THE PUBLIC PLACE OF CENTRAL LIBRARIES: FINDINGS FROM TORONTO AND VANCOUVER

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The last decade has seen a relative boom in the construction of central public libraries across North America. The social roles these public institutions play for society is a pressing issue in light of decreasing public funding, advancing information technologies, and an economy increasingly information-driven and decentralized. This article examines the public’s use of two of Canada’s largest central libraries, the Toronto Reference Library and the Vancouver Public Library Central Branch. The data gathered support the notion that these libraries fulfill many of the normative ideals of a successful public place and serve as important resources in the increasingly information-driven, knowledge-based economy. We conclude that private market interests encroaching upon this institution, and not advances in information technologies, represent a threat to its multifaceted role as a successful public place.

Introduction: The Public Library in Society

The public library is a space that has played a pivotal role in the public life and public culture of North American cities. Indeed, the library is a civic institution with a cultural mission deemed so vital to our collective well-being that it has been publicly funded by the taxpayer for much of the last 150 years. Tax-supported public libraries in North America and Europe have developed since the mid-1800s. In the United States, New Hampshire, in 1849, was the first state to enact legis-
lation enabling the establishment of public libraries [1, p. 185], while in Canada, Ontario was the first province to do so, in 1882 [2]. Other states and provinces followed suit throughout the mid- and late-nineteenth century, so that by the 1890s, the public library was firmly entrenched in municipalities throughout North America. After the Library Act of 1850 [3], a similar diffusion of public libraries occurred throughout England as well. In all three countries, libraries that had existed in the modern industrial environment prior to such legislation were private libraries, being either subscription libraries requiring a membership fee [4] or circulating libraries (a for-profit commercial rental enterprise). Public library legislation effectively ended both types of private libraries and brought the library squarely into the realm of public space, where it remains today.

Thus, over the past century, the public library has become a principle institution of the public sphere: it is both an instrument and a site of public communication and is thus a principle product and producer of public culture. The physical library itself is a material expression of shared meanings and values of public life. This notion is especially true of central public libraries, which make a physical statement about the library as an integral part of civic culture and make visible a symbolic statement about knowledge in society [5]. In this regard, the importance of the central library is no less palpable today than it was at the turn of the previous century. The last decade or so has witnessed a relative boom in the construction of central public libraries across North America. San Francisco, Chicago, Phoenix, Vancouver, and numerous other large and midsized cities have chosen to construct or refurbish large and costly central libraries ([6, p. 67] and [7]). It could be argued that at no time since the construction of Carnegie libraries at the turn of the last century has so much money been directed toward the construction and renewal of central libraries. But what does this renaissance of the central public library mean? What is the role that is imagined for these libraries, and how do they fit into the changing character of contemporary North American cities? An examination of the social roles these public institutions play for society is a pressing issue in light of decreasing public funding, advancing information technologies, and an economy increasingly information-driven and decentralized.

Accordingly, this article is about public libraries—in particular, central libraries and the role they play in promoting and sustaining a vibrant public culture in today’s large cities. The primary question we

4. This article investigates those and other questions in relation to a particular type of library: the central library. The research reported here is part of a larger, funded study exploring
seek to answer arises from the library's traditional role as a successful public place amid the emergent aforementioned cultural changes: In the context of a North American culture of increasing privatization and advancing information technologies, are contemporary central libraries successful public places for their users? We answer this question by examining the design aspirations, user profile, user behavior, and library staff experiences at two major libraries in Canada, the Toronto Reference Library (TRL) and the Vancouver Public Library Central Branch (VPL). We conclude that private market interests encroaching upon this institution, and not advances in information technologies, represent a threat to its multifaceted role as a successful public place and consequently undermine the ideological underpinnings of the institution itself. We hope that this exploration will provide valuable insight into the social roles and public place of contemporary central public libraries, which will, in turn, indicate if the longstanding ideological underpinnings of the institution continue to be fulfilled amid ongoing changes to our public places.

The Condition of Contemporary Public Space

Before exploring the library as a type of public space, it is worthwhile considering how public space is defined and conceptualized. What are the public spaces of our cities? At one time in the not-too-distant past, the answer to this question would have been relatively straightforward and would have included identifiable features where the public is free to mingle in the company of strangers, such as streets, walkways, boulevards and promenades, the market square, parks and public gardens, and tax-supported municipal buildings such as the city hall, galleries, schools, and libraries. The Canadian legal definition of public space is "a place where the public goes, a place to which the public has or is permitted to have access and any place of public resort" [8, p. 302], which includes privately owned, publicly used spaces, such as movie theaters, restaurants, and parking lots. Other definitions are more open-ended and all encompassing, such as "a shared environment" [9, p. 7] or a place where two or more people occupy or experience the same place, such as a sidewalk or a television program [10]. Uniting most definitions are the characteristics of social interaction, especially among strangers; of social diversity; inclusivity and community; ease of

the social and functional roles of large central libraries in an era of decentralization, privatization, and emergent information technologies.
spatial access and proximity; and a high degree of user control [11, pp. 7-11; 12, p. 118; 13, pp. 16-24; 14, pp. 8-24; and 15, p. 262].

Unfortunately, there have been a number of developments over the latter half of the twentieth century that have diminished the design and number of public places (let alone successful ones) on the North American urban landscape. Perhaps nothing has reshaped our public streets, sidewalks, neighborhoods, and daily journeys more than the private automobile. Cars have removed people from the public sidewalk and the possibility of chance encounters with friends and strangers alike. Encased in semiprivate metal containers, few of us have the opportunity to physically interact with others in our day-to-day travels. Furthermore, the rise of residential suburbia, which is premised on the private automobile, has in many instances added to this social alienation. Lyn Lofland makes the observation that it is a “peculiar fact that a significant proportion of houses built since 1945 have as their dominant feature the prominence of the garage,” prompting her to refer to modern suburban homes as “autoresidences” [16, pp. 201-2]. As well, in contemporary urban residential developments, the design norm tends to turn its back on the public street: sidewalks may be limited to one side of the street, or none at all, and inward-oriented backyard sundecks replace the front porch. The uniformity of land use and housing stock serves to minimize social and class diversity and encourages homogeneity, or “megamonneighborhoods” [16, p. 200].

The aforementioned examples demonstrate that the type and variety of spaces within which we carry out our daily activities within the contemporary city have changed dramatically. Some of the older, established forms of public space (such as parks) have declined due to lack of funding and a concern over safety, particularly in the central city, to be replaced by the rise of the suburban shopping mall and other related spaces (perceived to be public space but actually private consumptive space). Accordingly, the notion of what is considered to be public space has become rather murky. Shopping malls have become a surrogate public space for many citizens who are engaged in a wide variety of pursuits within them, including shopping, walking, visiting, relaxing, reading, observing, networking with peers and colleagues, hanging out, and engaging in various sorts of resistance against authority [17-19].

Ironically, the shopping mall, ranked third after home and work or school as the most popular place used by Canadians, is a “public” place in that it is used by and open to the public, but it is privately owned and subject to the control and management of private interests: not everyone is welcomed in a shopping mall [20]. The same exclusivity operates at the larger scale of “indoor” or “underground” cities. Both
Toronto and Montreal, for example, have extensive labyrinths of interior, shop-lined corridors in their downtowns. These privately owned, publicly used places restrict access according to their own in-house regulations, thereby negating the neutrality of a truly public place and seriously diminishing the users’ control [21]. Indeed, in a consumer-oriented society like ours, many of the communal meeting grounds—the civic sites where we gather as a community of strangers—are first and foremost entertainment and retail spaces. As a result, themed and fantasy environments, intended to attract customers and move products, are pervasive in virtually every city [22]. People and activities that may detract from the fantasy are barred entrance [23]. Gated communities, downtown video surveillance cameras, “no loitering” signs, and private security agencies policing privately owned, publicly used sites are indicative of our society’s growing perception of the need to secure or “harden” places: to keep them safe and secure for those who belong. Such control mechanisms can alienate and discourage a sense of belonging and community for large segments of society. Of course, such spatial segregation also reflects the growing economic gap between the affluent and the poor.

Today’s emergent “new economy” also is changing the nature of our public places. As we shift from industrial-capitalism to postindustrial or late capitalism, electronic communication and information management, processing, and production are expanding and becoming central to the economy, an economy where “consumerism” has become the dominate ideology ([24], [25, p. 615], and [26, p. 394]). Information technology—the lifeline of the information economy—is altering the spatial organization of our cities and the ways we interact with one another. Due to the rapid transmission of electronic information from any one place to any other place, location is becoming irrelevant, and the emergent urban landscape is freed from conventional restrictions imposed by space. Cities are thus increasingly decentralized, fragmented, and seemingly organized by chance [27–30]. For example, so-called edge cities or technoburbs are centerless urban developments of high-tech, nonplace-based, global industries, with shopping malls composed of predominantly transnational retail chains, and residential suburbs designed in a standard “international” motif, all of which is connected by highways, both asphalt and virtual ([22–23] and [31–34]). There is no downtown central meeting site in such a network of fragmented land uses oriented primarily toward the consumption of goods and services. In such an economy geared toward personal consumption, public institutions (hospitals, libraries, museums, schools, universities) are increasingly challenged by politicians and citizens alike who adhere to a user-pay mentality suspect of universal services
for all. When underfunded by governments and compelled to compete for private philanthropists who are global in scope and not necessarily committed to any one institution, city, country, or continent, such public institutions necessarily turn more and more toward private, corporate sponsors and commercial ventures to fill the financial void [35]. Such public/private ventures modify our public places and public culture in ways we as yet do not fully understand.

Many scholars suggest that processes such as these (and these examples are by no means exhaustive) have diminished the "publicness" of our communal meeting grounds [36–38]. As a general rule, the greater the control exerted over access to a space, the more private it is, and, conversely, the less control over access to a space, the more public its nature. As a society, we have drifted toward a preference for private spaces where access by the public at large is increasingly controlled and segregated. This tendency diminishes social interaction and diversity, if only because strangers of differing ages, classes, ethnicities, genders, and religions have less opportunity to mingle in the same physical space. Clearly, public places where people are at complete liberty to choose their activities (within the reasonable confines of the law) are, if not diminishing, certainly threatened by the these processes.

The Public Library as a Success Public Space

Given the murkiness surrounding the identification of which spaces are public and which are private or semiprivate, it seems rather futile to attempt to define public space by a characteristic such as ownership or a physical attribute such as openness. Contemporary public spaces can perhaps be more usefully thought of in terms of the activities that take place within them and the sociocultural functions that these spaces perform. Accordingly, for the purposes of this discussion, the description of public space that is most applicable can be found in the work of Sharon Zukin [15], who takes a broad view of public space as a constantly changing context as perceived by the various public and private interests who construct and use those spaces. Zukin focuses upon the dual notions of public culture and public space, which are intimately linked and are mutually reinforcing. As she notes,

Public culture and public space are socially constructed ... produced by the many social encounters that make up daily life in the streets, shops and parks—the space in which we experience public life in cities. The right to be in these spaces, to use them in certain ways, to invest them with a sense of ourselves and our communities—to claim them as ours and to be claimed in
turn by them—make up a constantly changing public culture. . . . Yet public space is inherently democratic. The question of who can occupy public space, and so define an image of the city, is open-ended. [15, pp. 10–11]

Of particular interest in the quote above is the phrase “the right to be in these spaces, to use them in certain ways, to invest them with a sense of ourselves” [15, pp. 10–11]. Public life is produced and reproduced by social practices that transpire in specific places—public places—and the library is certainly one of those enduring and successful public places. According to Ray Oldenburg [9], highly successful public spaces exhibit several characteristics. They are sites of neutral ground where people are free to come and go at their leisure and all feel welcomed; regardless of social rank, people are treated equally by the host. The primary activity is information exchange, be it intellectual discourse over a desk or casual conversation over a coffee. They operate beyond the regular weekday working hours to accommodate visitors during evenings and weekends. Ease of access is a priority, often locating near public transportation in order to serve the widest possible sector of society. They attract a regular clientele, those who use the place on a routine basis, be it daily, weekly, monthly, or annually. The patrons themselves create a dynamic and animated ambience through their own activities, diversity, and vitality. Such places are taken for granted: they are ordinary and widely known parts of society, an expected norm. Consequently, their users hold a deep sense of place attachment: such places are part of their community, part of their social and cultural fabric, places with special meanings to many people.

North America’s central public libraries certainly exhibit these qualities to varying degrees, or at the very least, aspire to fulfill these criteria. Libraries have traditionally been idealized as a spatially unrestricted communal meeting ground for all members of a pluralistic society, a shared site where people of various classes, ethnicities, religions and cultures mingle to create the “heterogeneity of open democracy” [38, p. 591]. As Liz Greenhalgh and Ken Worpole point out, one of the preeminent values of the public library is “neutral space, as democratic, non-sectarian territory. Urban cultures need free space as much as they need working space and selling space: the life of towns needs convivial public spaces” [39, p. 12]. The engineering of such a physical space signifies the priority we as a society assign to creating, storing, and accessing information and knowledge for distribution throughout all levels of society. The social practices that transpire inside the library are themselves expressions of shared meanings and values of public life. The acts of conversation; of reading, writing, and learning; of viewing; of socializing; of playing and working in the presence of others
are the active practice of our technologies, values, ideals, and public culture. The underlying ideology of central public libraries is thus inherently democratic, neutral, educational, and inclusive.

In relation to the ideas outlined in the previous paragraphs about the changing nature of public space, the characteristics of successful public places, and the ideological foundation of public libraries, three important questions emerge. First, as the public spaces of the city have become more dispersed, fragmented, and ambiguous, Is the notion of a "central" library still a desirable and viable concept? Second, in light of the changing nature of public places and public culture, and the emergent information economy and its information technologies, Are the ideals of successful public places currently being fulfilled in today's central libraries? And finally, Is the ideological premise of central public libraries challenged by any of these aforementioned changes?

Purpose of Study, Methods, and Data Collection

This article is part of a larger funded study of two of Canada's largest central public libraries. The overall purpose of the study is to explore the role of large central libraries as a type of public space within a changing urban context. The focus of the research is on large central libraries in major urban centers, and as such, the research does not examine branch libraries scattered throughout metropolitan areas, though they are also worthy of study. The principle direction of investigation for the research is the following: within the context of a North American culture of decreasing public space, increasing privatization, and advancing information technologies, Are contemporary central libraries necessary and successful public places? To investigate this broad question, the study specifically focuses upon the following: Who are the patrons of central libraries? How are central libraries designed, and What do library users think of the design elements of their central libraries? How do patrons view the central library's services and amenities? What uses do they make of these libraries? And finally, What insights can patrons and library staff provide about the ongoing role of the central library in large urban centers?

The two sites chosen for the study were the Toronto Reference Library (formerly the Metro Toronto Reference Library), built in 1977, and the Vancouver Public Library Central Branch, built in 1996. These two central libraries were chosen because they are among the largest public libraries in Canada, are located in the downtown cores of large urban centers, and both represent a significant capital investment on
the part of their respective city councils. As well, both were controversial libraries when they were constructed, and each was designed to make a bold statement about the important role of central libraries and access to information within their respective city. Finally, while the two libraries are similar in many respects, they differ on two important dimensions. First, they were constructed in different eras—Toronto’s, just prior to the advent of widespread electronic resources, and Vancouver’s, in the era of the information highway. Second, Toronto has a noncirculating reference collection, while Vancouver has a fully circulating collection. It was thought that these differences might bring out some interesting comparisons on the role of central libraries.

Four different methods were used to gather the necessary data by our research team (two researchers and two research assistants). The intent and design aspirations of each library were identified through local news article and news magazine archives, academic journals, and in-house library publications. A triangulated methodology, including an extensive written patron survey; face-to-face interviews with a smaller sample of patrons; in-depth interviews with library staff; and nonobtrusive patron observational surveys called seating sweeps were used on-site to investigate library patron profile, patron behavior, and library staff experiences. This article reports primarily on the results of the written survey of library patrons and the seating sweeps but enhances these findings with material from the interviews where appropriate.

The written patron survey consisted of thirty closed and open-ended questions developed in consultation with librarians at the Toronto Reference Library and Vancouver Public Library Central Branch at Library Square. These surveys were based, in part, on the American Library Association’s roles for public libraries [40] and a previous user survey undertaken by the Toronto Reference Library in 1990. The face-to-face interviews were composed of nine open-ended questions addressing patron use of the library, opinions about the building’s form and function, and attitudes toward acceptable and unacceptable patron behaviors. The in-depth library staff interviews consisted of nineteen open-ended questions concerning patron behavior, building design, job responsibilities, and general attitudes toward the pros and cons of the library itself. The seating sweeps consisted of thrice daily

5. All large urban centers have their own unique characteristics, but because of their sheer size and diversity, share common issues related to the development of urban space and civic institutions. Canada’s three largest cities are Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. It was considered, despite their differences in population, that Toronto and Vancouver were representative of large cities in Canada and in North America and thus were appropriate sites for research regarding the role of large central public libraries.
observational walks, or "sweeps," through the library, making systematic and detailed observations of sixty different variables concerning who is present in specific locations and what activities they are conducting at specific times of the day. This method has been used primarily in studies of commercial spaces, such as shopping centers, but it can be used in any space that is frequented by members of the public. It is a good technique for determining the nuances of public usage of a space ([14] and [41–45]).

Data collection in Toronto and Vancouver took place from July 5–15 and September 27 to October 6, 1999, respectively. The written survey data was collected during the first day and a half of the study at each library. Two members of the research team stood at the turnstile entrance to the library and handed out questionnaires to patrons as they entered the library. They were asked to fill out the survey, if they had time, and to deposit completed surveys in a deposit box at the library exit. Pencils were provided to those who needed them. At TRL, 1,880 surveys were handed out, with 864 usable surveys returned, for a response rate of 46 percent. At VPL, 1,850 surveys were distributed,

6. On most of these days, sweeps were conducted during three time periods: from 10:15–11:30 A.M., 2:00–3:30 P.M., and 6:00–7:30 P.M. The only exceptions to this pattern were days on which the libraries did not have evening hours (that is, Friday and Saturday). To prepare the coding work sheets, the research team (two researchers and two research assistants) went through the building and developed locational acronyms for every type of location within the building and its immediate external environs (for example, WC = work carrel, WT = worktable, CW = computer workstation). We also counted all of the seats within the library, such as carrels, workstations, benches, and sofas, to be able to judge how busy or crowded the library was on a particular day and time by comparing the number of people observed against the number of seats within the building. The variables to be recorded about each person included a variety of details that could be readily observed, including approximate age range, gender, types of belongings (such as briefcase, knapsack, walking aid, cell phone, Walkman) and types of activities in which the person was engaged (such as reading, talking, eating, searching, interacting with staff, or using technology). The work sheet was organized so that these variables simply could be ticked off for each person observed.

7. These months were used at the request of the two libraries and in conjunction with the researchers' availability. Weather was comparable during both study periods. Nearby educational institutions were active in both instances.

8. The written survey at TRL was distributed on July 5 and the morning of July 6, 1999; the VPL survey was distributed on September 27 and the morning of September 28, 1999.

9. In Toronto, 1,880 surveys were handed out, and 999 surveys were returned, with an overall response rate of 50 percent; in Vancouver, 1,850 surveys were handed out, and 1,200 surveys were returned, with an overall response rate of 65 percent. To be considered usable, it was decided that each survey had to have fifteen or more completed questions. Using this approach, 864 usable surveys were returned in Toronto, for a final response rate of 46 percent, and 1,077 usable surveys were returned in Vancouver, for a final response rate of 58 percent. Such response rates are considered excellent for a survey of this type.
and 1,077 usable surveys were returned, for a 58 percent response rate. One hundred face-to-face patron interviews were conducted at both libraries. Each researcher conducted twenty-five, three-to-five-minute interviews on their assigned floor(s), writing down responses on the question sheet. Interviewees were selected by chance, alternating between genders. The in-depth library staff interviews used an open-ended question format, lasted an average of thirty-five minutes, and were tape-recorded. The seating sweeps were conducted for a six-day period, Monday through Saturday, to obtain an entire week’s profile.\textsuperscript{10}

As for data analysis, coding schemes were developed for the surveys, patrons interviews, and the sweeps, and the responses/observations were entered into data matrixes, created with the SPSS Version 8 software package, for analysis. Because the seating sweeps generated such a large amount of data, it was later decided to use only a three-day sample from each site.\textsuperscript{11} Accordingly, 2,779 observations were analyzed from Toronto and 4,368 from Vancouver. Staff interviews were transcribed and relevant comments selected to augment the discussion below.

Overview of the Library Buildings

Before turning to the findings of the study, it is helpful to provide some background as to the development of the two libraries under consideration. In particular, it is noteworthy that both libraries were considered controversial at the time of their construction and inspired heated public debate about their value and design within each city.

Toronto Reference Library (TRL) was officially opened by the lieutenant-governor of Ontario in November 1977 [46]. Situated in “the very heart of the city and its transportation system” [47, unpaged pamphlet].

\textsuperscript{10} In Toronto, the week sampled included Friday, July 9; Saturday, July 10; and Monday, July 12, through Thursday, July 15; in Vancouver, the week sampled included Thursday, September 30; Friday, October 1; Saturday, October 2; and Monday, October 4, through Wednesday, October 6.

\textsuperscript{11} The quantity of data for the sweeps is extensive: thousands of observations were made during the week. For the sake of brevity, a sample of the data is used here. The two sweeps from Saturday, July 10, and Saturday, October 2; the three sweeps from Monday, July 12, and Monday, October 4; and the three sweeps from Wednesday, July 14, and Wednesday, October 6, are used. Monday was chosen because it is one of the busiest weekdays in the libraries. Wednesday was chosen because it falls directly in the middle of the week and as such may be most representative of a weekday, and Saturday was chosen as being representative of a weekend day. The three-day sample represents 2,779 observations of individuals within the TRL and 4,368 observations in the VPL, which is sufficient to be able to draw some conclusions about public usage of the library buildings.
phlet] one block north of the city's core intersection of Yonge and Bloor Streets, its eighty-two kilometers (fifty-one miles) of shelves and total area space of 36,417.5 square meters (391,852 square feet) made this library the biggest and most extensive public library in Canada [47–50]. Erected at the cost of $30 million dollars (more than the new Toronto City Hall at the time), it was not without its share of opponents: city politicians cried "monument building," and the press pounced on the "giant budget" with such headlines as "new library like a plush hotel" ([51, p. D6] and [52, p. C19]).

Indeed, this was a different kind of building than its Greco-Romanesque forerunners; it is a pyramid-shaped modernist megastructure of mortar, steel, and glass, but unlike most other modernist buildings of its day, where "form followed function" and "less was more," it was designed specifically to serve human sensibilities and to embody philosophical, spiritual, and moral values ([50] and [52]). The fundamental design principle is "openness." As Raymond Moriyama, the architect of the library states, "Our society is fundamentally technological and materialistic. We tend to focus on the cup itself, its material, its form, its colours and pattern. But the essence of the cup is the emptiness inside it. Without the need for this emptiness there is no need for the cup. In architecture, defined emptiness allows the observer, the user, to fill a space with himself, his thoughts and imagination. The choice and use of emptiness belong naturally and properly to the user. This was the key idea in the design concept of the Metropolitan Toronto Library" [50, p. 21].

The large, ceiling-to-floor, five-story atrium in the middle of the building provides a central core of light and space linking all levels, each of which becomes in effect a balcony furnished with natural objects: thousands of plants, natural skylight and, on the main floor, two ornamental pools with running water. No single major space on any one level is physically separated or walled from any other. Symbolically, the library space itself is structured in the image of "a veritable tree of knowledge," with the trunk the "empty" atrium and the branches the various disciplinary floors [50, p. 26]. According to Moriyama, this design is meant to diminish mental barriers by promoting mental connections among the disciplines, thus enhancing creativity, freedom of thought, and spiritual enlightenment [50].

Despite the controversy surrounding its construction, the Toronto Reference Library has provided a highly valued service within the city over the past twenty years. The 1,200,000 people who visit yearly (3,000–5,000 per day) have access to 4,300,000 items in its collections, including over 1,700,000 volumes of bound periodicals and hundreds of thousands of other items (posters, films, maps, pictures, slides, re-
cordings, microforms, special collections) ([47] and [53]). Materials are used nearly 3,200,000 times annually, with over 2,700,000 photocopies made on-site, and over 1,100,000 questions answered by librarians through information services and an “answerline” on topics ranging from business and consumer information to reference inquiries and health issues [47].

The Vancouver Public Library Central Branch (VPL) was officially opened some two decades after the TRL, in May 1995, amid a shower of colored particles descending upon an estimated six thousand revelers [55]. Located on Georgia Street West at Homer in the previously called no-man’s-land of downtown Vancouver, it was heralded as an anchor in an emergent “culture zone” in the east end of the city [56]. Built at a cost of $100 million dollars, including the twenty-one story office tower that is part of the Library Square multiple-use complex, the nine-floor library building provides seven floors, or 32,236 square meters (347,000 square feet) of floor space for twenty-four kilometers (14.8 miles) of shelves (levels eight and nine are leased by the Provincial Government for twenty years) [57–58].

With 1,300,000 items in-house, composed of 1 million books and 400,000 other items, such as photographs, recordings, videos, and miscellaneous items, this library is considered to be the “richest [circulating] public library collection in Canada” [59, p. F4]. With fiber-optic cabling; bar-code computer checkout, including four self-serve computer checkouts; computer-controlled heating, cooling, lighting, security, and life-safety systems; and 239 computer terminals, including 139 microcomputer workstations accessing the Internet and CD-ROM data-

12. West Edmonton Mall, Canada’s largest shopping center, attracts 1.2 million consumers in the month of January alone [54]. Relative to such commercial and entertainment places, the volume of pedestrian traffic at TRL and VPL might appear to pale in comparison. However, when one considers the smaller physical size of these libraries, their more focused and serious array of services, and their much greater diversity of users, the success of these institutions to attract people cannot be overstated.

13. TRL also provides a “virtual reference library” via a Web site whereby users have access to library collections, resources, and librarian expertise online. Its contents include special research tools, specialized Internet subject gateways, and an electronic commerce management tool for fee-based services involving business transactions. Begun in 1993, by 1997 their efforts were recognized by the Ontario Library and Information Association as the best example of an innovative technology for library users [49]. There are, of course, numerous other in-house services available to the public: reference desks, worktables and study carrels, a reading lounge, a news article room with national and international publications, art exhibits, the Canada Trust Gallery, a small playroom for children, a piano practice room, and a center for people with disabilities. Amenities such as public washrooms, telephones, community bulletin boards, lockers, drinking fountains, cafeteria and snack bar add to the convenience and sociability of the library as a dynamic, lively public space.
bases; and 200 catalog-accessible terminals available to the public, VPL is also the state-of-the-art Canadian public library at the dawn of the twenty-first century ([58] and [60]). The route to such distinguished status was not without its share of hurdles: it was "the most expensive and the most controversial civic project to be undertaken in Vancouver in a decade" [61, p. 44].

The mandate and design of the VPL was a public process, which necessarily encouraged vigorous public debate and input [62–65]. Over twenty-thousand residents submitted written comments on three designs, and the vast majority favored the design that the nine-member jury unanimously approved on the basis of its ability to "function as an efficient and enjoyable library, as well as an important symbolic centre of learning"—Moshe Safdie's "cube within an ellipse," dubbed by both admirers and detractors as the "Colosseum" [61, pp. 48–49 and 66, p. D3]. Opposition came in many forms. Some criticized the need for a new library, arguing that digital technology will replace books, such that "tomorrow's library will operate from a single [computerized] room" [67, p. B4]. Others took issue with the new location, noting it was not on a public transit line or oriented toward a retail strip, making easy access for all difficult [61]. Even the design competition was said to be flawed: it was an "outrageous . . . undermining of local culture" because all three design finalists were "outsiders" (that is, not from or living in Vancouver) [61, p. 46]. The most intense criticisms, however, were directed at the winning library design itself. To its detractors, the design was a "colossal blunder" and a "mistake" [68, p. B1]. Critics pointed out that it was expensive, Disneyfied, isolated from the city center, lacked dignity, and presented no Canadian identity ([61], [67–68], [69, p. 239], and [70]).

Opponents and proponents aside, Safdie's library design was certainly unprecedented; it was intended as a civic landmark—"a major public statement," "an eye-catcher" with a strong "sense of civic presence"—and, as such, it succeeded ([61, p. 44] and [71–72]). The library proper is a rectangular building inside a Roman Colosseum-like external ellipse, covered with reddish-brown granite composite. The interior centerpiece is a six-story high, curved and glass atrium flooded with natural light, which serves as foyer and retail area. The elliptical transparent wall and the flowing public space, which link the two exterior plazas on the north and south sides of the building, are its fundamental design elements [70]. In true postmodern form it uses ornamentation, symbolism, juxtaposition, and eclecticism on a grand scale in a widely recognizable aesthetic [73–74]. Safdie asserts that any resemblance between his design and an ancient Roman amphitheater is both superficial and inadvertent [61]. Said Safdie: "It bridges a kind
of high-tech futuristic experience at the same time as it provides the comfort and familiarity of something that is both ancient and traditional" [72, p. B3]. The mass appeal of his design, he maintains, has less to do with spectacle than with "the sense of memory of a great institution which has to do with library" [61, p. 48]. Sandra McKenzie states, "To me, a library is a place of contemplation, an oasis. It's not a department store, and it's not an extension of the sidewalk. It would have been meaningless [to have omitted the two plazas] because the streets [in this area] are not defined in an urban way. By making a building that sits back from the edge, with lots of open space around it, it becomes as much a piazza as a building. It will become a focal point for the district, pulling the chaotic edges around it together" [61, p. 45]. Not surprisingly, the architect's approach meshes well with the mission statement of the library: "The Vancouver Public Library will strive to meet the lifelong learning, reading, recreation and information needs of the people of Vancouver by providing information and related services through universal access to collections, use of facilities and assistance of staff" [75].

Indeed, the 2,240,000 people who visit annually (7,800 per day) take full advantage of the library's services and amenities [75–76]. The library has 700 underground parking spaces, and 1,200 seats for patrons, including tables and chairs, armchairs, study carrels, and group study rooms. Over 380,000 library cards are currently in use, a figure equivalent to 70 percent of the population of Vancouver [77]. Visitors check out over 8 million items, with youth under age nineteen responsible for 26 percent of items borrowed [78]. Library staff answer an average of 3,000 reference questions per day and host more than 100 events a year, including readings, art shows, and book launches [79–80].

Clearly, both libraries were built and continue to operate with the intent of playing a major role in the public culture of their respective

14. The library was designed for maximum convenience and flow, with centralized elevators and escalators, and common services on every floor (such as photocopiers and telephones) ([57]; [77]; and [81–82]). The library has numerous reading rooms with magazines, newspapers, and current popular books in some twenty languages. There is a literacy center, a language lab with tape recorders and VCRs, and hundreds of computer workstations to access electronic catalogs, CD-ROM databases, E-mail, and the Internet. There are Internet training sessions, outreach visits to seniors and shut-ins, and specialized materials for the young and the visually and hearing-impaired. Wide doorways, lever-type handles, handicapped parking spaces, and wheelchair compatible tables and desks promote ease of access for people with disabilities [83]. A children's library, a nursing alcove, a toddlers' play area, a preschoolers' and parents' lounge, and security-controlled entrances and washrooms on each floor make for a child-friendly environment ([81–82] and [84]). The art gallery, bulletin boards, book displays, auditorium, and eight atrium shops further enhance the library's vitality as a public place.
city. The Toronto Reference Library was intended as "a focus of civic attention, a new marker of Toronto's physical growth, and a new symbol of the city's aspirations as a cultural and intellectual center" [50, p. 20]. Vancouver's "Colosseum" was expected to become a great place for the city. Indeed, several of Oldenburg's criteria for successful places are met through the intent, design, and operation of these libraries. The mandates to serve all people, the symbolic and functional forms of the buildings, the wide variety of services and amenities offered, the millions of items borrowed, the millions and diversity of annual visitors, the hundreds of thousands of library card subscribers, the centralized locations near public transportation, and the extended hours of evening and weekend operation contribute to the creation of a dynamic social ambience—their inclusive, welcoming neutrality; their ease of access; and, of course, their role as sites of information exchange. Nevertheless, empirical data on the library users themselves, their uses of the library and its services, the priorities they prefer for the library, and the insights of library staff themselves, are necessary to substantiate the degree of success or failure that these libraries have attained as public places.

Findings of the Patron Survey, Seating Sweeps, Interviews, and Staff Interviews

The numerous findings generated from such an intensive empirical study go well beyond the scope of this article. The results reported here are limited to those that address the principle question and its subsidiaries. For comparative purposes and the sake of brevity, both libraries are discussed concurrently, and results from the patron survey, patron and staff interviews, and the seating sweeps are integrated. For the most part, the findings are given in terms of basic descriptive statistics (numbers of responses and percentages), but in some cases, findings from additional analyses in the form of the crosstabulation of two variables are included.

Patron Profile

Library patrons were almost exclusively inhabitants of their respective cities, resided less than an hour away from the library, and, for the most part, arrived alone (see table 1). About 60 percent of TRL patrons came from the former City of Toronto, and nine in ten came from former Toronto and its immediate environs. By the same token, about 70 percent of VPL patrons came from the City of Vancouver, and almost all came from Vancouver and its immediate environs. At both
sweeps, a large majority of patrons took thirty minutes or less to travel to the library, and about one-quarter traveled for thirty-one to sixty minutes. Consistently, at each library, three-quarters or more of the patrons came to the library alone, and of those who were accompanied, most patrons came with friends. Younger patrons were more likely than older patrons to come to the library in groups of two or more, and females were more likely than males to be accompanied by someone.

In terms of gender and age, the surveys revealed some interesting findings. The surveys indicated that more library patrons were males than females (see table 2), which is contrary to other studies of public libraries, which historically show more females than males as patrons [85–87]. Our finding was also confirmed by the seating sweeps, where the patrons observed in the library were more often male at both sites.

With respect to age, the patron surveys revealed that the clientele of the libraries is relatively young. At TRL, about 75 percent of the patrons were under the age of forty-four, just over 50 percent were under the age of thirty-four, and less than 5 percent were over sixty-five years old. Similarly, at VPL, about 50 percent of the patrons were under the age of thirty-four, 33 percent were in the age twenty-five to thirty-four range, and just 7 per cent were over sixty-five years old. The seating sweeps verified this finding: at TRL, there were equal numbers of observed patrons under thirty years of age and between thirty to sixty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence, Travel Time, and Companions of Respondents</th>
<th>Proportion of Respondents (%)</th>
<th>Toronto (N = 864)</th>
<th>Vancouver (N = 1,077)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residence:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City proper</td>
<td>518 (60)</td>
<td>764 (71)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbs</td>
<td>259 (30)</td>
<td>280 (26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within province</td>
<td>61 (7)</td>
<td>22 (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>26 (3)</td>
<td>11 (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel time (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 15 minutes</td>
<td>190 (22)</td>
<td>237 (22)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–30 minutes</td>
<td>363 (42)</td>
<td>539 (50)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–60</td>
<td>242 (28)</td>
<td>226 (21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 1 hour</td>
<td>69 (8)</td>
<td>75 (7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanying people:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>674 (78)</td>
<td>819 (76)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>138 (16)</td>
<td>215 (20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more</td>
<td>52 (6)</td>
<td>43 (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
years old, with a noticeable lack of people over the age of sixty. VPL also had a small percentage of observed patrons over sixty years old, but two-thirds of patrons were under age thirty and over a quarter were between thirty and sixty years of age. Male patrons generally tended to be older than females at both libraries.

Users were generally well educated and culturally diverse (see table 3). Two-thirds of patrons held a university degree, community college diploma, or postgraduate degree, and a further 20–25 percent of patrons at both sites had at least some university or college education. Almost all patrons spoke English, and one in five spoke French. However, an astonishing array of languages beyond English or French were spoken (sixty-five in Toronto, fifty in Vancouver), with the top four languages being identical at both sites (a surprising finding in itself): Chinese (including both Cantonese and Mandarin), Spanish, Korean, and Japanese.

As to the occupations of patrons (table 3), about 30 percent of patrons placed themselves in a professional category, with close to 10 percent of patrons in each of the artistic/literary, clerical/technical/labor, retired, and unemployed categories. About one-quarter at each site were students, and, of those, over half were attending university. Retired people and those in the clerical/technical/labor categories tended to be a slightly lower proportion of patrons at TRL than at VPL. Homemakers, the self-employed, and tourists were a small proportion at both libraries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex and Age of Respondents</th>
<th>Toronto (N = 864)</th>
<th>Vancouver (N = 1,077)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>510 (59)</td>
<td>657 (61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>354 (41)</td>
<td>420 (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 18</td>
<td>26 (3)</td>
<td>11 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>147 (17)</td>
<td>183 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>294 (34)</td>
<td>356 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>181 (21)</td>
<td>215 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>121 (14)</td>
<td>162 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>60 (7)</td>
<td>75 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 65</td>
<td>35 (4)</td>
<td>75 (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 3
EDUCATION, LANGUAGES, AND OCCUPATION OF RESPONDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proportion of Respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toronto (N = 864)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>9 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some secondary</td>
<td>43 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school diploma</td>
<td>69 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some university or college</td>
<td>164 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University or college graduates</td>
<td>354 (41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some postgraduate university</td>
<td>52 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University postgraduate degree</td>
<td>173 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages spoken:*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>812 (84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>164 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western European</td>
<td>156 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>121 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Arabic</td>
<td>86 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>61 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern European</td>
<td>52 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>17 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>224 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>95 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>69 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>9 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>155 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management/administration</td>
<td>52 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artistic/literary</td>
<td>86 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/research</td>
<td>60 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/retail</td>
<td>26 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>35 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>35 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>9 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist</td>
<td>9 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This section does not total 100 percent due to multiple languages spoken.

Reported and Observed Library Use
When asked why they came to TRL or VPL instead of branch libraries, the most common response (table 4) focused on the large and comprehensive collections held by the central libraries. Convenience was the second most frequent response, with about 20 percent of patrons in
TABLE 4
REASONS FOR USE OF LIBRARY, TIME OF VISIT, LENGTH OF STAY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for use of central library:</th>
<th>Toronto (N = 864)</th>
<th>Vancouver (N = 1,077)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete/large collection</td>
<td>328 (38)</td>
<td>506 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient location</td>
<td>173 (20)</td>
<td>441 (41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique materials/services</td>
<td>104 (12)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet/comfortable</td>
<td>69 (8)</td>
<td>65 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous other</td>
<td>190 (22)</td>
<td>65 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of visit:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>380 (44)</td>
<td>452 (42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>389 (45)</td>
<td>506 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>52 (6)</td>
<td>75 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>43 (5)</td>
<td>44 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of stay:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 30 minutes</td>
<td>52 (6)</td>
<td>97 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–59 minutes</td>
<td>164 (19)</td>
<td>366 (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–1.9 hours</td>
<td>311 (36)</td>
<td>344 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–3.9 hours</td>
<td>251 (29)</td>
<td>205 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 hours or more</td>
<td>86 (10)</td>
<td>65 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Toronto, and about 40 percent in Vancouver, citing this reason. Ranking third at TRL was its unique materials and/or services, while quiet and comfort were cited for VPL.

When asked if they borrowed from other libraries, 64 percent of respondents in Toronto indicated that they did, which is understandable given TRL’s reference-only collection. Nevertheless, these people still used the central library, suggesting that the library’s noncirculating and unique reference collection is actually a major appeal. In Vancouver, despite that fact that the city is well endowed with branch libraries throughout the metropolitan area, a surprising number of patrons indicated that they did not borrow materials from other libraries. The VPL Central Branch’s circulating collection and premises is a major draw for at least 60 percent of respondents, who indicated that they do not use other circulating branches. Thus, the VPL serves as the primary branch library for the majority of its patrons.

The time of day patrons frequent the libraries (see table 4) suggests they are used as places of work rather than simply recreation. Patrons of all ages and sexes were most likely to visit the libraries early in the
week, particularly during the afternoon, and were less likely to visit on a weekend when recreational pursuits are more likely to occur.\textsuperscript{15} Further, patrons were likely to have a long stay, with over three-quarters of the patrons remaining in the library for at least an hour and just under half remaining for two or more hours.

Further evidence of the studious behavior of patrons was evident during the seating sweeps and survey results. Just over 50 percent of all TRL patrons and just over 60 percent of all VPL patrons observed in the library were engaged in reading. This activity far surpassed any other. Writing (20 percent TRL and 21 percent VPL), talking (14 percent and 16 percent, respectively) and using the library computer workstations (14 percent and 13 percent, respectively) were the other major activities observed. In both libraries, older patrons were observed reading more than their younger counterparts, and younger patrons were observed talking more than older ones. Females were also observed talking more than males.

Patrons were split in terms of how often they visited the library, with close to half of patrons visiting only a few times a year or less, and the other half visiting two or three times a month or more. Finally, almost half of the patrons planned on patronizing stores and shops in the area adjacent the library, indicating substantial economic benefits for nearby shops and services.

When asked about their primary reason for visiting the central library, the most common survey response at TRL was “looking for information”; at VPL it was “to borrow or return materials” followed closely by “looking for information” (see table 5). However, when multiple responses were considered, the most common reasons at TRL included looking for information, reading, and studying with personal materials; at VPL the most common reasons included looking for information, borrowing/returning materials, reading, browsing, and studying with personal materials. These responses fit well with the actual activities observed during the sweeps. For example, the emphasis on private study and reading is reinforced by the observation that patrons of all ages and both sexes generally had within their possession books (about seven in ten) and knapsacks to carry their books (about six in ten). Further, patrons generally were located at worktables or study carrels (about six in ten at TRL and four in ten at VPL) to conduct their reading and study. Older patrons were more likely to be seen at worktables, and younger patrons were slightly more likely to be seen at study car-

\textsuperscript{15} This observation could have been attributable to the time of year in which the studies were conducted and may or may not reflect weekend patterns during the months of fall, winter, or spring.
TABLE 5
PURPOSES OF VISIT AND USE OF ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of visit:*</th>
<th>Proportion of Respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toronto (N = 864)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for information</td>
<td>328 (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrow/return materials</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read</td>
<td>251 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>199 (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Internet</td>
<td>138 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browse</td>
<td>121 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photocopy</td>
<td>78  (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use E-mail</td>
<td>69  (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of electronic resources:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>138 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>199 (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>216 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>173 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>138 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of electronic resources:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>104 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>164 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>242 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>207 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vital</td>
<td>147 (17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This section does not total 100 percent due to multiple purposes of visit.
Toronto Reference Library is noncirculating.

rels. Younger patrons and males were more likely to be seen at computer workstations.

Whether through electronic or paper sources, looking for information on a subject is an endeavor in which large numbers of patrons engage on a daily basis, and personal interviews with library users at each site revealed a wide array of school, work, and personal projects requiring information held at the central library. Numerous patrons commented that they had come to the central library because they were assured that the materials needed for their research would be available, echoing the finding from the surveys that the large, comprehensive collection of the central library is highly valued. School-related research primarily involved searching for information related to specific topics for essays and theses, such as African American culture, Canadian securities, gerontology, crisis management, and art history. In many cases, school-related research was for advanced graduate work,
and a number of individuals interviewed stated that the resources of the central library were extremely important for both masters and doctoral thesis projects. Work-related examples included research about insurance brokering, small business setup, financial management, nuclear waste, business publishing, literary journalism, property records, marketing, documentary film production, and language translation, to name a few. Many of those interviewed indicated that they had been sent to the central library by their employer specifically to carry out the needed research. Research for personal projects were also wide ranging, including such projects as genealogy, filmography, writing fiction and nonfiction books, painting, auto repair, biblical commentary, aviation history, higher education programs, welding and metal fabrication, and travel.

Although searching for information was perhaps the single most important reason for visiting the central library, reading, studying, and borrowing (the latter at VPL) were also frequently cited reasons. Again, with respect to studying and reading, interviews with patrons provided many insights into the types of studying and reading in which they engaged. As to studying, patron interviews indicated that the major reasons for using the library to study primarily fell into three main categories: studying for university or college courses in a wide variety of disciplines, preparing for particular exams (such as the SAT or LSAT), and studying English as a second language. The fact that the majority of patrons consider these libraries to be spacious, quiet, and comfortable, with many aesthetically pleasing panoramic views from study carrels and worktables, only enhances their attractiveness for studying and reinforces their place appeal as a study destination.

While studying seemed to be a relatively consistent activity, reading as a library-based activity varied greatly. Some patrons dropped into the library occasionally to pass time by reading whatever caught their fancy, while others came to the library regularly to read specific items such as news articles, magazines, or particular kinds of books. For the latter, purposeful reading was an important part of how they structured their days. For example, one retired gentleman explained that he always identified areas of culture in which he sought to improve his knowledge and would use the vast resources of the central library to educate himself. His current project was to learn more about art history, and he was currently spending a large part of every day (usually from about 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.) reading about Renaissance art and artists. He noted that he might read on one topic for six months or a year before moving on to a new topic. A previous area in which he had read extensively was religions of the world. He also noted that coming to the spaciousness of the library was a wonderful antidote to his small,
cramped apartment, and that he enjoyed feeling part of the larger community by coming to the library. This patron remarked that he could not understand why more seniors did not come out to enjoy the wonderful resources of the central library, rather than remaining isolated and alone.

Patron interviews further suggest that there did appear to be some differences in expectations about reading at the two central libraries. Because of its circulating collection, patrons interviewed at VPL were far more likely to say that they had come to the library to find materials for pleasure reading, which they would then borrow and read elsewhere. Patrons at TRL were more likely to indicate that they had come to the central library to read on-site, and fewer of them indicated that they would be reading purely for pleasure, although certainly some did mention this activity. For instance, several TRL patrons indicated that they had come to read books from the large multilanguage literature collection at TRL, through which they felt more connected to home.

As we have noted elsewhere, although successful public places enable the people using them to feel that they have a certain amount of control as to what they may do in those places, there nevertheless are certain accepted norms about what is appropriate behavior in public places. Accordingly, during the interviews, patrons were asked what they thought about how people behaved in the library and how people ought to behave in the library. At TRL, about 60 percent of those interviewed stated that they thought people generally behaved appropriately in the library, with about 40 percent of patrons at VPL feeling the same way. A further 23 percent at both sites believed that people generally were quiet. Other terms used to describe how patrons behaved were “respectful,” “kept to themselves,” “orderly,” “considerate,” “studious,” and “polite.” About 12 percent of patrons at each site complained that other people were “too noisy” and thus disruptive. When asked how they thought people should behave in the library, the majority of interviewees (49 percent at TRL and 76 percent at VPL) stated that patrons should “be quiet.” A further 26 percent at TRL and 22 percent at VPL indicated that patrons should be “respectful” of others. Clearly, the image of the library as a place of enforced quiet has not disappeared and, in fact, may be exactly what the majority of patrons desire. A few interviewees did comment that they felt that library staff should be more proactive in reminding patrons to be quiet and respectful of the needs of others.

Generally speaking, most patrons are respectful of other’s needs. Virtually all fifteen library staff interviewed, including two security supervisors, stated that the behavior of most patrons was “generally quite good” or “absolutely fine.” As the Security Search Supervisor at VPL
stated, "Most are really, really good; most people I come across are very friendly to the staff and very friendly to security." According to librarians, the most frequently cited violation of acceptable conduct is, not surprisingly, noise, which both staff and patrons themselves try to curtail. The most common infraction reported by security is the illicit consumption of food and drink, a problem they consider more of an annoyance than a serious threat to library security. "The number one [criminal] problem we have would be theft," says the VPL security search supervisor, a problem echoed by TRL's site supervisor of security: library books and patron backpacks and purses are the principal targets. As one TRL librarian put it, "We have our share of behavioral problems that you would expect in a large city": discarded drug paraphernalia, pornography, liquor bottles, and intoxicated patrons are not entirely foreign to either library, but such illicit behaviors are anomalies. Given the high volume and diversity of library users every day, it would appear that these two libraries are among the safest public places in their respective cities. As with all successful public places, the users are largely self-policing: they keep each other in check.  

Perceptions of the Central Library and Its Services
Survey results suggest that these two libraries are clearly perceived by users as friendly, valuable, and vital places providing important services for the public at large. When asked to describe that library, the vast majority of respondents found the library in question to be user-friendly and used positive words (such as good, great, helpful, educational, user-friendly, modern, clean). In fact, few patrons used negative or even neutral words to describe their library. In terms of the library buildings specifically, interviews with patrons again confirmed that the large majority of patrons at both sites liked the design and usability of their library, using terms such as airy, spacious, light, bright, comfortable, well-designed, and inspiring. With respect to the design aspects, there were some negative comments. For instance, a small number of TRL patrons indicated that the central library was too large, required too much walking internally to find needed materials, or needed new

16. There are three surveillance cameras located at entrances and exits, and usually three security guards on call at any one time, at both libraries. Technically, these are electronically monitored and guarded sites, which lends support to the concerns expressed by Lees [69, 88] over the control and surveillance of public libraries, specifically VPL. Nevertheless, the lack of concern over surveillance and security guards expressed by patrons in our surveys, the limited use and restricted placement of cameras inside these institutions, and the freedom of homeless people—indeed everyone—to enter the library and stay all day if so desired, suggests that the issue of control and oppression inside public libraries might be less problematic than she suggests.
TABLE 6
MOST IMPORTANT SERVICES/PRIMARY PURPOSE OF CENTRAL LIBRARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Toronto (N = 864)</th>
<th>Vancouver (N = 1,077)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proportion of Respondents (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most important services:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference and information</td>
<td>328 (38)</td>
<td>280 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal study space</td>
<td>207 (24)</td>
<td>237 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place to read</td>
<td>112 (13)</td>
<td>108 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to technology</td>
<td>86 (10)</td>
<td>108 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational support</td>
<td>78 (9)</td>
<td>161 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of fiction/literature</td>
<td>N.A. N.A.</td>
<td>129 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous other</td>
<td>53 (6)</td>
<td>54 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary purpose of central library:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of information resources</td>
<td>285 (33)</td>
<td>398 (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of research resources</td>
<td>112 (13)</td>
<td>43 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place to study/read</td>
<td>86 (10)</td>
<td>97 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References assistance</td>
<td>86 (10)</td>
<td>22 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational facility</td>
<td>78 (9)</td>
<td>162 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide service to the public</td>
<td>78 (9)</td>
<td>54 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge enrichment</td>
<td>35 (4)</td>
<td>54 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous other</td>
<td>104 (12)</td>
<td>247 (23)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.—N.A. = not applicable. Fiction and literature are not part of the Toronto Reference Library’s collection.

accoutrements such as carpets. At VPL, some patrons felt that the library needed more open space, more natural light, and better acoustics. However, in general, negative remarks were a minority of overall comments made about the two libraries.

Survey respondents at both institutions indicated that the single most important service to them (see table 6) was the provision of reference and information services, followed closely by the provision of personal study space. Beyond these responses, however, the patrons at the two libraries differed in their priorities. Respondents at Toronto indicated that having a place to read, having access to technology, and support of lifelong learning were important services. Patrons in Vancouver rated lifelong learning support, provision of fiction/literature, and a place to read as the next most important services. Respondents at both sites placed community events, provision of community information, and a place to socialize low on the list of priorities.

Whether reading, researching, or browsing, the availability of electronic resources is an important service to many library users. From survey responses, over one-third of TRL patrons, and about one-half of VPL patrons, purposefully came to the library to use electronic re-
sources, either the Internet, E-mail, the library's catalog, or CD-ROM databases. In terms of reported use of electronic resources, patron use was split at both libraries, with about one-third of patrons stating that they usually or always used them, and about one-third of patrons stating that they rarely or never used them. This split was also evident when patrons rated the importance of electronic resources, with just under one-third reporting that they were unimportant or only somewhat important and well over one-third reporting that they were important or vital at TRL, and well over 40 percent reporting as such at VPL. Females were just as likely as males to use electronic resources, while older patrons (over sixty-five years) were more likely to say that they never used them. These survey findings about electronic resources were consistent with the observations of the sweeps, where we found about 14 percent of TRL patrons and 13 percent of VPL patrons were observed to be working at computer workstations, males and females were observed at the workstations in roughly equal numbers, and older persons tended to be observed at workstations less frequently than younger patrons.

In terms of services or resources that should be introduced, most wanted more or better services: TRL users wanted access to more or better technology, and VPL users wanted improvements to the collection. Fully one-third of both sample groups felt the collection was the best feature of the library, while the most common complaint in Toronto (about one in five) was the building design or lack of amenities (reflecting the aging of the Toronto building), whereas in Vancouver, it was the perceived limited hours of operation (almost two in ten).

When asked to indicate the primary purpose of the central library (table 6), the public seems fairly clear on what it is the central library should be doing: one-third or more of all patrons at both sites felt that the primary purpose of the library was to provide information resources. However, there were some slight differences. In Toronto, the proportion of patrons stressing the importance of having good information resources increased significantly to 46 percent if the second most highly cited answer (provision of research resources) is included. On the other hand, in Vancouver, while 37 percent cited provision of information resources as the primary purpose, a further 15 percent cited being an educational facility as the purpose, which is quite closely related to the provision of information resources. The purpose of the library as an important place for study was consistently mentioned, with about 10 percent of respondents at both libraries indicating that role. Finally, in Toronto, about 10 percent of patrons indicated that the primary purpose of the central library was to provide reference assistance. It seems clear that the public sees the central library as an important
provider of excellent information and research resources, which contribute to its mission as an educational facility and as a place to conduct personal study.

Finally, in terms of the importance that the central library has in the lives of citizens, about half of all patrons reported that loss of the library would constitute a considerable or major impact on their lives, and a further third reported that its loss would constitute somewhat of an impact. When combined with the finding that a significant number of users spend more than two hours per day in the library, there is every indication that these libraries have a relatively high degree of importance in the daily lives of patrons in both cities and in terms of Oldenberg’s criteria of fostering a loyal, regular clientele, are thus highly valued and successful public places.  

Discussion

The Role of the Central Library as Public Space
What do the empirical findings suggest about the social role of the central library and its function as a public place? It seems clear that the central library is, indeed, central to the life activities of large numbers of people, is an important space in which public culture is constructed and lived, and thus has a deep sense of place attachment for its users. The central library attracts all ages and linguistic groups, has a well-educated clientele, and is regarded as a safe and appropriate destination for women, children, and men. People feel comfortable coming to the central library, and as Greenhalgh and Worpole noted in their British study, “it is often one of the few places in a busy city center where people, particularly women, of all ages go alone and spend time without worry” [39, p. 52].

Further, as our research has indicated, considerable numbers of people spend lengthy periods of time in the central library, sometimes on a daily basis. There seem to be two kinds of patrons of the central library: those for whom the library serves as an extension of their living room and who visit on a daily or weekly basis, and those for whom quick and convenient access to a large collection is important, who visit less frequently and do not linger. Because the central library is a relatively open and unconstrained space, both types of uses are perfectly compatible and expected. As a result, the central library fosters

17. This finding supports a 1993 opinion survey done for the city of Vancouver that showed public libraries ranked second only to police protection and firefighters in importance to Vancouverites [89].
a large, diverse, and loyal clientele who feel relatively free to pursue their own uses of the space (within the usual expectations about appropriate behavior in public places).

The evidence from the seating sweeps was revealing in confirming that the central library is considered by most patrons to be a place of purposeful study. The vast majority of library users were observed seated, engaged in reading or writing, and provision of study space was rated highly on the survey as an important role. Thus, as noted previously, the central library acts primarily as a public work space and not a recreational space. As such, it is extremely important as a place where individuals can sit in quiet study and reflection, often for hours, without the pressure to act as consumers that is so pervasive in other sorts of spaces.

Following up on this point, one cannot help but wonder if the overt studiousness of the public is a direct reflection of the shift to a knowledge economy. People must continually educate themselves, upgrade their skills, and reorient themselves to new realities. Interviews with patrons demonstrated that many individuals who were unemployed used the library as a home base to explore employment opportunities, even receiving cell phone calls in the library about job interviews. There was also much evidence that patrons were using the library as a place to make the transition into Canadian society, particularly through the learning of English. For instance, the seating sweeps in Vancouver revealed that a large number of patrons (more than half on many sweeps) in the library on any given day were involved in studying English. The central library, then, acts as a place where individuals in transition can feel included and productive in a way that would be almost impossible in other public spaces, such as cafes, parks, museums, arenas, and municipal offices.

Directly related to the issue of citizens and their personal productivity is the survey finding that for almost half of patrons, the prime reason for visiting the central library was to look for information on a subject. Interviews with patrons revealed an extremely wide array of reasons as to why information was being sought. While some reasons had to do with paid employment (looking up information directly related to their work), in many cases the information sought related to other areas of life involving serious projects and pursuits that could not be characterized as merely recreational, including projects having to do with theater set design, a photographic exhibition, research for a film, small business development, and writing a screenplay, to name a few. These examples emphasize that the construction of public culture is a complex, ongoing process in which individuals are engaged in often surprising ways. Thus, the research suggests that the search for relevant
information and its subsequent use in productive activity may be an integral characteristic of the construction of contemporary public culture in the emergent twenty-first century. If this is true, the central library is then a key site of both cultural consumption and production and a facilitator of civil society in a way that other public places are not.

Given the diversity of reasons for searching for information, the importance of the breadth and depth of the central library's collection cannot be overstated. In fact, the public does identify development and maintenance of the collection as an important role of the central library: the large, comprehensive collection was identified on the survey as the single best feature about these libraries, and individuals who were interviewed expressed fears about the possibility of the collections being diminished. Large research-level collections usually are associated only with university libraries, but it is clear from this study that the public needs and wants access to a high quality, comprehensive public research collection, including both print and electronic resources. Walt Crawford also has recently emphasized this point, commenting that "a downsized worker relearning the art of resume writing, considering new employment fields and evaluating possible self-employment possibilities may not be doing scholarly research, but her research is just as important and is far more dependent on public library resources and space than traditional scholarly research" [6, p. 65]. Branch libraries, with severe space constraints, will not be able to meet this need. As a public place, then, the central library has an important role to play through the provision of access to a wide spectrum of in-depth information resources.

The important role of the central library in providing access to a tangible, physical collection of high quality information materials is also reinforced by the finding that a noticeable number of survey respondents in this study (about 10 percent) identified browsing as an activity in which they regularly engaged at the library. As studies of browsing in public libraries have suggested [90], the search for information is often fuzzy, and browsing is a way to clarify the dimensions of what information is needed. Browsing is also a pleasurable social activity, contributing to the vitality and ambience of a public place. Greenhalgh and Worpole comment that "the qualities of browsing in a library or bookshops—unhurried perusal, unexpected discoveries, an openness to new possibilities, exploring interests—are also characteristic of being in an urban setting where people window-shop, stroll and keep in touch with what's going on. These qualities and ways of being in and using urban landscapes are now being recognized. . . . The city center was to be a stage upon which urban life was played and
the non-instrumental activities—sitting, waiting, chatting, reading and watching—were all part of the milieu” [39, pp. 74–75].

Browsing also is often accompanied by an expressed need for human intermediation. Due to the complexities of searching for information in a vast sea of resources, human intermediaries (trained librarians and other staff) can often save hours of labor. Accordingly, the provision of reference assistance was identified as important, particularly in the Toronto sample. In an era when large numbers of people feel frustrated by remote information systems that rely on telephone keypad menu options and often cannot speak to a human intermediary, the central library becomes an important place where direct human interaction and intermediation is highly valued and sought.

Finally, while branch libraries are important in their own right, it is clear from this research that the central library seems to play a different role in the life of citizens. Because of the large collection, many respondents used the central library for private research and study that would not have been possible in branch libraries. Indeed, as respondents in both samples indicated, for many individuals, the central library is both a research facility and a community library, and, as a result, a certain proportion of library patrons felt no need to use other public libraries in the city. The central library is rather unique in this regard in that patrons can satisfy both their higher-level informational needs and their need to feel part of a community at the same time. This aspect of the central library only contributes to its vitality as a public place: the library takes on multiple meanings for those who use it, and despite its size and complexity, citizens are able to make it their own and to incorporate it into the fabric of their lives.

Implications of Electronic Information and Privatization for Public Space

Electronic information resources are a relatively recent addition to the mix of resources and services offered by libraries, and the operative word here is “addition.” Since about 40 percent of survey respondents indicated that they would use some sort of electronic resources while at the library, the provision of access to electronic resources and the development of an “electronic commons” for public access are increasingly important features of the central library. Nevertheless, despite the findings that somewhere between one-third and one-half of patrons highly value information technology (IT) resources and use them frequently, a surprisingly large number of patrons at present do not feel the need to make use of them, or use them selectively. Furthermore, despite their differences, the two central libraries in this study have remarkably similar user profiles and patron preferences with respect to electronic resources, suggesting to us that the provision of elec-
tronic resources, and the IT infrastructure needed to support those resources, is but one more library service and should not become the raison d'etre for central libraries. The findings of our research would lead us to disagree with the sentiment that "the public library of the future will be a comprehensive and commonly-accessible database located somewhere in cyberspace" [91, p. C5]. Provision of electronic resources is simply one more service in an already well-established, rich "cultural capital" of services offered to the public. According to its patrons, VPL's state-of-the-art information technology is a contributing factor to its success as a library, but the fact that patrons of TRL had a remarkably similar views in an older, less "wired," and noncirculating library suggests that IT is not, in and of itself, the principle attraction of central libraries. Information technology has a place in the library, but it seems unlikely that access to electronic resources can replace the library; there are just too many other valued aspects that cannot be experienced online (for example, a work-study space, specialized collections, trained intermediaries, and so on). Nevertheless, it is likely that in an information-driven, knowledge-based economy, the need for the many and varied electronic information resources that the central library provides will continue to grow.

Paradoxically, in the postindustrial information economy, it is the accompanying free-market ideals of privatization and commodification that both encourage and constitute a shift away from the traditional public place of the central library, and presumably libraries in general. We maintain that it is not the incursion of information technologies but the decreasing levels of government funding coupled with the increasing costs in information management and dissemination, increasing reliance on private funding, and the need for on-site commercial enterprises that suggest a shift in the library's place identity. The library is becoming increasingly co-opted by multiple private interests (the in-house automated banking machines; food and drink vending machines; cafes; card boutiques; gifts shops; company-sponsored events, rooms, and facilities) and the corporate model of a cost-cutting, profit-making (or at least self-sustaining) business enterprise. Public libraries today engage in a wide array of commercially oriented ventures that were virtually unheard of even two decades ago. In-house bookstores, gift shops, the selling of T-shirts, mugs, book bags, postcards, and food are some of the ways libraries are forced to help finance themselves in light of diminishing public funds. Indeed, libraries are in direct competition for patrons with the commercial megabookstore and video retail chains, which specialize in the popular press and related infotainment media (for example, magazines, videos, CDs, computer games, and DVDs). There are countless instances of this pressure on public librar-
ies in North America [92–93], but let us take one of our sample sites. Due to underfunding by government, VPL turned to corporate sponsorship even before it opened its doors to the public and has continued to do so. It became the first library in North America to put corporate logos on library cards, much to the ire of some: "The library is the bastion of free, unfettered, completely equal access to knowledge. It exists to ensure that citizens in a democracy can be equally informed regardless of economic status or political persuasion. It is outside—and must be seen to be outside—the realm of political or monetary interest. Libraries cannot be seen to be beholden to any interest" [89]. Others went on to argue that "despite the stated civic commitment to knowledge, education and literary pleasure that Library Square represents, the implications that such a public service, fundamental to free thinking and democracy, is for sale is a deplorable sign of the times." [94].

The VPL has also closed its doors to the public and rented its premises as a movie set to private filmmakers in order to sustain itself [95–96]. One VPL librarian is quoted as saying such commercialization is "prostitution" [97, p. D1]. Clearly many librarians, including those at VPL and TRL, despair because they feel "the library's long-term health—indeed its integrity as a public service—is being damaged" [76, p. D1].

The decline in public funding is exacerbated by the fact that the costs of operating a library in the information age are rising. Constructing new buildings, or retrofitting old ones, to provide access to a myriad of new electronic resources and still accommodate all the traditional services of the library is costly, causing some libraries to look for ways to share physical space with other institutions [98]. As well, the costs associated with the provision of the proliferating number of information formats (print, video, CDs, audiotapes, DVDs, electronic databases, and the latest—e-books) are enormous. Not only is there the direct cost of purchasing these materials with an often dwindling collections budget, there are also associated hardware, software, licensing, and maintenance costs (for example, shelving and reshelving) that must be taken into account [99]. Finally, public libraries have increased staffing costs, both in terms of providing sufficient staff to meet demand and the increased levels of staff training needed to serve the diverse population of library patrons. As Peter Booth Wiley notes, "the introduction of new technology brings a demand for a dramatic increase in both staff and patron training" [7, p. 110]. In some cases, smaller public libraries simply cannot afford to get into the game, making it all the more crucial that large central libraries continue their
important role in providing a strong and deep collection of resources, both print and electronic.

Conclusions

In summary, the findings of this study lead us to three major conclusions concerning the importance of the central library as a vibrant public space, the material and human resources of the central library, and the subtle ideological shift currently underway in the underpinnings of the library. First, our findings from Toronto and Vancouver suggest that, despite the pressures of decentralization, suburbanization, and sprawl experienced by large metropolitan centers, the central library is a unique and necessary public space that is heavily utilized and greatly appreciated by the citizens of each city. The central libraries in this study were clearly highly successful as public spaces, and the empirical data demonstrate quite clearly that these libraries fulfill Oldenburg’s criteria for a successful public place. As was shown, both institutions were conceived, designed, and intended as civic landmarks for the use of all citizens, and they do indeed attract a large and diverse user population. It is clear that both the Toronto Reference Library and the Vancouver Public Library Central Branch at Library Square fulfill extremely important educational, informational, and social functions within their respective cities, providing community gathering, work, and study places that would be difficult to duplicate in any other manner. It seems, therefore, that public monies spent on the construction, maintenance, operation, and refurbishment of central libraries are a sound investment in social capital, on many levels.

Second, those who would argue that a central library is redundant in an age of electronic information have not fully understood the important symbolic, cultural, and socioeconomic roles of such a library. New information technologies appear to augment, rather than threaten or diminish, the role of these libraries: it is yet one more tool, one more service, that libraries provide to the public. As well, detractors who would claim that civic monies could be better spent on local and branch libraries have not appreciated the public thirst for access to large and comprehensive research collections in support of their work-related and personal goals. Life for citizens in the late twentieth and emergent twenty-first century is a complex affair, requiring a great deal of personal development and change related to daily living, employment, education, health, family life, social support, recreation, and numerous other areas of concern. The central library provides the
depth of collections, services, and human intermediaries to allow a wide diversity of library users to become empowered to negotiate the changes required of them in daily life and to enhance their opportunities for betterment and improvement.

Finally, despite their success as vibrant and valued public places, perhaps the single most pressing factor working against the continuation of the central library as public space in Toronto, Vancouver, and presumably elsewhere, is 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. Despite those who believe that the rise of electronic information will eventually lead to a diminishment of the central library, the threat to its place in the society of the twenty-first century is not technological but ideological: the encroachment of private interests in the form of commodification and branding and the accompanying costs to libraries and their users. Such public/private ventures necessarily sacrifice, or at the very least, tarnish the sacred tenet upon which libraries have been founded and have operated for most of the previous two centuries. As the fundamental premise 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. A corporate-sponsored summer reading program is not, in itself, a threat, but ongoing commercialization has the real potential to transform the fundamental nature of libraries. Precisely how to discern between a commercial venture employed to ensure ongoing library services to the public and one that modifies the basic premise of a library's cultural mission to the detriment of that public and the institution itself is a pressing issue of the emergent twenty-first century, warranting future research on this topic.

Appendix A

Library User Survey

Hello,

We would like your opinions on some very general questions about this library. It will take about 5–7 minutes of your time to complete. We do not need your name: you will remain anonymous. Participation is vol-
untary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. This library is participating in a University of Western Ontario study examining the roles and services of Canadian libraries. Results will be shared with this library and will be made public through publications and seminars. Thank you very much for your participation!

VISITATION PROFILE

1) Where do you live? (Please check one)

Vancouver Survey Only

- Burnaby
- Coquitlam
- New Westminster
- North Vancouver City
- North Vancouver District
- Port Moody
- Richmond
- Surrey
- Vancouver
- West Vancouver
- Other: please specify

Toronto Survey Only

- Etobicoke
- North York
- Scarborough
- East York
- York
- Toronto
- Other: please specify

2) How long does it take you to travel from your home to this library by your usual means of transportation? (Please check one)

- Under 15 minutes
- 15–30 minutes
- 31–60 minutes
- 1–2 hours
- Over 2 hours

3) How long do you typically stay at this library? (Please check one)

- Under 30 minutes
- 30–60 minutes
- 1–2 hours
- 2–4 hours
- 4–6 hours
- Over 6 hours
4) On average, how often have you visited this library during the past twelve months? (Please check all that apply)

- Once a week or more
- Two to three times a month
- Once a month
- Once every other month
- A few times a year
- Once (today)

5) What day or days of the week do you usually visit this library? (Please check all that apply)

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday

6) What time of day do you usually enter the library? (Please check one)

- Morning
- Afternoon
  (Before noon) (Noon-5:00)
- Evening
- Don’t know
  (After 5:00)

7) What hours do you prefer the library to be open? (Please check one)

- Morning
- Afternoon
  (Before noon) (Noon-5:00)
- Evening
- Don’t know
  (After 5:00)

8) How many people usually accompany you to this library? (Please check one)

- None (Go to question #9)
- One other person
- Two or more other people

If one or more people usually accompanies you to the library, are they primarily

- Friends
- Relatives
- Co-workers
- Other
9) Will you be patronizing any stores or services in the vicinity of the library today?
   ____Yes   ____No   ____Don’t know

USER PROFILE

10) Sex:  ____Male   ____Female

11) Age Category:
   ____Less than 18 years
   ____18–24 years
   ____25–34 years
   ____35–44 years
   ____45–54 years
   ____55–65 years
   ____over 65 years

12) Highest level of educational attainment: (Please check one)
   ____Elementary school
   ____Some secondary school
   ____Secondary school diploma
   ____Some university or college
   ____University or college degree/diploma
   ____Some post-graduate university
   ____University post-graduate degree

13) Languages spoken: (Please check all that apply)
   ____English
   ____French
   ____Other(s): List

14) Primary Occupation: (Please check one)
   ____Student:  Elementary____  High School____  College____
   University____  Language School____
   ____Unemployed
   ____Retired
   ____Homemaker
   ____Professional (e.g., lawyer, accountant, psychologist)
___ Management/Administrative (e.g., manager)
___ Artistic/Literacy (e.g., writer, journalist)
___ Educational/Research (e.g., teacher, marketing)
___ Clerical/Retail
___ Technical (e.g., electrician, computer repair)
___ Unskilled Labour (e.g., server, cashier)
___ Skilled Labour (e.g., carpenter, hairstylist)
___ Other; please specify

LIBRARY USE

15) Why did you come to this library today?
   Please indicate the most important reason with the number 1 and
   check any others that apply with a check mark:

___ Use public meeting room
___ Use children’s services
___ Browse
___ Borrow/return materials
___ Consume food/drinks
___ Look for information on a subject
___ Meet a friend
___ View art work, displays, notice boards
___ Obtain help from library staff
___ Read
___ Study in the library with own materials
___ Use photocopiers
___ Microfiche/film
___ Use CD Roms
___ Use the on-line catalogue
___ Use the Internet
___ Use electronic databases
___ Use e-mail
___ Other: Please specify
16) Without this library, how would your life be affected? (Please circle one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Considerably</td>
<td>Major Impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17) Why do you use this library rather than other libraries?

18) Do you borrow from other Vancouver/Toronto Public Library branches?

___ Yes  ___ No

If yes, which branches? Please specify

19) Do you borrow from libraries other than Vancouver/Toronto Public Library branches?

___ Yes  ___ No

If yes, which library/libraries? Please specify

20) When you visit this library, how often do you use electronic resources (e.g., the Internet, on-line catalogues, CD Roms, electronic databases)? (Please circle one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21) Please rank the importance to you of electronic resources in this library (e.g., the Internet, on-line catalogues, CD Roms, electronic databases): (Please circle one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>Somewhat Important</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>Vital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22) Do you ever bring a laptop computer with you to use in this library?

___ Yes  ___ No

23) Do you ever bring in any other electronic equipment with you in this library? (e.g., cell phone, digital scanner)

___ Yes  ___ No

If yes, please specify: ___________________________________________
24) How "user friendly" is this library? (Please circle one)

1  2  3  4  5
Highly Very Somewhat Unfriendly
Friendly Friendly Friendly

25) Please select the single most important service this library provides:
(Please select only one)

___ Access to technology
___ A place to read
___ A place to socialize
___ Community events
___ Community information
___ Life-long learning (educational support)
___ Personal study (homework, research, etc.)
___ Provision of fiction/literature (i.e., recreational reading)
___ Reference and information services
___ Other: please specify

26) Please select the single least important service this library provides:
(Please select only one)

___ Access to technology
___ A place to read
___ A place to socialize
___ Community events
___ Community information
___ Life-long learning (educational support)
___ Personal study (homework, research, etc.)
___ Provision of fiction/literature (i.e., recreational reading)
___ Reference and information services
___ Other: please specify

27) Do you ever use this library's non-English materials?
___ Yes  ___ No

28) Do you ever use this library as a place to meet language tutors?
___ Yes  ___ No
29) What other services or resources would you like to see introduced here?

30) Could you please provide a word or two that BEST describes this library:

31) What is the ONE best feature of this library?

32) What is the ONE worst feature of this library?

33) Where is your favourite location or place in this library?

34) In your opinion, what is the primary purpose of this library?

35) Please add any additional comments you wish to make:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

Please deposit this in the survey box at the library exit.

Please submit only one survey.

Appendix B

Library User Interviews

Hello, I'm from the University of Western Ontario, and we are doing a study for this library about its use and design. I'm wondering if you could please give me five minutes of your time to answer a few questions. We do not need your name; you will remain anonymous. Participation is voluntary.

Sex: Male_____ Female_____

Age: Under 30___ 30–60___ Over 60___

1) What are you doing here today?

2) Why did you come to this library?

3) How often do you come here?

   ____ Once a week or more
   ____ Two or three times a month
   ____ Once a month
   ____ Once every other month
   ____ A few times a year
   ____ Once (today)
4) Do you ever talk to any of the library staff when you come here?
   ___Yes    ___No
   If so, what do you talk to them about?
5) When you come here do you usually use any electronic resources?
   ___Yes    ___No
   If so, which one or ones?
6) What do you think of this building?
7) What do you think about how people behave in this library?
8) How do you think people ought to conduct themselves in this library?
9) What behaviours would you consider to be unacceptable in this library?

   Thank you very much for your participation

Appendix C

Library Staff Interview Questions

1. Could you please provide a word or two that best describes this library:
2. What is the single best feature of this library?
3. What is the single worst feature of this library?
4. Where is your favorite location or place in this library?
5. In your opinion, what is the primary purpose of this library?
6. Aside from providing the public with access to information, what do you think are important social functions of this library?
7. How do you see Central Vancouver Public Library being used socially?
8. Please briefly describe your primary job responsibilities.
9. Describe the nature of your interaction with the public.
10. What are most users doing in this library?
11. What are the primary problems you’ve experienced when dealing with the public in the lib.?
12. How does the physical environment of this library help or hinder your job?
13. How does the physical environment of this library help or hinder your interaction with the public?
14. In your experience, how do patrons typically behave in the library?
15. Could you provide an example of unacceptable patron behaviour you've seen in this library?

16. How common is unacceptable behaviour in this library?

17. How has computer technology affected your job?

18. How has computer technology affected your interaction with the public?

19. What proportion of your interactions with the public involve helping them use computer technologies?

20. Is there any final comment you would care to make about the design, technology, use, or services of this library?

REFERENCES


