Everyday Life, Everyday Democracy in Libraries:

Toward Articulating the Relationship

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Introduction

I have suggested the importance of the idea that democracy now frequently takes place outside of formal political settings (Buschman 2018; 2017a; 2017b; 2012). That is, social life is shaped democratically in various arenas. The dramatic decline in smoking and the rise in acceptance of same-sex marriage are good examples of thresholds crossed not by dint of laws, policy, science, media coverage, or evidence gathered and organized and presented for investigation by libraries, but also by and through (essentially) democratic talk and social change that preceded and then drove law and/or policy. That many restaurants have changed their treatment of smokers (becoming less tolerant) or same-sex couples (becoming more tolerant) some time ago are good examples. We in the United States are, as of this writing, currently experiencing a reevaluation of how we have handled issues as diverse as sexual harassment (an area where law and policy were clear but not honored), concussions in football (getting our entertainment from a sport that frequently causes life-altering brain injuries), and the technology infrastructure that allows/promotes lies and misinformation as news and Russian interference with our democratic processes and institutions. These are not being led by Congress or the Executive branch, but rather by open airing of the problems (almost daily) and discussion among people and in various media—some of which are the source of problems just noted.

Where, then, do libraries come into these processes? Traditionally (and that term is not deployed pejoratively), the answer is that libraries and librarians are there to foster informed discourse and exchange (Buschman 2003). This of course is a cornerstone of the field and, given political history and its relationship to control/manipulation of information, it would be perverse to argue with these approaches and the principles behind them (Webster 1999; Peters 1993). But that answer is too one-size-fits-all to fully explain a complex phenomenon, often essentializing it down to an information literacy problem in helping to establish context and trace sources, deployed to cover everything from dealing with real fake news, to fake "fake" news (Baer 2017; Lupien and Rourke 2017) to predatory publishing (Swauger 2017). It hasn't proven terribly persuasive, being dourly remarked by Joseph Schumpeter all the way back in 1942 that "Information is plentiful and readily available. But this does not seem to make any difference" in the content or quality of our democratic decisions (Schumpeter 2001, 147). What we need as a supplement is a theory of how democracy works on the ground socially (as in our smoking and marriage examples), and what role libraries play in those social processes.

This paper is an attempt to articulate that relationship further, and it starts with an unlikely source—Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*—that will in turn be placed in context by a current and very influential idea taken up by democratic theorists: Amartya Sen's capabilities approach. This framing will then be deployed to situate the actions, place, and functions of libraries and the meaning of their relationship to democratic societies that go well beyond the traditional functions noted above. In so doing, this article deploys legal scholar Cass Sunstein's (1996) concept of "incompletely theorized agreements on particular outcomes" (143); that is, "it is rare [to] completely…theorize any subject, [meaning] to accept both a general theory and a series of steps that connect the theory to a concrete conclusion" (146). The ideas presented here certainly have more-than-casual affinities but, as with Sunstein (1996), it is not argued that they contain a lockstep of premises, consequences, and explanations that logically flow up and down the theoretical ladder, but rather "the goal is to try to stay with the lowest level of abstraction necessary" (143-144) to provide both a framing and a further elucidation of the democratic content of libraries and library and information science (LIS).

Democracy and Everyday Life

Jacobs published *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1961. Her book was – and remains – controversial, a full-throated and polemical challenge to the ideas behind and the methods of city planning. We will touch on only some of her ideas, but they are still valid: mismanaged, unmanaged, and unregulated real estate still inflicts "damage…on the economic and psychic well-being of neighborhoods" and on people's lives, "cherished local shops are disappearing, replaced by national chains or, worse, nothing at all [and] 'blight extracts a social cost'"

(Editorial Board 2017). In turn, Jacobs' (1961) observations proved prescient concerning how most of us *now* live: "Even residents who live near each other are strangers…The bedrock attribute of a successful [place to live] is that a person must feel personally safe and secure… among all these strangers [and] not feel automatically menaced by them" (30)[1]. The concept of place Jacobs uses is related to, but not identical with that of space; "space refers to location somewhere and place to the occupation of that location. Space is about having an address and place is about living at that address" (Agnew in Leckie and Buschman 2007, 5). Jacobs described the ways places and communities can be arranged to live well and safely among strangers that remains essential and relevant.

In so doing, Jacobs (1961) repeatedly linked that idea to what she called "democratic self-government" (128), "mundane organs of self-government" (114), "civilized self-government" (117), and "processes of self-government" (427). The connection she made was not an intuitive one between the arrangement, organization, and principles of places, planning them, and democracy (Rich 2016), so we should plumb what she meant by these terms. First and foremost, Jacobs means by these terms arrangements that people freely choose, enjoy living in, and in turn contribute to their vitality: places that are "populated naturally and casually…by being situated…close to…active and different currents of life and function[:] shoppers, visitors and strollers as well as…workers… where there is work, cultural, residential, and commercial activity—as much as possible of everything" (1961, 101). These are places to visit and live where arrangements are as local as possible and freely improvised and formed (Jacobs 1961, 60-61). It is, in short, an "intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially. The components of this diversity can differ enormously, but they must supplement each other in…concrete ways"

(Jacobs 1961, 14)[2]. In other words, a rich and democratic everyday life is helped along considerably by the qualities of the sites where it takes place. For philosopher Marshall Berman (1982), she captured the "environment…uniquely capable of nourishing modern experiences and values: the freedom [and] order that exists in a state of perpetual motion and change, the…intense and complex face-to-face communication and communion" of the best of modern life capable of adapting and enlarging the idea of community (317-318).

With economic (and architectural) diversity comes a diversity of persons (social classes, ethnicities, ages and purposes for being there) and differing schedules of usage, thus making spaces safe and usable over the course of a whole day (Jacobs 1961, 148, 35). People using an area beget more people using that area, and they observe and watch one another as a casual form of entertainment and passing the time (think of a Starbucks); in turn, small businesses "are typically strong proponents" of these attributes because "they hate having customers made nervous about safety [and] are great street watchers and sidewalk guardians" (Jacobs 1961, 37-38). Small businesses of course imply a modest-to-extensive circulation of people, and in these various ways places become desirable, habitable, and good for people of all ages. This circumstance allows people to move in and out of the area and shape their lives as they choose, interacting with people with whom they are not intimate, but with whom they are deeply interconnected because they all depend on one another for a place to function well. Such places "have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" (Jacobs 1961, 238). This then is what Jacobs meant by democratic self-government: mutual (if often unnoticed) daily life shaped and improved by the free choices and actions of people that make life interesting, various, reasonably safe, and mobile. She "converted

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1. This idea still informs concepts of and research into publics and the public realm (Buschman 2017b). Political theory states it this way: "The unencumbered self is…the encumbrance of our modern social condition." That is, under neoliberalism our very fluid social and economic arrangements mean that we are often unknown in and less-connected to our local communities now, whether urban or not, but we still wish to live a good life where we are (Gutmann in Buschman 2012, 134; see also Putnam 1995a; 1995b; Webster 2006, 208-209).

2. A critique of Jacobs written at the time (Rodwin 1961) was that "one almost gets the impression of a golden age before" the developments she opposed "appeared on the scene." This idea has been carried forward; she "romanticised social conditions that were already becoming obsolete by the time she wrote about them" (Zulkin in Beauman 2011; Berman 1982, 323-325). Her importance and relevance lies in that, "when we remove [her work] from the specialized discourse of urbanism, its connections to other streams of writing and thought become obvious and revealing" (Fulford 2011, 7).

democratic values into design policy" (Rich 2016).

Jacobs (2011) described this elsewhere as navigating the essential tension between the "morality and values in commerce and politics—in other words, social or public morality as distinguished from purely private moral behavior" (161). She makes it clear that the happenstance architectural, economic, and social diversity that has been improvised is what fosters and underwrites effective democratic living, cooperation, and action. Jacobs takes pains to note that these ideas applied to cities, making the distinction between them, suburbs, and small towns. However, living patterns have clearly changed in the last five decades or so. The problems (and solutions) she identifies are more generally relevant now:

> [P]eople like to live, not just be, in such lively [areas and] youngsters and elders alike need such surroundings [but] we continue to put up civic centers… residential areas and housing "projects" segregated by income. [T]hese developments…combine to produce boring homogeneous cores which generate traffic for limited periods and then lapse afterward into dead or dangerous districts. [N]ew buildings with high rents squeeze out…marginal activities, the small business…just getting a start, the colorful shop…the little restaurants and bars…all that… lends spice, charm and vigor to an area… Jacobs proposes that we do most of the things urban experts tell us not to do: attract mixed activities which will generate active cross-use of land; cut the length of blocks; mingle buildings of varying size, type and condition; and encourage…concentrations of people. (Rodwin 1961)

Jacobs' critique is the obverse: that planners and policymakers together produce "financial incentives…to achieve [a] degree of monotony, sterility and vulgarity" that serves an idea of how people should live, rather than fostering how they want to live by allowing people to make the environment themselves (1961, 7).

Two aspects of Jacobs' analysis are of concern to us here. First, there is a specific way in which Jacobs connects these ideas to political action. Healthy and lively areas foster and allow "communities of interest" to form that enable them to sustain interest groups, support businesses, create or support culture, and/or exert political pressure or take political action—sometimes in the

interests of preserving the character of their community and area (Jacobs 1961, 119, 124-128)[3]. Second, Jacobs writes at some length about libraries and their role and placement in communities: "Monopolistic…monumental cultural centers cloak, under the public relations hoohaw, the subtraction of commerce, and of culture too, from…intimate and casual life" (1961, 4). That is, libraries as part of a suite of cultural institutions (along with museums, concert halls, etc.) can de-diversify an area: "there is no point in bringing [them] to where the people are, if in the process the *reasons* that people are there are wiped out and [they are] *substituted* for them" (Jacobs 1961, 101). Libraries can be the primary use and reason people come to an area, but they should nevertheless contribute to its diversity; likewise, a branch library can increase an area's convenience, cohesion, diversity, and identity (Jacobs 1961, 159-162, 172). The point is that a library's placement and integration with its community can, by itself and in conjunction with what libraries do, help to foster the attributes and actions of her democratic self-government and foster a community of interest. Jacobs gives us a valuable corrective and addition to what LIS believes is (or should be) our proper function: "The New York Public Library, on an immensely valuable site, contributes more of value to the locality than any possible profitable duplication of nearby uses—because it is so different, visually and functionally" (Jacobs 1961, 254). In other words, a library affects everyday life (for better or worse), often irrespective of how we think it is (or should be) used.

Capabilities

Is that all libraries do—mere placement on our campuses and in our communities and in their building design? This would be as impoverished a vision of what we contribute to democratic society as neutral information-provision (Buschman 2017c). However, there is a vein of political theory that can help us to bring these two strands together, enriching both. The capabilities approach[4] was created by Sen almost forty years ago, and its extensive literature and application will not be done full justice

3. Jacobs was central among the "local campaigners [who in 1962] narrowly defeat[ed] an attempt by the despotic city planner Robert Moses to run a 10-lane elevated highway through the middle of Washington Square Park. For decades, Moses… play[ed] god with New York" (Beauman 2011).

4. This language follows Robeyns' (2005; 2016a) formulation.

here. It is a theory that lends itself to adaptation and interpretation across many fields (Robeyns 2005; 2016a). Our concern will be to deploy the ideas to further define and explain Jacobs' democratic everydayness of libraries as briefly as practicable without doing too much violence to their depth and subtlety. The first thing to note is that the capabilities approach was rooted in two critiques of relevance to Jacobs' ideas. The first was of the philosophical assumptions that economists imposed "not just on economics, but also on other social disciplines [which] see behaviour in terms of preference fulfillment and the intelligent pursuit of self-interest, steering clear of the… demands of morals and values" (Sen 1993b, 23). Sen argues that this is a self-referential definition that is isolated, non-social, and unable to accommodate variety, interests over time, and the context of specific acts: "The *purely* economic man is indeed close to being a social moron" (1977, 336)[5]. The second critique is of ideas of justice and equality rooted in equality of resources: "it is… concerned with good things rather than with what these good things do to human beings…[or] uses a metric that focuses on the person's…mental reaction" to getting such things like rights or income (Sen 2006, 481)[6]. Sen (2009) has gone on to critique political theory's perfectionism—that is, ignoring current injustices in the search for intellectually defensible foundations of a theory of justice[7].

Capabilities then are "opportunit[ies] to achieve valuable combinations of human functionings—what a person is able to do or be" and allows us to distinguish between the ability to do something a person would value doing (capability) vs. possessing the means to do so, and then being able to convert the means to those highly individual

5. This is clearly related to Jacobs' critique and her valorization of the non-economic (democratic) affordances and values of places and their makeup and arrangement.

6. This is both a philosophical and a practical critique of, respectively, Rawlsian and Utilitarian theories of justice, hence Sen's interest to political theory and philosophy. This is in turn related to Jacobs' related description of functional, lively areas and why people like to be and live in them: because their diversity and safety allow people the freedom to shape a life attractive to them.

7. This is not, incidentally, also related to Jacobs' (1961, 16-25) critique of modernist perfectionism in urban planning and that tradition studious ignoring of how people actually choose to live.

ends (Sen 2005, 153; 2006, 481)[8]. Sen began with "basic capabilities" (2006, 481; Robeyns 2005) that are rooted in poverty analysis: "the ability to be well nourished, to live disease free lives, to be able to move around," to be clothed and have respect and dignity as a person (Sen 2004, 78). He, however, refuses to weight these or preliminarily list capabilities; human diversity is illimitable and social and cultural conditions vary far too much to proscribe individual goals in any way; "the selection of capabilities is the task of the democratic process" (Robeyns 2005, 106; Sen 2004)[9]. Because of his background as an economist, much of the capabilities approach has affinities with ways to analyze, focus, measure, and shape development policies in more humane and effective ways (Robeyns 2005; 2006). Democracy and rights are then means to secure capabilities and an environment of economic development to further them (Sen 2009; 2005; 1999). Capabilities can thus be thought of as the freedom to have freedoms: "the alternative combinations of functionings the person can achieve, and from which he or she can choose one collection"—that is, the freedom/ability to realize things people end up actually choosing to do (Sen 1993a, 31).

There are of course tensions here. The achievements are often collective, but the capabilities approach is thin on who is responsible in such a circumstance for selecting and expanding capabilities and *how* that would take place democratically (Robeyns 2016b; 2005). Second, Sen's approach can be said to be too individualistic. A capability very often refers to one person (Robeyns 2016b; 2005). Third, there are technical and philosophical complications such as the choice not to make use of a capability like mobility to achieve a good (like visit family) vs. the deprivation of a capability; the distinctions among achievements when capabilities are converted; and the relationship between achieved functionings, capabilities, and standard of living which cannot be addressed here (Sen 1998, 298-303). By deploying the capabilities approach to look at both what librarianship conceives of as its role and its everyday effects together, we won't solve

8. Sen (2006) famously noted that it is much more difficult (and expensive) for a differently-abled person to convert an income (a means) into a capability (mobility), hence the highly specific nature of capabilities.

9. Sen cites the "remarkable fact that, in the terrible history of famines…no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press" (1999, 7-8).

or avoid all of these problems, but it is a productive exercise to explore both the practices and the institutional place-ness of libraries as contributing to Jacobs' everyday democratic life.

Capabilities and Libraries

There has been only a small amount of work done on libraries and capabilities, even if we include related areas such as access to technologies and information rights (see Hill 2011; Loh 2015; Britz et al. 2013; Dadlani 2016). Clearly the capabilities approach is compelling in its approach to poverty and different abilities, that is where it has been theoretically and practically explored and applied the most, including in libraries (Hill 2011). Its social and collective applications to institutions and processes that are not resource challenged are less-developed: "On the theoretical level, the capability[ies] approach does account for social relations and the constraints and opportunities of societal structures on institutions on individuals," but the thinking and theorizing on those processes are in need of further development (Robeyns 2005, 108; 2016a, 399). The most relevant work for our purposes here has been on education. Like investments in educational systems and structures, the purpose of libraries is not human capital development *per se.* Rather, "While economic prosperity helps people to have wider options and to lead more fulfilling lives, so do more education…and other factors that causally influence the effective freedoms the people actually enjoy" (Sen 2007, 100). The development of human capital and capabilities are closely related, but they have different yardsticks and are not commensurate; at the same time they are both closely linked to political freedoms and rights (Sen 2007; 2005). What libraries "mean for a life that is composed of many different dimensions and sees [them] as a contribution to the development of the kind of person one will become and the types of things one will be able to do" is a deep contribution to capabilities (Robeyns 2016a, 399). We also know that "social conversion factors" (public policies) are important: if there are no libraries, it becomes much more difficult to achieve what a library does for a person (Robeyns 2005, 99; Sen 2005). At the same time Sen (1993b; 2007) notes that successful economies rely on the functioning of institutions (political and social) to promote and sustain them (and both support capabilities), and that expanding capabilities in turn often brings about political and social change. Finally, the

capabilities approach does not choose our collective political and social ends for us, but it does imply a vigorous Habermasian political discourse to sort out our ends and the justice of collective means to them (Sen 2009; DeCesare 2014). This of course places libraries squarely (again) in the midst of the public sphere (Buschman 2003), and it strongly suggests alternative evaluative measures (to return-on-investment) of what libraries are doing and how they affect the lives of the people they serve.

Jacobs' analysis suggests both a different variant within the capabilities approach and a measure of its success. Though capabilities are easily cast as individualistic, Sen also quite clearly points to broader social goals:

- The capability "to participate in public life" (2004, 78) as well as what "societal cohesion and the helpfulness of the community" enables in terms of capabilities (2005, 154) are also given primacy in Jacobs' account of the quality of democratic life.

- The capabilities approach enables a more subtle assessment of individual well-being and its relationship to social arrangements, including through public functions like education and good quality libraries (2004, 78; Robeyns 2005). This has clear affinities to Jacobs' democratic self-government and the variety of uses and persons in a place.

- Capitalism has not been attuned to these factors, but private economic success (and hence the actions that lead to it) are actually matters of *public* good and a source of common benefit (1993b). In other words, the capabilities approach effaces the complete separation of private property rights, choice, and social/public matters. Jacobs' work stands as an exemplar of modern community as challenge to the economistic vision of social goods or private property rights.

- That "social conditions and the priorities they suggest may vary" (2004, 79) is highly germane to our economically, socially, and politically fractured society (Buschman forthcoming) and the societal infrastructure of Jacobs' healthy democratic self-government.

- And finally, these considerations are in no way of a lesser order of rationality, or importance, or are answered or superseded by economic reasoning (1977).

We will take as given Jacobs' design principles in terms of the location of libraries in communities and on campus, diversity of uses and traffic, and that the library will embrace those factors, but part of what libraries do is to

increase the functionings of democratic self-governance as a healthy part (in Jacobs' sense) of communities. The capabilities approach suggests (strongly) that we find ways to describe and account for those factors that enable such progress. That is the connection Jacobs makes: she describes the interplay of communal and personal health (a social functioning enabled by capabilities) that libraries can be vital to. In other words, Jacobs gives us the beginning of a metric to describe the democratic effects of libraries.

Libraries and Capabilities: Fleshing Out Jacobs and Sen

Sen writes that "There is…a close connection with [the 18th century's] deep interest in enriching societal statistics, and with [a] commitment to the necessity of continuing public discussion, since they all help to advance the use of more information in the procedures of public choice and in the exploration of social justice" (2009, 94). This is deeply implicated in what we invest in as a public and a polity:

> [T]he importan[t] distinction on which the capability approach focuses [is this]: *can the person actually do these things or not?*…It is this distinction that the capability approach tries to capture, and it is a momentous distinction to acknowledge in general and to be recognized in the making of public policy in particular…[W]ithout [it we are] steer[ed] towards the view that instituting social security provisions, or having a supportive society, cannot make any difference to anyone's freedom…[T]hat would be a huge lacuna…For example, individual parents may not be able to set up their own school for their children, and may be dependent on public policy, which may be determined by a variety of influences, such as national or local politics. And yet the establishment of a school in that region can be sensibly seen as increasing the freedom of the children to be educated. To deny this would seem to miss…an important way of thinking about freedom that has both reason and practice behind it. This case contrasts sharply with a case in which there are no school in the region and no freedom to receive school education. [O]n this the capability approach concentrates, even though in neither case can the person bring about her own schooling independently of the support of the state or support from others. (Sen 2009, 307-308)

Simply add the word/concept of library/library use alongside that of school/schooling in the quote above and the capabilities approach provides a both compelling *reason for* the field and situates its work[10].

The subject of this article is not what libraries *should* do in and for democratic societies, but rather theoretically situating and explaining what libraries actually do for them already that exists, but is not necessarily well understood as such. Once this perspective—Jacobs' everyday democratic self-government viewed through the lens of capabilities—is adopted, there is a very respectable amount of research extant in LIS scholarship that documents and studies these practices. Libraries have been documented as:

- a locus and embodiment of African American community in a Carnegie library in the segregated South (Hersberger, Sua, and Murray 2006);
- places of social caring: "supportive mutuality in the information search and use process in the library" (Harris 2009, 176);
- academic library places and spaces that are "about student learning and the quality and nature of the community in which students…learn [and] most fundamentally about the learning behaviors that give life to the educational missions of the institutions that bring us together physically," and not about "students as information consumers or…of instructional services" (Bennett 2007, 176; Given 2007);
- "community resources" staying open in contemporary urban settings while riven by racial strife over police brutality: "libraries are…[T]hey are anchors in so many communities…the only resource" (Hayden in Cottrell 2015);
- a safe space for the young—LGBTQ youth (Rothbauer 2006) or the 10 year old Barack Obama upon returning to the US from Indonesia (Wiegand 2015b)—to explore identity, commonality and difference;

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10. There are important distinctions to maintain in deploying the capabilities approach. A library is a means to an end, not an end in itself; its presence is enables a capability to achieve a functioning; a functioning is the achievement—becoming informed or educated or entertained or exploring life-options in a library. And, there will be illimitable variations in how persons can convert the resource of the library into their particular functions/achievements (Robeyns 2016a, 405-407).

- enabling communities of learners (Riedler and Eryaman 2010);

- places of respectful civic dialog, civic engagement and pride (Wiegand 2015a, 259; Curry 2006);

- providing a space for women to appropriate for their purposes and needs: "When inhabited by women jointly engaged…the public space of the [library] program room becomes a site…for the enactment of women's identities and the performance of caring (McKenzie, Prigoda, Clement, and McKechnie 2006, 126);

- a place of individual possibility: "mixing a collective desire to build…community with…goals generated by personal ambition and [the] will to acquire power and wealth" (Wiegand 2015a, 270);

- sites of community in general, functioning as "public mediation sites for determining local…values" while at the same time "stimulat[ing] the dynamism of diverse communities by both addressing and celebrating their diversity [and] promoting a sense of belonging" (Wiegand 2015a, 266-267, passim);

- a public third place "offering…novelty, perspective,…tonic, and friendship [and] in addition,…a societal good in terms of its political role, habit of association, recreational spirit and importance" as a public domain for sharing and enjoyment (Fisher, Saxton, Edwards, Mai 2007, 152; Leckie and Hopkins 2002); and

- a scholarly redoubt conducive to scholarship, "a quality that is linked to the value of library space" in itself, reflecting a "passionate belie[f] in the power of place" (Antell and Engel 2007, 174-175).

It is perhaps easier to see Jacobs and Sen in the *absence* of these—of functionings in Sen's capabilities approach and in everyday democratic self-governance in Jacobs' terminology—as social deficits harmful to democratic society: "diminishe[d] social interaction [and] diversity…because strangers of differing ages, classes, genders, and religions have less opportunity to mingle in physical space" that is damaging to "inclusivity and community; spatial access and proximity; and a high degree of user control" (Leckie and Hopkins 2002, 331, 328-329). At the core is what it means to explore and learn and what learning means as a *social and political phenomenon*—which is the often unacknowledged core of LIS and its institutions[11]. Jacobs

helps us locate the individual's actions within social results healthy to society and democracy—and what library places do for them. Sen helps us to locate those capabilities as meaningful and rightful goals of policy in the name of equality, in and through a democracy.

Conclusion: Toward a Yardstick For Libraries

There are acknowledged difficulties in this approach: 1) famously, the lack of a baseline list of capabilities seriously hinders empirically describing success; 2) the open inclusiveness of its application also produces the same challenge; and 3) some capabilities are simply hard to measure. It is "much more difficult to assess people's ability to have self-esteem, than their ability to write and read" along with other "nonmaterial aspects of people's well-being" (Comim in Chisa and Hopkins 2014, 54); the yardsticks are thus better suited to study of some of the classic poverty-addressing capabilities listed earlier since social- and policy-level research "can [only] focus on the analysis of people's' ability to choose what to do or be" (Chisa and Hopkins 2014, 54). For academic libraries "currently, societal contributions are not a part of institutional ranking schemes" and their "contributions to society have not been widely identified or researched"; for public libraries "outcomes can be more challenging to assess than calculating data on economic impacts [because of] the complexity of social impacts and the difficulty demonstrating that libraries, and not some other entity, caused the impact to occur" (Oakleaf 2010, 56, 80). Librarians and administrators often fall back on an improvised admixture of utilitarian and capabilities approaches in response to their ideals operating in fluid and challenging circumstances (Dadlani 2016). Are we at a dead end then, with libraries vaguely described as a good, which is most often interpreted by boards and administrators as merely feel-good?[12]

> Sen's (2009) formulation provides a key to addressing that question: if social realizations are assessed in terms of capabilities…rather than in terms of their utilities or happiness…then some very significant departures are brought about. First, human lives are…seen inclusively, taking note of the substantive

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11. Webster (2006) notes that "a genuine sense of community is not a matter of…restricted communication, since it involves connecting with whole people rather than with the

specific 'bits'…that can easily be disposed of when the interest wanes…Such superficial, non-disturbing and self-centred links do not merit the term…that…involves encountering others in real places and real times" (106-107).

12. Webster (2006, 176-182, 198-202) outlines this challenge well.

freedoms that people enjoy, rather than ignoring everything other than the pleasures or utilities they end up having…[S]econd…it makes us accountable for what we do (19).

Much of the new value-of-libraries literature (Oakleaf 2010, Neal 2011) is an honest attempt to both provide nuanced answers to questions arising from a neoliberal fiscal oversight environment, and to move away from traditional metrics (size, usage) in so doing. But like the research on libraries and social capital (Johnson 2015, Buschman and Warner 2016), it can display a dual nature, describing both real social capabilities and their instrumental ("capital") side. Sen and Jacobs suggest that the questions must be flipped: without libraries, what capabilities are precluded? The question is more obvious in education: do MOOCs engender what campus communities and their libraries do? Can they be a substitute for primary and secondary schools? But the same questions can be asked about the internet and public libraries and cheap access to books via online sellers. They're free (or inexpensive), hence they *must* provide utility and pleasure, but people over and over reaffirm the value and desirability of libraries through use (Horrigan 2016; Axiell 2017).

We may be abandoning some of our usage data a bit too soon. We need to plumb the depth of what that usage means rather than exclusively focus on a search for outcomes which tend to be individual and exceptional—"a useless frame when you are concerned with the majority" (LeBlanc 2014). Time and again, when fundamentally challenged—recently that the field was radically shrinking and "dying"—the LIS field responds with … usage data:

> "Visit a library in your community," urged [American Library Association President James] Neal. "You'll be amazed by the energy and the innovation, and by the extraordinary growth in use of collections, services, programs and staff expertise." He added that visits to public libraries remained stable from 2007 to 2015 at 1.4 billion, and said that the use of electronic resources like ebooks, streaming services and archival databases "is exploding." Anne R. Kenney, interim executive of the Association of Research Libraries, [said] that…visits to ARL libraries remained high at 240 million in 2016 [and] Roger Schonfeld, director of Ithaka S&R's libraries and scholarly communication program, said that while libraries and the role of librarians are changing, they

still play a vital role. "I've spent time in dozens of academic libraries and I don't see any evidence that they're dying…." He added that public libraries have been "transformed" into "vibrant centers for community engagement" in recent years, despite reports of funding crises. (McKenzie 2018)

Utilitarianism (ironically enough) provides us with a good reason for this fallback: the fact that people value and choose to use them is evidence enough that libraries are desirable in some way (Mill 2002, 106).

Sen asks us to flip the question: why are people using libraries when there is so much social and media weight behind the storyline of the dying institution? There is a Jacobsean everydayness to the quality of community and campus life that a library is a core part of that is captured by how we have actually long been living in a highly mobile (and often alienating) society:

> In his classic 1949 essay 'Here Is New York,' E. B. White described the city as 'a composite of tens of thousands of tiny neighborhood units,' each 'virtually self-sufficient' with shops that met most residents' basic needs, from groceries to shoes, from newspapers to haircuts. Every neighborhood was so complete, White wrote, 'that many a New Yorker spends a lifetime within the confines of an area smaller than a country village' (Editorial Board 2017).

Libraries certainly have an educational-research-informing-citizenship role, but modern society needs the places (and spaces) of libraries. Physically and digitally shutter them in one's community or campus for a given October and then let the board or administration handle the outcry. Jacobs and Sen move us toward capturing why that would be such a bad idea. We must put our shoulder to that theoretical and research task to further document and argue why.

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