achievement.” For Marshall, The uppermost rungs (“delegated power” and full “citizen control”) were “not only unlikely but inappropriate levels of power for citizens within the library system. Full citizen power in one institutional realm, as an isolated phenomenon, is a political impossibility and therefore poor political strategy” (emphasis added, p. 282).

In the previous section, the TPL’s use of the term “participation” in its Annual Reports and two Strategic Plans (2004-2007; 2008-2011) is somewhat ambiguous, and does not denote an expansion of opportunities for community involvement. In many ways, urban reform era patron participation allowed the library to effectively integrate community engagement principles into its planning and policymaking. However, as Marshall (1984a) argues, patron participation must be an ongoing process. Reaching the “institutionalization” phase of patron participation has some drawbacks, including the introduction of “processes of bureaucratization and elitism, abdication of collective leadership, and eventual ossification and decay.” According to Marshall, “Continual injection of grassroots energy and the felt urgency of real issues still to be dealt with are and will be essential for the revitalization of citizen participation” once “institutionalization” has been achieved. (pp. 129-130). However, the TPL’s inclusive policies and practices, as well as its strong commitment to youth engagement, reflect the legacy of “citizen participation” at the TPL. Exploring existing entry points for community involvement in these areas provides some insight into how the TPL could enhance patron participation in the future.

One of the most significant issues that emerged at the TPL in the 1970s concerned the library’s conservative collection development policies. The lack of comprehensive multilingual materials and services exposed the library’s tacit view that “immigrants were poor potential for
library use.” Rather than acquiring materials in other languages, the TPL seemed to believe that it “should wait until the new arrivals had learned sufficient English and […] service would consequently follow with integration” (Sousa, 1984, p. 212). Once this bias in collection development policies was exposed to the public, various groups began to demand their rights, as taxpayers and as Canadian citizens, to access reading materials in other languages at their local branches (Sousa, 1984). Many of the TPL’s services and resources that reflect Toronto’s diverse populations—such as the Rita Cox Black and Caribbean Heritage Collection—were developed during this period.

As a result of the changes in collection development policies that occurred during the reform era, local branches of the TPL are now are likely to be “the first civic institutions” many new Canadians encounter upon arrival in Toronto (Pyper, 2009). Library Settlement Partnerships (http://www.lsp-peb.ca/) between libraries, settlement agencies, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada has enabled library systems across Ontario to provide comprehensive settlement information and services to newcomer communities. As part of its “focus” on “engaging Toronto's diverse communities in our city and our neighbourhoods” included in its 2008-2011 Strategic Plan, the TPL pledges to “[p]rovide increased support for newcomer youth in partnership with other agencies” and to “[s]upport newcomers with social integration, and educational and economic achievement” (TPL, 2008b, p. 7).

This commitment to developing programs and services to meet the needs of “diverse communities” could enable the TPL to develop a uniquely inclusive platform for patron participation. As Gaventa (2006) argues, “a critical challenge for the deepening democracy movement is how it engages with the debates on issues of difference, diversity and inclusion in the political process, and whether its approaches actually broaden the space for inclusion in
better ways than previous approaches” (p. 25). The 2008-2011 Strategic Plan includes the goal to “[e]ncourage participation in city life” (TPL, 2008b, p. 7). As a familiar and welcoming presence in many communities, the TPL is well-positioned to create new opportunities for patron participation while also helping to “broaden the space for inclusion” at the local level.

Another collection development issue at the TPL that became subject to public scrutiny during this period involved the selection of reading materials for children and youth. The TPL was proud of its strong tradition as a provider of high-quality children’s services, as well as its famed Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books. However, patrons such as author Marian Engel found the TPL’s approach to children’s librarianship outdated and elitist: “Not only were the children’s book collections almost identical to the ones I had known thirty years before in Sarnia and Galt, but the staff was unhappy when I tried to take my sticky twins to the bathroom” (p. 201). According to Marshall (1984h), the TPL resisted demands to acquire “pop” materials such as comic books, and was opposed to “the unheard-of suggestion that children and young people participate in the book selection process, thus displacing to some degree the experts, the ‘gatekeepers’ of quality, and opening the doors to an indiscriminate flood of filth and trash” (p. 235). At the time Marshall was writing, there appeared to be no foreseeable end to this particular struggle over children’s reading materials. While “the ‘comic or classics’ argument is […] simplistic,” he argued, it “reflects an ongoing, never-ending dichotomy of human choice” (p. 238).

Today, the TPL appears to cultivate youth participation and leadership at the branch and system levels through the Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs). The struggle over children’s services and reading materials at the TPL in the late 1970s did not bode well for future youth involvement in these areas. However, the YAGs represent one of the only patron groups currently involved in
a sustained dialogue with the TPL over library planning and governance issues. Young patrons are thus equipped with the knowledge and expertise to play an important role in establishing new channels for patron participation at the TPL. Any future efforts to enhance patron participation at the TPL should involve meaningful youth leadership in the process.

The internet is another potential platform for patron participation. Today, libraries play a significant role in bridging the digital divide by providing access to computers and the internet, by offering free computer training to library patrons, and by developing information literacy within communities. The internet and social media played a significant role in the campaign to advocate for TPL funding during the 2012 City of Toronto budget process (the online petition was available at OurPublicLibrary.to). By creating new opportunities for patron participation through the internet, libraries can demonstrate the value of the internet as an organizing and advocacy tool and empower communities to use technology to leverage their participation in other areas of civic life.

“The Educative Habit” of Patron Participation

Patron participation could also serve a broader function as a component of the library’s commitment to citizenship learning and lifelong learning. E. A. Hardy (1912), who served as President of the Ontario Library Association from 1925-1926, argued that “[t]he habit of consulting the library is an educative habit, and in so far as the community acquires this habit it is being educated. This is true of many other uses of the library” (p. 57). What “other uses of the library” could become an “educative habit”?

According to Pateman (1970), “The major function of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is […] an educative one, educative in the very widest sense, including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures.”
Pateman argues that democracy cannot be sustained through “representative institutions at national level” alone. In addition to these institutions, “democracy must take place in other spheres in order that the necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities can be developed. This development takes place through the process of participation itself” (p. 42). Meaningful participation in library planning and governance could foster participation in other arenas. As Neaera Abers (2003) notes, “[p]articipatory decision-making can gain legitimacy on the small scale and participants can learn about political life and broaden their interests to other spheres” (p. 207).

The librarians of the Working Together Project acknowledge that “[o]utreach supports detachment, but community development requires taking risks” (Campbell, 2005, p. 273). The library’s resistance towards these types of initiatives reflects a professional belief that patron participation is a risky undertaking. Without the institutional knowledge, as well as proper training and expertise, how are patrons equipped to participate in library planning and governance? Proponents of participatory democracy, such as Pateman, suggest that “[p]articipation fosters the very qualities necessary for it; the more individuals participate the better able they become to do so” (p. 42-43). The research of Smith (2005) and others “suggests that if a diverse range of citizens is brought together they have the capacity and skills to deliberate and make recommendations on complex public policy issues” (p. 9). Rather than merely providing “resources and programs to engage and encourage discussion in civic and social issues,” local branches of the TPL could foster civic engagement as actual sites of citizenship learning and participatory democracy (TPL, 2008b, p. 7).

For Pateman (1970), democracy cannot be sustained through “representative institutions at national level” alone. In addition to these institutions, “democracy must take place in other
spheres in order that the necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities can be
developed. *This development takes place through the process of participation itself*” (emphasis
added, p. 42). Marshall (1984f) also supports the notion that “citizen participation, when it is
genuine and not a sham, has significance beyond what is achieved (or not achieved) through its
exercise.” This type of “genuine” participation
breaks the pattern of handed-down decisions, too readily acquiesced in, whether gladly or
grudgingly, by apathetic citizens who become the object of someone else’s decision-making.
When that habitual response is broken, the door is opened not only to participation but to
learning. (p. xi)

What do participants learn though this process? According to Marshall, they “learn that they can
make decisions, they can share responsibility, they do have power; and they learn also the limits
of that power, and where they stand in relation to those who have the final say or the ultimate
authority.” Marshall argues that this brand of learning can be “carried forward into struggles for
a more equitable society, or applied only to the workings of our present incomplete and badly
flawed democracy” (xi).

Marshall’s argument suggests that patron participation can become an empowering and
transformative “educative habit” within communities. This “educative habit” can lead to changes
in attitudes towards the library. In the conclusion to her 1981 study of community outreach at the
TPL, Mary Vise included the following “subjective” observation:

In the course of reviewing my notes from the discussion with community respondents, I realized
that in many interviews a general pattern repeated itself. A shift took place in the perspective in
which the library was viewed by the respondent, so that the reference point for the discussion
changed from viewing the library as a building where staff dispensed books and ran children’s
programs, to seeing it as an organization with an interest and concern about what was going on in
the community, and a goal and capability of being relevant to broader concerns and not limited
to only the recreational and educational needs of the community. The change was subtle—not a
turnabout in basic conception, but more an expanded vision of what the library could be and
wanted to be.
According to Vise, this “expanded vision” was a direct result of “[t]he library interest, expressed in both the questions asked and the simple fact that ‘someone from the library’ wanted to sit and talk about what was going on in the community […].” While this shift in perspective “appeared to happen quite naturally and unconsciously,” it could have powerful effects (p. 326). For Vise, this observation demonstrated the “enormous potential for the passive goodwill that exists in the general community to develop into an active concern and involvement with the library as not only a valued, but a vital community institution” (Italics mine, p. 327).

The Working Together Project librarians also describe how community participation in library planning can lead to the development of the “attitudes and psychological qualities” described by Pateman:

Sometimes, the most important outcome of community-led service planning is not the actual products or services, but the change in socially excluded community members’ sense of their importance to the library, their right to be involved, and their ability and confidence to engage (emphasis added, Working Together Project, 2008, p. 19).

Through involvement in library planning and governance, they argue, participants should be made to “feel that the library is their library and that they have a voice and sense of belonging.” They emphasize the importance of “building and strengthening the abilities of socially excluded community members to engage in the library—not just as service recipients, but as active and confident community members” (emphasis added, p. 19). In other words, this process can lead to a unique brand of citizenship learning that empowers “socially excluded communities” by bringing them into the fold of community decision-making and civic life.

Librarians, library staff, and the community at large can learn from these inclusive and participatory experiences as well. The Working Together Project librarians observe “that basic knowledge of adult education was helpful in planning responsive programming and training” (Italics mine). Library staff members were advised to familiarize themselves with the principles
of adult education through “preparatory reading” or by consulting with adult educators. “When librarians have an understanding of adult learning styles and challenges,” they argue, “they are better equipped to facilitate planning sessions for programs and services for adult community members. They are also better able to collaboratively design programs that will be successful for adult learners” (Working Together Project, 2008, p. 131). Similarly, Marshall (1984g) argues in his chapter on organizational change at the TPL, “[c]hange must include growth, development in people; therefore it is a process of learning. Not learning in the abstract, but down-to-earth, practical learning, trial-and-error learning, plus reflecting on the process in order not only to understand it better but to do it better. In word, praxis” (p. 120-121).

**Building a “Common Language” of Patron Participation**

The first section of this chapter outlined the challenges facing many public library systems and the recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues. During the 2012 City of Toronto budget process, Toronto’s strong “constituency of library supporters” (which consisted of engaged library patrons as well as the Toronto Public Library Workers Union) played a decisive role in preventing library closures and cuts to hours, services, and programs. While the well-organized and highly visible online campaign mobilized many supporters, this highly successful campaign relied upon patrons’ strong ties to their libraries. The TPL has established high levels of trust in communities through its responsive programs and services, as well as its extensive branch system. These distinctive features of Toronto’s library system exist as a direct result of urban reform era library activism and patron participation in the 1970s. Now is an ideal time to revisit this history, and discuss the creation of new venues for patron participation in library advocacy, planning, and policymaking.
According to McCabe (2001) and Willingham (2007), public libraries must renew their historical commitment to a “civic mission” that involves “education for a democratic society” (McCabe, 2005, p. 80). For De la Peña McCook (2000) and the Working Together Project (2008), this “civic mission” is complicated by issues of power and inequality, which must be addressed through “community building” and “community development” initiatives. The historical case study of patron participation at the TPL indicates how community involvement has left an impression on the library’s policies and practices regarding inclusion and youth engagement. These are presented as possible platforms for the TPL to enhance patron participation.

Public libraries are highly adaptive institutions. Their continued existence as accessible and trusted public institutions has depended on their ability to connect with patrons through the provision of innovative programs and services. While many institutions are attempting to “deepen democracy” and enhance accountability through participatory approaches to planning and governance, this remains relatively uncharted territory within the current context of public librarianship. This chapter has explored different philosophical and practical approaches to patron participation and the role of libraries in civic life. While some groups, such as the Working Together Project (2008), have documented important initiatives in these areas, as Willingham (2008) notes, we lack “a common language for talking about this emerging role for the library as a player in the community” (p. 108).

Adult educators can assist librarians and library staff to articulate a “common language” and a “common vision” regarding libraries and participatory democracy. This language should draw on the library’s historical commitment to citizenship learning and lifelong learning, as well as its symbolic ties to democracy and human rights. It should also address the issues of power,
inequality, and social exclusion identified by the Working Together Project librarians. Are familiar and accessible institutions that often inspire a high level of trust in the communities they serve, libraries have the potential to build on this trust, fostering an “educative habit” through patron participation that could lead to greater social inclusion and involvement in civic life. However, as Vise (1981) notes, “To realize this potential the library must be able to communicate its concern for, and involvement in, the community, and its ability to translate that concern into a responsive service that welcomes community participation” (emphasis added, p. 327). Now is the time for adult educators, community activists, and library patrons to join librarians in this discussion, and use a “common language” to explore the expansive possibilities of a truly participatory public library system in Toronto, and beyond.
Chapter 7
Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This section will present a summary of findings and conclusions of the four individual research objectives outlined in sub-section 1.3 of the Introduction: *identifying issues of agency and power in public library history and exploring the role of public libraries in civic life; understanding the influence of the urban reform on library activism in Toronto; exploring the evolution of urban-reform era library activism and its impact on TPL policy; and generating discussion regarding the creation of new opportunities for patron participation within the context of the recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues*. Recommendations for directions for future research will be outlined, and limitations of the study will be addressed. The chapter will conclude with a brief personal reflection on the project.

7.2 Research Objectives—Summary of Findings and Conclusions

*Identifying issues of agency and power in public library history and exploring the role of public libraries in civic life*

Exploring the origins of public libraries as Progressive Era institutions provides insight into issues of agency and power in public library history. The philanthropy of captains of industry such as Andrew Carnegie “was motivated by a fear of egalitarianism and upheaval from below as much as by a desire for democratic extension of education” (Garrison, 1979, p. xiii). Carnegie remained steadfast in his belief that the “study of library materials would encourage acceptance of this system and dreams of economic advancement in the tradition of Horatio Alger rather than Karl Marx” (DuMont, 1977, p. 62). However, open access to knowledge through libraries
allowed individuals to draw their own conclusions about society and power. The learning that occurs through libraries was—and remains—inherently tacit and unpredictable.

In the early twentieth-century, libraries were regarded as important instruments for the assimilation of new immigrants and a bulwark against popular dissent. However, outreach work to communities also provided librarians with rare insight into the lived experiences of their patrons. During this period, libraries began to acquire multilingual materials to draw non-English speaking users into the library. By transcending the prejudices of their time and openly encouraging the retention newcomers’ languages and cultures, librarians undermined their mandate of assimilation in subtle ways. As neutral and accessible institutions, libraries could also be reclaimed by marginalized populations as tools for empowerment and resistance.

Garrison (1979) describes the public library as a “marginal institution.” This “marginal” status allowed libraries “to establish a more flexible, less coercive attitude toward its users” (p. xiii). The role of public libraries in civic life is defined, in part, by this condition of marginality. While public libraries share some of the characteristics of Oldenburg’s (1999) “third places,” they possess unique characteristics that set them apart from other community gathering places. Unlike privately-owned commercial enterprises, for example, libraries exist entirely within the public realm. Their mandate to provide free services to all members of the community makes them more inclusive than many typical “third places.”

Putnam and Feldstein (2003) describe how public libraries create social capital in various ways. The presence of a public library represents a substantial ongoing investment in a community, and may instill a sense of local pride in residents. Patrons derive tangible benefits from the library in terms of increased access to vital information and new learning opportunities. In addition, libraries play a significant role in bridging the digital divide through the provision of
free online access and computer training, and through the promotion of information literacy. As shared public spaces, libraries may also create social capital by continuing to cultivate a sense of trust in the library, which may expand to include other public institutions, the community at large, and other individuals (Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Vårheim, Steinmo & Ide, 2008; Vårheim, 2008).

The multifaceted role of public libraries in civic life was further explored using six features that distinguish the public library from other types of public institutions. Marshall (1984d) identified five of these features: *ubiquity* (public libraries are fixtures of the urban landscape in most cities); *propinquity* (public libraries tend to be situated in close proximity to the places where people live); *availability/neutrality* (library services are accessible to all members of the community, and library usage is free and self-directed); *flexibility/versatility* (libraries are designed to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of patrons); and *capability/potentiality* (libraries possess the potential to assume new roles and responsibilities but rarely perform to the fullest of their capability) (pp. 297-301). A sixth feature—*inclusivity*—was proposed. The feature of *inclusivity* recognizes libraries’ emphasis on welcoming marginalized groups into the community, creating opportunities to encounter and appreciate diversity, and providing all individuals with the same privileges as library patrons.

Exploring the Progressive Era origins of public libraries reveals their intertwined—and, at times, divergent—aspirations to uphold the established order and to provide open access to knowledge and information. Garrison (1979) characterizes these aspirations as “the censorship and the consumership models of the library” (emphasis added, p. xiv). While this ambiguous ideological foundation has shaped the public library as an institution, communities have always exercised agency and negotiated their relationships with libraries. The malleability and
marginality of libraries allowed them to become especially responsive to the changing needs of patrons. Today, libraries are highly trusted public institutions. Trust is the cornerstone of library service to communities, and building on this trust yields benefits for the entire community in terms of the creation of social capital. As a wholly public institution, the library has developed unique features enabling it to play a multifaceted and inclusive role in our civic life.

**Understanding the influence of the urban reform movement on library activism in Toronto**

In order to understand the influence of the urban reform movement on library activism in Toronto, the rise and fall of Toronto’s urban reform movement was placed within a broader political and historical context. Four themes in the history of urban reform were identified: the emergence of citizen participation, the impetus for urban reform, the composition of the urban reform movement, and the legacy of urban reform in Toronto.

The demands for greater citizen participation in policymaking and decision-making processes emerged against the backdrop of various social movements in the 1960s and 1970s (including the American civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the gay rights movement, various countercultural youth movements, the student movement, the antiwar movement, and the First Nations’ pursuit of treaty rights). In Canada, popular interest in citizen participation was influenced by a Canadian nationalism as well a growing disillusionment with elected officials and representative government (exacerbated by events such as the Vietnam War and the October Crisis). Various levels of government appeared to support greater citizen participation in decision-making processes—particularly within the planning arena—as a means of containing popular dissent and securing public buy-in on contentious issues.

Various urban issues provided the impetus for urban reform in Toronto. During this period, vast economic, demographic and physical changes were transforming the city’s
landscape. Citizen participation was viewed as a necessary counterweight to the dominant “technocratic” perspective of governments and planners, which failed to address urban issues on a human and social scale. For example, opponents of the Spadina Expressway framed the project as an outmoded and anachronistic approach to planning that promoted “technocratic” and “suburban” values at the expense of a vibrant downtown community. Many of the urban reformers viewed themselves as the guardians of an urban way of life embedded in the very fabric of city neighbourhoods.

The urban reform movement consisted of various groups who shared a unified perspective on specific urban issues. Caulfield (1974) characterizes the movement as “a brief congruence of the interests and sentiments of a diverse array of groups and individuals, whose interests and sentiments were otherwise often in conflict. The reformist movement was a coincidence” (emphasis added, p. 138). On issues related to transportation and development projects, the urban reformers were able to combine their efforts to achieve common goals. However, the movement lost its momentum following the 1972 municipal election of Mayor David Crombie, and consequently fractured along class and political lines. The lack of a shared vision for the city of Toronto limited the long-term sustainability of this loose confederation of activists and citizens’ groups.

The eventual collapse of Toronto’s urban reform movement has often obscured its legacy and its long term impacts on Toronto urban landscape, the tenor of municipal government, and the city’s approach to planning and policymaking. By 1974, Caulfield predicted that “[r]eformism may continue to dissipate and fragment, and may become just a minor footnote in Toronto municipal history. While reformism has been, in some sense, a real force, it has been a mushy, fuzzy force” (p. 144). In the history of the urban reform movement, Fulford (1995)
argues, the notable accomplishments “tend to be negative, the avoidance of this or that, the saving of something” (p. 73). Fulford calls the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood “the tour de force of the reform era, proof that on at least one occasion the reformers could deliver on their promise of a more liveable city” (pp. 73-74). This study presents the reform-era transformation of the TPL as another such “tour de force.”

**Exploring the evolution of urban reform-era library activism and its impact on TPL policy**

Building on the research of the history of Toronto’s urban reform movement, four themes in the evolution of urban reform-era library activism and its impact on TPL policy were addressed: the emergence of library activism, the impetus for library activism at the TPL, the identity of the library activists, and the legacy of library activism at the TPL.

The Canadian materials debate provides insight into the role of the Board in the emergence of patron participation at the TPL. After the 1972 municipal election, many city agencies and boards, including the Library Board, came under close public scrutiny for the first time and new Board appointees, including Canadian writer Marian Engel, began to examine TPL policies and planning issues from a new perspective. When Engel joined the TPL Board, libraries “refused to buy Canadian books on the grounds that they reflected a low taste. Others didn’t know enough about Canadian books to know what to buy” (p. 201). Engel describes how the systematic review of book selection policies led to new debates over the acquisition of popular and multilingual library materials. As a result of these Board-initiated policy changes, library collections began to reflect the articulated demands and interests of patrons.

Two interrelated issues—the unequal distribution of library services across the city and the district library model—served as the main impetus for reform era library activism. The Forrester Report (February/March 1975) was commissioned to provide statistics and information
on the library system for the Board, as well as the newly established Long Term Planning and Priorities Committee (LTPP). According to Lorimer (1984), the report demonstrated that the TPL was comprised of “two systems.” The “well-endowed, well-serviced, well-provided library system” in North Toronto provided patrons in the city’s “highest-income neighbourhoods” with an indisputably high quality of service. Meanwhile, a “poorly-endowed, poorly-staffed, and under-stocked” system served patrons in the east, west, and central areas, “with many pockets of the city having no service at all” (p. 83). This unequal distribution of resources was reinforced by the fact that usage determined funding priorities for each subsequent year. As library collections and services were largely geared towards middle-class, English-speaking patrons, libraries located in areas catering to these patrons continued to receive a larger share of funding than their counterparts in less affluent areas (Lorimer, 1984).

Based on a study conducted nearly a decade earlier (The Shaw Report, 1960), the TPL argued that it could expand its services and equalize library resources through the construction of large-scale district libraries. Within the context of the urban reform movement, district libraries represented an outmoded and “technocratic” approach to planning. For many communities, the district library proposal was reminiscent of other development and transportation projects that threatened to destroy the fabric of the inner city. The reform-minded Board members were less invested than library staff in the district library model and were thus more skeptical regarding its suitability for Toronto’s library system. The public’s rejection of the district library proposal reflected an attachment to neighbourhood-level library services.

In terms of the identity of the library activists, the individuals who became involved with the TPL were motivated by various issues and concerns. Unlike the urban reform movement, library activism gained momentum and developed a unified approach over time. This occurred
for three reasons. First, library activism emerged from within the TPL through the active involvement of reform-minded TPL Board members. Second, many of these policy and planning issues were interrelated and stakeholders became accustomed to engaging in collaborative efforts to achieve their goals. Third, the parameters of change were defined by the distinctive features of public libraries identified by Marshall (1984d, pp. 297-301). Libraries’ inclination towards inclusivity also shaped this process of organizational change. Public libraries were increasingly framed as multipurpose facilities; it was assumed that libraries could accommodate the needs of various stakeholder groups.

In terms of the legacy of reform era library activism, several substantial accomplishments—including the commitment to developing inclusive library collections and services, the rejection of the district library model and the renewal of the neighbourhood branch system, and the equalization of library services across the city of Toronto—helped to shape the TPL as it exists today. Library activism also fulfilled the initial promise of the urban reform movement through the creation of opportunities for extensive patron participation. Marshall (1984d) argues that patron participation would permit libraries to develop policies and services responsive to diverse community needs; create a “feedback mechanism” enabling the library to assess the impact of its policies, programs and services; increase in the number of library patrons by converting non-users; recognize and recruit advisory group and Library Board members from various community and ethnic groups; and establish “a knowledgeable network of citizens” who would sustain the library’s commitment to freedom of speech (p. 279).

Perhaps most significantly, Marshall (1984d) noted that patron participation would help the library to build “a constituency of library supporters who may be called upon for help in applying pressure to City Hall, in backing budget requests, etc.” (p. 279). As libraries in Toronto
and elsewhere face increasing financial pressures from government funders, a broad base of popular support among library patrons may continue to play a decisive role in their survival as dynamic public institutions.

Generating discussion regarding the creation of new opportunities for patron participation in the context of the recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues

In the wake of the financial crisis, a number of American library systems have been forced to privatize or engage in other cost-cutting measures. In recent years, library systems in the U.K. have faced similar financial challenges. When I embarked on this research in 2009, the TPL appeared to be firmly entrenched in the public realm. However, Toronto’s municipal election of Mayor Rob Ford in the fall of 2010 marked a palpable change in the tenor of city government and the political fortunes of the TPL.

In response to proposed cuts to the TPL’s budget, the Toronto Public Library Workers Union (TPLWU Local 4948), led by the Union’s president, Maureen O’Reilly, launched a high-profile campaign and online petition (at OurPublicLibrary.to). Virtually overnight, the fate of the TPL became a hot-button issue in the media. The Mayor and his allies on City Council did not anticipate the strong public reaction to the proposed cuts that would follow. Based on feedback from displeased library patrons, many Councillors publicly announced their support for libraries, preventing massive service cuts and branch closures.

Marshall (1984d) believed that community involvement in library planning and policymaking had helped to create a “constituency of library supporters” who would be willing to advocate for the TPL and ensure its continued existence and growth (p. 279). Funding for public libraries has recently become a politicized issue in many cities. By capitalizing on their strong ties to communities, libraries can cultivate a diverse “constituency of library supporters” to champion their cause in times of crisis while “deepening democracy” at the local level.
As a result of reform-era library activism and patron participation, Marshall (1984d) argued, “the directions of policy for the Toronto Public Library have been set—irrevocably—for the foreseeable future” (p. 278). These “policy directions” included the rejection of the district library model in favour of neighbourhood-based library services, the equalization of library services across the City of Toronto, a re-orientation towards meeting the needs of all patrons (and a new focus on “outreach” activities), expanding the breadth of multilingual materials, programs and services, and the inclusion of Canadian and popular materials within library collections (pp. 278-279).

The TPL can build on this legacy of reform-era library activism to create new entry points for patron participation at the TPL. The ability to develop programs and services that meet the needs of newcomers could enable the TPL to develop a uniquely inclusive platform for patron participation. The TPL appears to cultivate youth participation and leadership at the branch and system levels through the Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs). The YAGs represent one of the only patron groups currently involved in a sustained dialogue with the TPL over library planning and governance issues. Young patrons are thus equipped with the knowledge and expertise to play an important role in establishing new channels for patron participation at the TPL.

Patron participation could also serve a broader function as a component of the library’s commitment to citizenship learning and lifelong learning. Meaningful participation in library planning and governance could enable patrons to develop skills that can be transferred to other arenas of civic life. Libraries can also function as inclusive sites for citizenship learning by bringing marginalized communities into the fold of community decision-making and civic life.
Librarians and library staff can also gain new knowledge about their communities through these inclusive and participatory experiences.

According to McCabe (2001) and Willingham (2007), public libraries must renew their historical commitment to a “civic mission” that involves “education for a democratic society” (McCabe, 2005, p. 80). For De la Peña McCook (2000) and the Working Together Project (2008), this “civic mission” is complicated by issues of power and inequality, which must be addressed through “community building” and “community development” initiatives. The historical case study of patron participation at the TPL indicates how community involvement has left an impression on the library’s policies and practices regarding inclusion and youth engagement. These are presented as possible platforms for the TPL to enhance patron participation.

While some groups—such as the Working Together Project (2008)—have documented important initiatives in these areas, Willingham (2008) notes that we lack “a common language for talking about this emerging role for the library as a player in the community” (p. 108). Adult educators can assist librarians and library staff to articulate a “common language” and a “common vision” regarding libraries and participatory democracy. This language should draw on the library’s historical commitment to citizenship learning and lifelong learning, as well as its symbolic ties to democracy and human rights. It should also address the issues of power, inequality, and social exclusion identified by the Working Together Project librarians. Now is the time for adult educators, community activists, and library patrons to join librarians in this discussion, and use a “common language” to explore the expansive possibilities of a truly participatory public library system in Toronto, and beyond.
7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings from each of the individual research objectives outlined in the previous section, four areas for future research are recommended: the role of public libraries in Toronto’s civic life, the evolution of patron participation at the TPL, contemporary public library activism, and the process of patron participation.

The Role of Public Libraries in Toronto’s Civic Life

Chapter 2 (Issues of Agency and Power in Public Library History and the Role of Public Libraries in Civic Life), explored the role of the public library in civic life by discussing the relationship between libraries and social capital, by expanding upon the five features of public libraries identified by Marshall (1984d, pp. 297-301), and by proposing a sixth feature: inclusivity. Johnson (2012) has examined how library staff can generate social capital through their contact with patrons. Putnam and Feldstein (2003) describe the role of libraries in social capital creation using Chicago’s Near North Branch as a case study. Future research could explore the role of public libraries in Toronto’s civic life by investigating the functions and perceptions of libraries at the neighbourhood level. As libraries continue to face budgetary pressures from their funders, research that measures and demonstrates the various social and economic impacts of libraries—such as the contributions of libraries to public health and safety—will be of particular relevance to public libraries and the patrons who depend on their services.

The Evolution of Patron Participation at the TPL

Further research is needed on the history of reform era library activism and the evolution of patron participation at the TPL. This study focused on the early, intensive period of library activism, and emphasized the contributions of reform-minded Board members and library
patrons. Further research—perhaps in the form of an oral history—could clarify how patron participation at the TPL unfolded over time, and explain how changing values within the library profession and supportive library staff contributed to this process of organizational change at the TPL.

**Contemporary Public Library Activism**

Chapter 6 (*Discussion: “Deepening Democracy” at the TPL*) described the financial pressures facing library systems today and contemporary library advocacy campaigns in the U.K. and in Toronto. Future research could examine successful library advocacy campaign strategies, with an emphasis on the creation of alliances between library staff and patrons and the use of the internet as an organizing tool. Research could also explore how these types of campaigns affect the popular perception of the library in the community (for example, whether or not they attract new library users and/or supporters).

**The Process of Patron Participation**

Marshall (1984d) outlined several potential benefits of patron participation (p. 279). Further research in this area could evaluate the impact of specific venues for patron participation in libraries. For example, the TPL’s Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) represent one of the only patron groups currently involved in a sustained dialogue with the TPL over library planning and governance issues. Research on the YAGs could provide new insight into the benefits and challenges of involved in youth-focused patron participation programs.

7.4 **Limitations**

As addressed in Chapter 3 (*Research Methods*), one limitation of this study is its reliance upon the first-hand accounts compiled by Marshall, as well as the archival documents and reports
generated during this period. I had initially envisioned this thesis as a continuation of Marshall’s work, and had planned to include an oral history component in my research on reform era library activism. I believe that interviewing participants (and re-interviewing some of Marshall’s contributors) would have enriched this study greatly. While the archival sources and first-hand accounts compiled by Marshall provided various perspectives on the reform era, speaking with participants would have provided a more nuanced account of the patron participation process. As mentioned in the previous section on areas for future research, an oral history of reform era library activism could examine the changes that occurred at the TPL from the perspectives of librarians and TPL staff.

While the sources cited in this study exist within the public domain, my subjective reading of these sources has been shaped by my personal experiences as well as my current social context. This thesis—initially envisioned as a self-contained historical study—expanded in scope to explore the contemporary resurgence in civic engagement on library issues at the TPL in response to the 2012 budget process. Libraries—in Toronto and elsewhere—continue to face intense financial pressures, lending an unfinished quality to this portion of the research. By addressing these current events and issues at the TPL, my primary goal was to generate discussion regarding the possible benefits of creating new venues for patron participation at the TPL. Following Marshall (1984f), I also hoped “to capture the immediacy of the experience” of the recent resurgence in civic engagement on library issues in Toronto (p. xii).

7.5 Self-Reflection

My approach to this project was inspired and shaped by an exceptional primary source: John Marshall’s *Citizen Participation in Library Decision-Making: The Toronto Experience* (1984). In addition to providing a set of first-hand accounts by reform era library activists, Marshall’s
volume was an invaluable bibliographical resource in terms of listing and describing various reports and other readings related to the urban reform movement. Consequently, the archival research component of this study was relatively straightforward.

Constructing a theoretical framework for the study presented other challenges. However, my coursework on various topics (adult education, community development, citizenship learning and participatory democracy, and the historiography of education) provided valuable opportunities to discuss the history of libraries and their role in civic life from various perspectives. I was also able to design two reading courses as a part of my program (Public Libraries, Citizenship Learning, and Participatory Democracy: The Case of the Toronto Public Library System and Citizen Participation and City Politics: Toronto’s Urban Reform Movement) that allowed me to investigate specific aspects of this project in greater depth.

Marshall’s belief in the importance of “citizen participation” in library planning and policymaking may have been shaped by his personal experience. Marshall (1984d) noted that patron participation benefitted libraries by “[p]roviding a knowledgeable network of citizens as a bulwark against censorship and support for the fundamental principle of full and free access to all points of view through the provision of appropriate library materials” (p. 279). During the Cold War era, Marshall’s involvement with the Canadian peace movement led to the loss of his position with the Victoria Public Library system based on accusations of communist sympathies. (The Greater Victoria Public Library Board formally apologized to Marshall for his unfair dismissal in 1998.)35 Marshall’s personal history came to mind during the 2012 City of Toronto budget process, when my research into reform era library activism seemed to take on a new significance—on both a scholarly as well as on a personal level.

35 Marshall recounted this experience in The Un-Canadians, a 1996 film directed by Len Scher, and in a 1999 article for ExLibris News.
The massive display of public support for the TPL demonstrated Toronto’s strong attachment to its library system. Many of those who came forward to voice their support for the TPL described how they had personally benefitted from library services in their communities. Their stories resonated with me as a patron and as a library volunteer; as a tutor in the TPL’s Adult Literacy Program, I have experienced the transformative impact of libraries in my own life. The loss of the TPL as a vital public institution would be a significant loss for Toronto’s civic life and an intensely personal loss for its patrons. As novelist Zadie Smith (2012) argues, the public library “a different kind of social reality (of the three dimensional kind), which by its very existence teaches a system of values beyond the fiscal” (emphasis added, n.p.). The future of the public library will depend upon our ability to articulate these values and our willingness to defend them. This research is my small contribution to this effort.
Figure 1: "Public Involvement Continuum" (Working Together Project, 2008, p. 16).

Figure 2: "Ladder of Citizen Participation" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217)
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