The Public Library: An Agency for Social Inclusion or Exclusion

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In the United States and Britain, public libraries play an important role in closing the distance between the privileged and the underprivileged by providing access for information and knowledge. However, public libraries in Japan play a contradictory role by widening gaps between the information-rich and the information-poor. Despite the constant calling for informationization of public libraries, a good placement of these libraries is a prerequisite.

1 The American Public Library as an Agency for Social Inclusion
(Falling Through the Net , Toward Digital Inclusion, 2000)

On March 14, 1994, the United States' first public library web site was launched by St. Joseph Public Library in South Bend, Indiana. The same year, Charles McClure and John Bertot conducted a survey among approximately 1,500 public libraries, and found that 20.9 percent of libraries had access to the Internet. The percentage of libraries having Internet access doubled (44.6 percent) by 1996 and this figure increased to 72.3 percent in 1997, 83.6 percent in 1998, and 95.7 percent in the 2000 national survey[1].

Consequently, the number of Internet terminals available for public access has also increased from 12.7 percent in 1994 to 27.8 percent in 1996, 60.4 percent in 1997, and 73.3 percent in 1998. In the 2000 survey, this number reached 94.5 percent. In other words, 95 out of 100 libraries provide access to the Internet. What was regarded as an innovation in 1994 has now become an essential service in all public libraries[2].

Meanwhile, in October 2000, the U.S. Department of Commerce published the fourth report in the Commerce Department series of studies, *Falling Through the Net*[3]. The Internet is becoming an increasingly important tool not only for national economy, but also for Americans to perform their day-to-day activities. In other words, people who lack access to the Internet are at a growing disadvantage. Based on these recognitions, the results of this survey showed many interesting findings. This report discovered that the rapid uptake of new technologies was occurring among most Americans, regardless of their income, educational background, race, ethnicity, geographical location, or gender. At the same time, this survey recognized the fact that "a digital divide still remains or has even expanded slightly in some cases, while the percentage of Internet access and computer ownership are rising rapidly for almost all groups."[4]

This survey indicates that 25 percent of the population uses the Internet "only from home," 8.7 percent "only outside the home," and 10.7 percent use the Internet "both at home and outside the home." However, although 25 percent of Internet users accessed the Internet only from their homes, only 12.1 percent of "Hispanic," and 13.7 percent of "Black" used the Internet at home. These figures indicate the pattern of at-home Internet usage is not consistent across demographic groups[5].

One interesting findings in this report is the locations of Internet access outside the residential home. Individuals who use the Internet outside their homes have a tendency to use it from a wide range of locations. The five key locations investigated by this survey are: at work, at school (K-12), at other schools, at public library, and at someone else's personal computer. Findings of the survey are presented in Table 1 and they are sorted according to users' annual incomes.

**Table 1 : Percent of U.S. Persons Using the Internet Outside the Home,
By Income, By Selected Places, 2000[6]**

In come (US$)	At Work (%)	Someone else's pc (%)	Public library (%)
75,000~	76.9	6.1	5.4
50,000~74,999	70.2	10.5	7.7
35,000~49,999	63.0	16.6	10.0
10,000~14,999	23.9	29.0	23.2
5,000~ 9,999	22.1	30.8	21.8
~ 4,999	19.5	27.2	16.5

This table clearly shows that as household income increases, the number of workplace users also increase. In other words, high income users can use the Internet both at home and at work. In contrast, as household income decreases, the number of users who use Internet at someone else's personal computer and at the public library increases.

Table 2 shows that Hispanics and Blacks have higher tendencies to use the Internet at public libraries than Whites, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

**Table 2 : Percent of U.S. Persons Using the Internet Outside the Home,
By Race/Hispanic Origin, By Selected Places, 2000[7]**

	At Work (%)	Someone else's pc (%)	Public library (%)
White	65.8	13.6	8.2
Asian American/ Pacific Islanders	63.4	10.5	9.5
Hispanic	45.9	16.8	13.6
Black	51.1	14.4	17.9

In addition, individuals with high educational background have less tendencies to use the Internet in public libraries than individuals with merely elementary school background.

The figures recorded are 5.6 percent and 27.5 percent respectively. Furthermore, married couples with offspring under 18 years old utilize the Internet in public libraries less than female households with offspring under 18. The figures recorded in this category are 10.4 percent and 16.1 percent respectively. Findings in this report indicate the fact that "public libraries appear to be a more important place of Internet use for the unemployed than for those who had jobs."[8]

This 2000 report concludes on the following statement: "Most groups, regardless of income, education, race or ethnicity, location, age, or gender are making dramatic gains. Nevertheless, some large divides still exist and groups are going online at different rates."[9] Furthermore, it also emphasized that public libraries play an important role in providing access for the information-disadvantaged. As indicated by the report's subtitle "Toward Digital Inclusion", the public library plays a definite role as an agency for social inclusion and provider of the safety net. The U.S. Department of Commerce 2002 report, *A Nation Online* also drew similar conclusions. "Internet access at public libraries is more often used by those with lower incomes than those with higher income," "Just over 20 percent of Internet users with household incomes of less than 15, 000 a year use public libraries, and 6.1 percent of Internet users in this category use the Internet at public libraries only."[10]

2 The British Public Library as an Agency for Social Inclusion (2000)

Soon after the above mentioned movement in the United States, the British public library also made extensive efforts to provide Internet services for users. In July 1997, the Library and Information Commission published a famous report *New Library: The People's Network*[11]. This report introduced a promising strategy for the British public libraries in the process of transformation proposing that they should be all connected to a national digital network. This initiative focuses on the importance of new information and communication technologies. In order to implement this basic vision, a report to Government, *Building the New Library Network*, and a report to Library and Information Commission, *Virtually New: Creating the Digital Collection*, were published in 1998 respectively[12]. Presently most public libraries in Britain provide users with Internet access.

During the Thatcher administration (1979-1990), the privatization and commercialization of public services were highly encouraged. Furthermore, the 1988 government *Green Paper* threatened the real value of the public library as a public institution because it strongly advocated the introduction of fees for various library services, contracting-out services and so forth[13].

Even if Thatcher had recovered British economic problems, her administration was well known for encouraging gaps between the rich and the poor. Thatcher's remark "there is no such thing as society" indicated cruel materialistic individualism. After Thatcher administration, Prime Minister Blair rejected social exclusion and has been advocating social inclusion ever since. The Labor Government has set out four main targets in order to resolve the existing social exclusion and they are: increasing employment, reducing crime, improving health and welfare, and achieving higher educational attainment. In response to this

government policy, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published the *Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries* (1999) as a policy guideline for local authorities[14]. DCMS has defined the following statement as its overall social inclusion policy:

> "To promote the involvement in culture and leisure activities of those at risk of social disadvantage or marginalization, particularly by virtue of the area they live in; their disability or age, racial or ethnic origin. To improve the quality of people's lives..."[15]

DCMS's definition of social inclusion is more comprehensive and impressive than the four target areas proposed by the British government. *Libraries for All* recognizes that over the years, public libraries have developed a range of different services, targeting at various disadvantaged social groups in order to facilitate equal participation. However, the scale of social exclusion is so large that public libraries must adopt "a fresh look." It concludes that public libraries now need to address what can be done to ensure that they can serve the remaining 40 percent of the population who are not current library members. To make public libraries to be at the very heart of the communities, allowing all individuals irrespective of their age or special background to enjoy services from their true community agency, Libraries for All identifies 4 main challenges for socially inclusive libraries[16]:

(1) Institutional: barriers that authorities, libraries and library staff themselves create.

    Ex. Unsuitable opening hours, inappropriate staff attitudes, inappropriate rules, etc.

(2) Personal and social: barriers exist either in personal terms, or because of cultural or community circumstances.

    Ex. Low income and poverty, direct and indirect discrimination, low self-esteem, lack of permanent address, etc.

(3) Perceptions and awareness: Perceptions that "libraries are not for us" exist.

    Ex. People who are educationally disadvantaged, isolated and people who do not think libraries are relevant to their everyday lives or needs, etc.

(4) Environmental

    Ex. Difficult physical access into and within buildings such as poor transport links, etc.

Immediately after the publication of DCMS' policy document, the Library Association (the name changed to Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in 2002) made a comment on this policy in January 2000[17]. The Library Association not only welcomed DCMS' definition, policy and guideline, but also shared a similar belief with DCMS on the importance of social inclusion. The Library Association advocated social inclusion and social justice within public libraries since they are indispensable elements for building a more prosperous and harmonious society. DCMS's policy specified that "Libraries should be a major vehicle for providing affordable (or preferably free) access of ICT (Information Communications Technology) at local levels." LA completely agreed with

this statement and further argued that each library should be equipped with Internet access. In addition, Internet access and the use of computers should be free of charge for library users in order to realize social inclusion in all libraries.

This policy on social inclusion was examined continuously in the following documents: *Comprehensive and Efficient: Standards for Modern Public Libraries* (DCMS, 2000), *Comprehensive, Efficient and Modern Public Libraries: Standards and Assessment* (DCMS, 2001), *Libraries and Lifelong Learning: A Strategy 2002-2004* (Library Association, 2001) etc. Each of the above documents emphasizes the importance of recognizing ideas and practices of social inclusion in public libraries.

3 Public Libraries: Social Exclusion or Inclusion.

In the opening address of the 1996 National Library Week, ALA President Betty Turock made the following statement[18].

> The information superhighway threatens to widen the gap between the "information rich" and "information poor" even as it revolutionize how we live, learn, work and connect with one another.... The solution to public access exists in virtually every community. It's doable and affordable: It's the library.

In the "Foreword" of the *Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries* (2000), Chris Smith, Secretary of DCMS wrote the following remark[19].

> One of the Government's highest priorities is to combat social exclusion. Many organizations within the cultural sector have important contributions to make to this campaign, but few are likely to be as well placed public libraries to generate change.

In the United States and Britain, public libraries may play the role as a social inclusion-provider. On the other hand, in many developing countries, so far as concerned with public libraries, the situation is quite different.

Table 3: Population, Number of Public Libraries, Average Service Population per Library, in the United States, Britain and Japan[20]

	Population (million)	Number of Libraries	Average Service Population
United States	288	46,400	17,000
Britain	58	4,600	12,600
Japan	126	2,700	46,000

Table 4: Number of Public Libraries, in the City, Town and Village Level in Japan[21]

	Number of Municipalities: (a)	Number of Having PLs: (b)	(b)/(a) x 100
City	665	649	98
Town	1,969	914	46
Village	554	93	17

As indicated by Table 3, the average service population per library in the U.S. and Britain is 17,000 and 12,600 respectively. On the other hand, Japanese libraries have an average service population of 46,000. Therefore, the density of public libraries in Japan is much lower than the U.S. and Britain. Table 4 further indicates that despite most Japanese cities have their own public libraries, merely 46 percent of towns and 17 percent of villages have public library facilities. In other words, there are many areas not covered by public libraries. Moreover, in case with large cities, the number of branch libraries is limited and each library usually end up having to cater for as many as 100,000~150,000 citizens. For example, Kobe city has a population of 1,500,000 people and 11 public libraries. Therefore, each library has an average service population of approximately 150,000.

In terms with developed countries such as the U.S. and Britain, public libraries' Internet and computer facilities plays an important role in reducing gaps between the information-rich and the information-poor. In other words, the public libraries have crucial roles in promoting social inclusion. However, earlier statements by Betty Turock and Chris Smith are only applicable in countries where libraries are located within the reach of all.

Nevertheless, the situation of Japanese public libraries as indicated in Table 3 and 4 is quite different from that of the U.S. and Britain. Each Japanese public library is making an effort to provide Internet and computer facilities within each service area to eliminate digital divides between individuals. However, taking a look at the national level, these sincere efforts are actually increasing gaps between the information-rich and the information-poor. In other words, public libraries have ironical roles in promoting social exclusion.

Informationization of public libraries is indispensable and social inclusion is an essential theme not only for Japanese public libraries but for all libraries in all developing countries. However, in this process, it is a prerequisite to improve the density of public libraries to the U.S. and Britain levels. This task should not be restricted to Japan, but should be carried out in all countries.

Notes

1) Charles R. McClure, John Carlo Bertot, Douglas L. Zweizig, *Public Libraries and the Internet: Study Results, Policy Issues, and Recommendations, Final Report, June 1994* (Washington D.C., National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 1994).

   John Carlo Bertot, Charles R. McClure, Douglas L. Zweizig, *The 1996 National Survey of Public Libraries and the Internet: Progress and Issues: Final Report* (Washington D.C., National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 1996).

   John Carlo Bertot, Charles R. McClure, Patricia Diamond Fletcher, *The 1997 National Survey of U.S. Public Libraries and the Internet: Final Report* (Washington D.C., National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 1997).

   John Carlo Bertot, Charles R. McClure, *The 1998 National Survey of U.S. Public Library Outlet Internet Connectivity: Final Report* (Washington D.C., National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 1998).

2) John Carlo Bertot, Charles R. McClure, *Public Libraries and the Internet 2000: Summary Findings*

and Data Tables (Washington D.C., NCLIS Web Release Version, September, 2000).

3) U.S. Department of Commerce, *Falling Through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion* (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000).

4) *Ibid.,* xiv.

5) "Figure II-13, Internet Access by Location," "Figure II-14, Internet Access by Location and Race/Ethnicity," *ibid.,* 46.

6) "Figure A33, Percent of U.S. Persons Using the Internet Outside the Home by Incomes, by Selected Places," *ibid.,* p. 110.

7) "Figure A34, Percent of U.S. Persons Using the Internet Outside the Home by Race/Hispanic Origin, by Selected Places, " *ibid.,* p. 110.

8) *Ibid.,* p. 47.

9) *Ibid.,* p. 89.

10) U.S. Department of Commerce, *A Nation Online: How Americans Are Expanding Their Use of the Internet* (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002) p. 41.

11) The Council for Museums and Archives and Libraries, *New Library: The People's Network,* 1997.

12) Library and Information Commission, *Building the New Library Network: A Report to Government* (1998); Parry, David, *Virtually New: Creating the Digital Collection: A Report to the Library and Information Commission* (1998).

13) *Financing Our Public Library Service: Four Subjects for Debate* (London, HMSO, 1988).

14) Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries* (DCMS, 1999).

15) *Ibid.,* p. 8.

16) *Ibid.,* p. 12-13.

17) *"The Response of the Library Association to the DCMS* (Consultation Document, Libraries for All)," http://www.la-hq/org/uk/directory/prof_issues/ifa.html.

18) Betty J. Turock, *"Who Will Ride the Information Superhighway?"* (April 14, 1996).

19) *Libraries for All, op.cit.,* p. 4.

20) National Center for Education Statistics, http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003399.pdf (Fiscal Year 2001); UK Library and Information Statistics Tables 2003, http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/dils/lisu/list03/gen03.html

21) Japan Library Association, *Libraries in Japan* (Tokyo, Japan Library Association, 2003) p. 26-27.