

Investigating essential elements of community engagement in public libraries: An exploratory qualitative study

Journal of Librarianship and
Information Science
45(3) 206–218
© The Author(s) 2012
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0961000612448205
lis.sagepub.com


Hui-Yun Sung, Mark Hepworth and Gillian Ragsdell

Loughborough University, UK

Abstract

This article discusses the findings of an exploratory qualitative case study involving Leicester Central Library. The purpose of this study was to investigate essential elements of community engagement in public libraries. Three research methods – semi-structured interviews, direct observation and document analysis – were used to gather data. Analysis of the data suggested a model of seven essential elements of community engagement: ‘belonging’, ‘commitment’, ‘communication’, ‘a flexible approach’, ‘genuineness’, ‘relevance’ and ‘sustainability’. Implications of the model are made in conclusion for the promotion of genuine community engagement, where the community-driven approach and the organic nature of the community engagement process are seen as being paramount to engagement.

Keywords

community engagement, involvement, Leicester Central Library, participation, public libraries

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate essential elements of community engagement (CE) in public libraries. CE is high on the UK Government’s agenda and has also attracted both academics’ and practitioners’ interests. Therefore, it was the intention of this study to deal with this significant issue that is facing today’s librarians and information professionals.

This article provides a background of CE in public libraries, presents the research design for the case study approach with Leicester Central Library, and discusses the findings of the research.

Background

The past few years have seen growing discussion about the role of the public library in UK communities. Community has been increasingly used in the statements of government bodies and departments responsible for public libraries. For example, *Framework for the Future* defined the role of public libraries in developing social capital as ‘community and civic value’ (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003). *Public Library Service Standards*, which came into effect in 2001 with an aim to provide a ‘comprehensive and efficient service’ and set, for the first time, a performance

monitoring framework for public libraries in England, were revised in 2008 to assess service performance and ensure that public libraries reflected the new strategy and delivered quality services to meet local needs effectively (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2008). The standards were abolished in 2009 (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, 2011) and more recently, the concept of ‘Big Society’, initiated by the Coalition Government, emphasised the importance of CE and aimed ‘to put more power and opportunity into people’s hands’ (Cabinet Office, 2010).

An increasing awareness of CE has been seen in the public librarianship literature over the past 15 years, for example community librarianship (Black and Muddiman, 1997), civic librarianship (McCabe, 2001) and a needs-based library service (Pateman and Vincent, 2010). The objectives of CE for public libraries include: tackling social exclusion (Birdi et al., 2008; Stilwell, 2006; Vincent, 2009); promoting democracy (Kranich, 2005); and

Corresponding author:

Hui-Yun Sung, Department of Information Science, Loughborough University, Ashby Road, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 3TU, UK.
Email: h.sung@lboro.ac.uk

contributing to social/human/cultural capital (Goulding, 2008; Hart, 2007; Hillenbrand, 2005).

There have been a number of programmes or projects aimed at fostering CE recently, such as Community-Led Libraries in Canada (Working Together Project, 2008) and Community Libraries Programme in England (Big Lottery Fund, 2007). An evaluation of the Community Libraries Programme highlighted the value of undertaking CE in public libraries, such as having a positive impact on library perceptions held by non-users; benefiting library workforce development; strengthening existing partnerships; improving local communities' wellbeing; and enhancing libraries' roles as centres of wider community based learning and skills (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2010).

Community engagement models

CE is a complex and contested concept and there is no widely-accepted definition (Sarkissian et al., 2009: 47). However, for the purpose of this study, Rogers and Robinson's (2004: 1) definition of CE was adopted:

Community engagement encompasses a variety of approaches whereby public service bodies empower citizens to consider and express their views on how their particular needs are best met. These may range from encouraging people to have a say on setting the priorities for community safety ... to sharing decision-making with them in relation to defined services.

In contrast to traditional library service models, such as Traditional Library Planning Model (Working Together Project, 2008), which was passive and service based, the literature on library service models encompassing CE reflected a more community-based service. These included: Library for the Future (LFF) Civic Library Model (Schull, 2004: 64); Aspects of Community Engagement for Public Libraries (CSV Consulting, 2006: 7); Library-Community Convergence Framework (LCCF) for community action (Mehra and Srinivasan, 2007: 132); and Community-Led Service Planning Model (Working Together Project, 2008: 30).

Generally, these models or descriptions focused on the role and activities of libraries in engaging with the community and partnership organisations. For example, the LFF Civic Library Model suggested six activities that libraries could undertake to promote civic values and foster democratic participation (Schull, 2004). These included: providing a public space; delivering community information as a medium for engagement; encouraging public dialogue and problem solving; providing citizenship information and education; creating a space for public memory; and integrating the newcomer. Similarly, CSV Consulting (2006) suggested seven aspects of CE, focusing on libraries as a space for community activity; partnership working; involvement of volunteers; and community involvement in decision making, for example.

Outside the library domain, there existed other published models for CE, for instance Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation; Wilcox's (1994) Level of Participation; and IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum (International Association for Public Participation, 2007). Central to these models, which identified different levels/spectrums/ladders of CE, was the issue about where power and control of resources resided (Brodie et al., 2009; Cornwall, 2008; Wilcox, 1994).

Other models have attempted to identify key elements for CE. These included: Scottish Community Development Centre's (2007) Key Purpose and Elements of Community Engagement Practice; Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute's (2006) Ingredients for Engagement; and CSV Consulting's (2006) Ingredients for Success. All the three models featured two main strands of community involvement and partnership working, in the CE process. However, these three models stemmed from a service perspective and did not explicitly recognise engagement as stemming from the community or that the community had the capacity to autonomously run and sustain the engagement process. It was implied that the initiative for engagement came from the service or the organisation rather than the community, which indicated that CE was service initiated, or even service driven.

The literature review has evidenced a growing interest in CE and there is a call for wider, deeper and stronger levels of CE in library services (Goulding, 2009; Hart, 2007; Mehra and Srinivasan, 2007). However, little systematic research has examined the CE process in practice in public libraries. This study addressed the lack of research literature on conceptualisation of the practical aspects of the CE process in the context of public libraries.

In this respect, Cornwall (2002: 58) drew upon conclusions from her participation in development projects, to suggest that an investigation of 'key ingredients' is necessary:

The spectrum of practices associated with participation in development is so vast that capturing their complexity would be impossible. What is evident, however, is that certain 'key ingredients' are necessary – if not always sufficient – to turn rhetoric into sustainable, positive change.

Therefore, in order to fill the research gap, a research question was developed:

- What are the essential elements of CE from the perspective of library services, partnership organisations and local communities – within the selected public library?

Methodology

This study adopted a case study approach with Leicester Central Library. The exploratory nature of the study led to a qualitative approach to investigate key stakeholders'

perceptions of CE and the practical aspects of CE (for example, who was engaged, in what and how?) in a particular initiative called Citizens' Eye. This approach, in turn, helped explore and identify essential elements of CE.

Case study rationale

Leicester Central Library was selected as a case study for this research because of its innovative and effective methods for engaging with the community and involving the community in service planning, development and delivery. The library had previous experience with CE and the project, *Welcome to Your Library*, won the CILIP Libraries Change Lives Awards in 2007. In addition, working with refugees and asylum seekers in *Welcome to Your Library* led to the opportunity for Leicester Central Library to work with Citizens' Eye, a community news agency, to provide community media services by, for and of the community.

Citizens' Eye was initiated by a local community member in January 2008 resulting in a partnership with Leicester Central Library being set up in November 2008. The partnership provides Citizens' Eye with in-kind support, such as an office space in the Library, a computer, Internet access and a telephone line, to be able to deliver the news service to the community.

In addition to working in partnership with Leicester Central Library, Citizens' Eye also works with an array of different organisations (see Table 1).

Citizens' Eye was the main news agency, and under it were 12 different news agencies (at the time the study was conducted), each involving different groups of people in the community (see Table 2). In each news agency, members of the community work together to source, edit and write news and issues that they understand and have personal affinity with.

Data collection

Three qualitative methods were employed in this study, including semi-structured interviews, observation and

document analysis. Table 3 shows the timeline of key activities in this study.

12 face-to-face semi-structured interviews, on a one-to-one basis, were conducted in order to obtain an in-depth insight into interviewees' perceptions of CE and identify essential elements of CE based on their experiences and participation in the CE process in Citizens' Eye. Direct observation, where the researcher conducted observation as an observer rather than as a participant (Creswell, 2009: 182), was used to gather additional data. All interviews and observations were recorded and fully transcribed. Furthermore, documents were collected to 'corroborate and augment evidence from other sources' (Yin, 2009: 103) and help understand the wider context as well as previous work on CE that was related to Citizens' Eye.

Data analysis

The data collected was analysed and coded, in an inductive fashion, using the thematic analysis procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Data was managed using ATLAS.ti 6.1, a qualitative data analysis software program, which was readily available for the researcher.

Data analysis began with familiarisation through transcribing the interview data, writing up observational field notes, and repeatedly reading and annotating the data in an active way. Secondly, 'generating initial codes' was done by using the technique of line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2006: 50), in order to remain open to the data and to see nuances in it.

The third phase was 'searching for themes' – the researcher organised the initial codes generated, employing mind mapping techniques, by grouping like with like, so that any initial codes which appeared similar to or related to others could be grouped together (see Figure 1).

Fourthly, 'reviewing themes' involved looking at the potential themes generated at phase three as a whole and started to synthesise those potential themes on the mind map (see Figure 2). A complete set of themes identified is provided in Appendix 1.

Table 1. A synopsis of roles of partnership organisations in Citizens' Eye.

Partnership organisations	Content of partnership working
Leicester Mercury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering Citizens' Eye a desk at the Leicester Mercury office • Publishing The Wave every month
BBC Leicester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering Citizens' Eye to run media training workshops at BBC Leicester every week
De Montfort University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing, including advertising events at De Montfort University • Media partnership, such as providing internship at Citizens' Eye
Leicester University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing, including advertising events at Leicester University
Voluntary Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing, including advertising voluntary work
Action Homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working on the Down Not Out news agency together to involve the homeless
Leicester Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing, such as advertising events • Information sharing, such as community news

Table 2. Citizens' Eye and different news agencies.

News agencies	Characteristics	Publications
Citizens' Eye	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main news agency, which covered general news and what was going on in the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens' Eye website, Soar Community Magazine
Senior Eye	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elderly people - over 40 years old who were regarded as being marginalised and feeling out of touch with later life matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Eye newsletter
Wave Newspaper dZINE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people - under 25 years old • People with disabilities or people who were affected by disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Wave newspaper • dZINE newsletter
Down Not Out Inside 'n' Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless people • Offenders and ex-offenders, both male and female, and youth offenders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Down Not Out magazine • INO Magazine
HAT News Ewalin Green Issues Community Action Photographers CAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees and asylum-seekers • International development in Africa • Green, environment and recycling • Photographers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HAT News website • Ewalin website • Green Issues magazine
Dads' News Agency DNA HowRU? Bands 'n' Beatz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dads' issues • Health and well-being • Music reviews and news 	

Table 3. A timeline of activities in the study.

Timeline	Activity
Dec 2009 – Jan 2010	Pilot stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot interviews with key stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of the interview schedule • Pilot observations of different events to inform the design of the observational sheet
Jan 2010 – Mar 2010	Data collection stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with different stakeholders (e.g. library staff members, local community members and partnership organisation staff members) to explore the process of CE through their participation in Citizens' Eye and to explore essential elements of CE • Observation of relevant meetings and events to explore participants' experience of CE process in Citizens' Eye • Collecting related documents (e.g. government policies, publications and media press) to identify ideas, practice and policies concerning CE in Citizens' Eye
Apr 2010 – Oct 2010	Data analysis stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial thematic coding (i.e. line-by-line coding) to see nuances in the interview data and to discover emerging aspects of CE • Focused coding, using mind mapping techniques, to organise initial codes and identify broader, inclusive themes • Writing-up case results
Oct 2010 – Apr 2011	Dissemination stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colleague-based review and dissemination • Feedback from key research participants

The fifth phase, 'defining and naming themes', helped define each code and the kind of data each code captured. The process of defining and redefining codes, therefore, consisted of detailed analysis and the researcher's interpretation of the data. Finally, the researcher 'produced the report' and wrote up the research findings, where the data was presented with descriptions, excerpts, explanations and analysis.

Reliability and validity

Using a range of data collection methods enabled 'triangulation' of the data sources in order to enhance the reliability and validity of the research. The researcher was constantly triangulating different data sources of information in order to provide a coherent justification for themes throughout the data analysis process that was on a day-to-day basis.

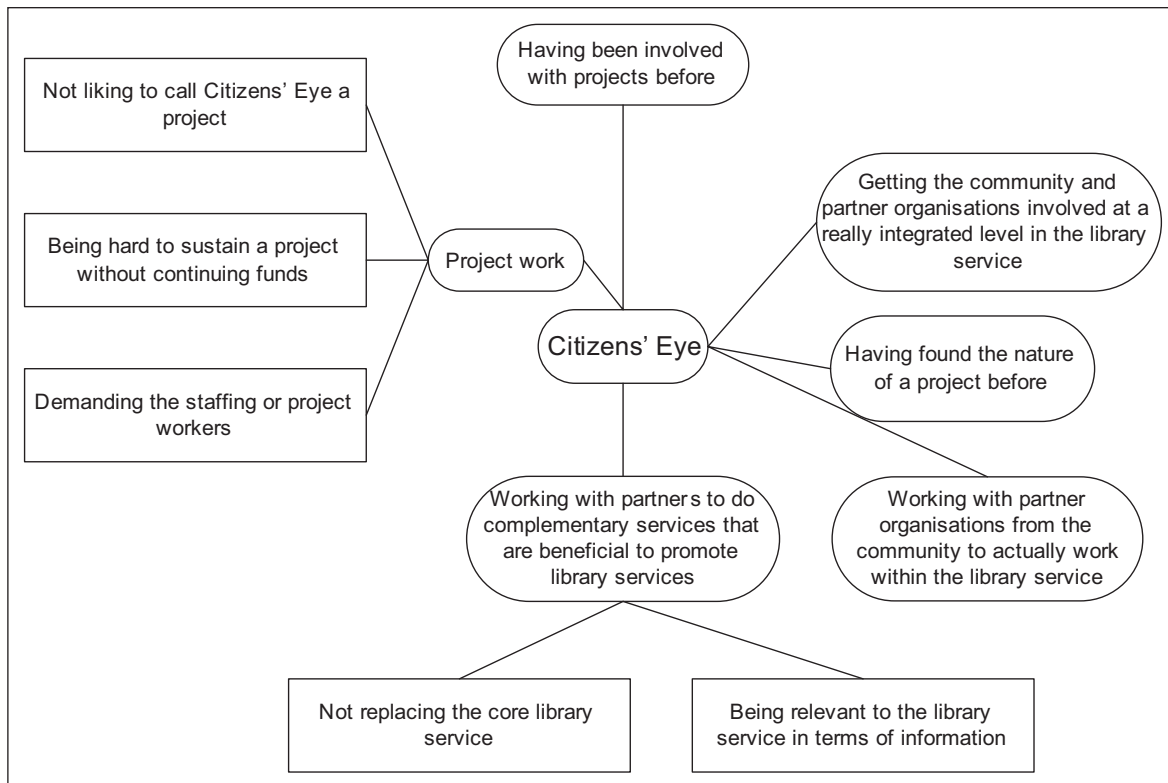


Figure 1. Initial thematic map, showing six main themes (excerpt).

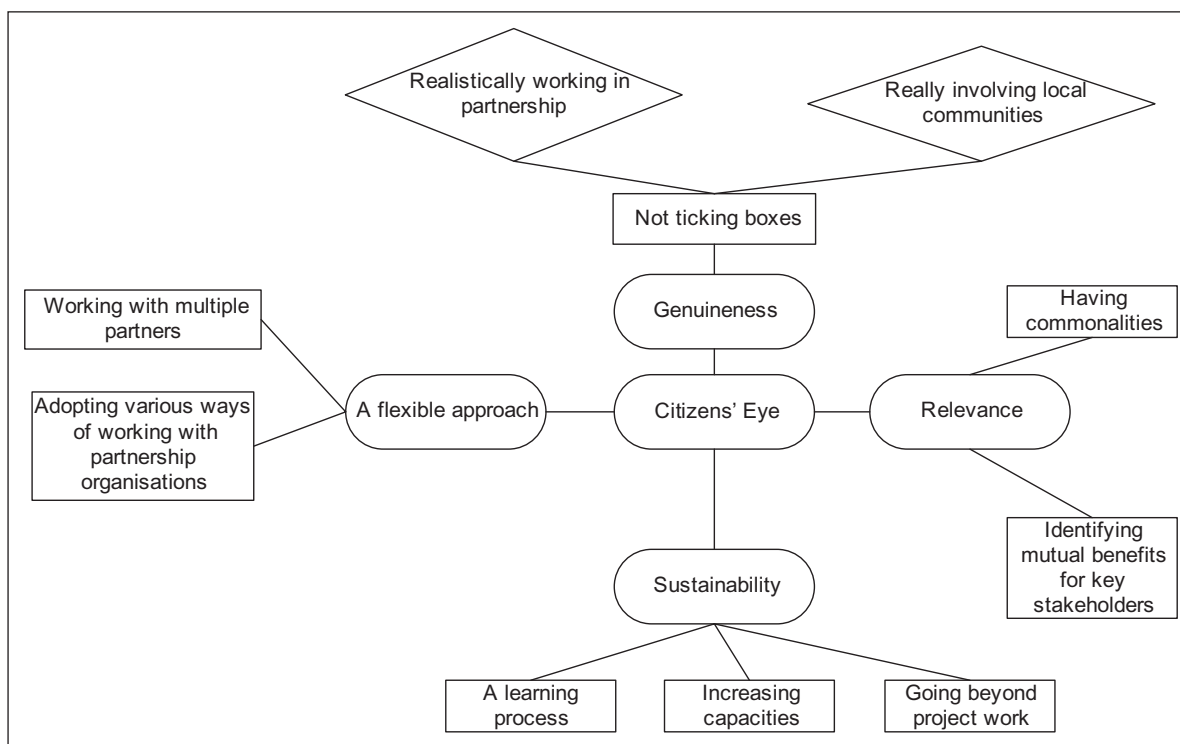


Figure 2. Revised thematic map, showing four main themes (excerpt).

Moreover, the researcher employed ‘respondent validation’ (Bryman, 2004: 274) where, once the data was analysed and written up, a meeting was set up with the main contacts from the library to obtain their comments on the findings of the case study. The library indicated the accuracy of the description of the case study, which provided evidence that the findings were consistent with the views of research participants.

Findings

This section starts by providing dimensions of CE in Citizens’ Eye, focusing on how the local community was engaged, and goes on to present essential elements of CE in Citizens’ Eye.

Dimensions of community engagement in Citizens’ Eye

There were four stages of CE in Citizens’ Eye, including informing, consulting, involving and empowering. Firstly, local communities were informed about news, events and voluntary opportunities in Citizens’ Eye and those specific news agencies. To this end, Citizens’ Eye informed local communities in a wide range of ways, such as word of mouth, publicity and publications. Additionally, Citizens’ Eye used websites, emails, Facebook, Twitter and Flickr, where people could receive information directly and get responses quickly. Nevertheless, ‘word of mouth’ communication was felt by the majority of interviewees to be most important.

Secondly, local communities were consulted through offering their feedback on the decisions and services that affected them in Citizens’ Eye. Although a library staff member did not see the need to consult local communities on the development of Citizens’ Eye, he recognised that:

because it’s grown organically and with the input of people, it can respond to what anybody says.

Indeed, it was noticed that consultation occurred informally in Citizens’ Eye, for example through daily conversations with local communities or through the Internet, including websites, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and Facebook. A partnership organisation staff member added:

I think it’s [the Internet] an opportunity for people to make sure their opinions are heard.

Thirdly, local communities were involved directly in the decision making and service delivery in Citizens’ Eye. Volunteers in Citizens’ Eye performed a diverse range of roles, including active participation, such as reporting news; updating websites; contributing to publications; publishing content to the Community Media Hub’s video channel via YouTube; uploading photos to Flickr; signing up for one of the specific news agencies, and passive participation (for example, using the information that Citizens’ Eye had

provided). When opportunities were open, local communities could get involved in Citizens’ Eye in the way they preferred.

Finally, local communities were empowered, or given power to run their news agencies, which was seen as a key stage relating to engaging with the community in Citizens’ Eye. According to a library staff member, Citizens’ Eye empowered local communities by encouraging them to write their feedback, enabling them to have ownership of what happened in their community and inviting them to tell their stories. A partnership organisation staff member echoed this notion and stressed the value of empowerment for marginalised groups:

Citizens’ Eye provides opportunities for marginalised groups to have a voice that they wouldn’t normally have on local issues, which actually started to informally change things that affected their lives and their communities across the city.

Essential elements of community engagement in Citizens’ Eye

From analysis of the data gathered from Citizens’ Eye, seven main themes were identified as essential elements of CE, including: ‘belonging’, ‘commitment’, ‘communication’, ‘a flexible approach’, ‘genuineness’, ‘relevance’ and ‘sustainability’. These elements are now used as a framework to structure the findings of the case study.

Belonging. ‘Belonging’ was defined as feelings of ownership and the emphasis on relationship building between the service and the community. It was observed that Citizens’ Eye embraced ‘a community-driven approach’. As a partnership organisation staff member stated:

I think the very nature of it [Citizens’ Eye] means that it will be shaped by the people.

Indeed, Citizens’ Eye evolved naturally – it originated as a community initiative that was run by volunteers and was self-sustained. Citizens’ Eye had a committee, which consisted of two local community members and one library staff member, to organise, manage, oversee and sustain its day-to-day activities.

Citizens’ Eye is an independent community news agency and has negotiated a very successful partnership with Leicester Central Library (Partnership organisation staff member). ‘The library acted as a facilitator’, for example offering office space and facilities (e.g. telephones and computers), providing human resources and expertise, and promoting Citizens’ Eye and hence attracting traffic (usage) to Citizens’ Eye.

‘Feelings of ownership’ were found both in the community and the service. It was observed in the interviews that most editors used the word ‘my’ indicating their ownership,

for instance 'my individual magazine' and 'my news agency'. Echoing this observation, a library staff member commented:

The community will own that service [the library service] and think of it as theirs, rather than an outside agency. I think that's why libraries are so good. We embed ourselves in the community and the community say we're part of them.

From its initiation, therefore, Citizens' Eye could be seen to stem from the community, and in that sense was indigenous, and therefore belonged to the community. This was reflected in the language used by the community and also their continuous participation in the service. This sense of ownership contributed to a two-way feeling of 'belonging' between library staff (to a great extent) and the community, and hence was fundamental to CE.

Commitment. 'Commitment' was defined as the degree of commitment to the project by the relevant stakeholders. The importance of 'commitment from the community' in the CE process was highlighted by interview respondents. As put by a local community member:

I think successful community engagement depends a lot on people's commitment to it.

Real commitment was evidenced from the community's 'enthusiasm and energy'. It was observed that the community was emotionally engaged, reinforcing its commitment. This observation was reflected in the interviews, where local community members used words such as 'excited', 'enthusiastic', 'proud', 'determined' and 'confident' about Citizens' Eye and the different news agencies. In addition to emotional engagement, some people actually contributed physically to the development of Citizens' Eye and different news agencies in roles of editors, news reporters and committee board members. Due to the enthusiasm and energy from local communities, Citizens' Eye has 'successfully grown in an organic fashion' (Library staff member).

Furthermore, the importance of 'commitment from the service' in the CE process was emphasised. As a library staff member explained:

It was about the library service and the community moving forward together to make a success.

'Support and trust' were expressions of the commitment within the library service. Not only did Citizens' Eye help the library get more volunteers involved and attract more community organisations' attention, but it also helped build up positive relationships with wider community groups.

One library staff member also noted:

With real trust and the commitment from Head of Service, I was almost left with a free hand to develop things.

According to the library staff member, being given a free hand to develop services was a recognition that things could evolve, because the development of Citizens' Eye was neither prescriptive nor predetermined.

'Commitment', consisting of real motivations, enthusiasm from local communities and support from service providers, was therefore regarded as an essential element for CE.

Communication. 'Communication' was defined as the way in which the service communicated with the community. Communication referred to 'two-way dialogue': 'Communication is a two-way process. It's not just about us telling people about what we're doing, but it's about us listening to what people want from the service' (Partnership organisation staff member). In this respect, a library staff member thought that Citizens' Eye provided a gateway for the Library to speak to and listen to the community, deliver services around them and involve them in the service planning. For example, when Leicester Central Library planned to improve facilities for people with disabilities, they talked to dZINE, a news agency run by disabled people under Citizen' Eye.

Many interview respondents indicated that 'honesty and openness' were intrinsic parts of good communication and would ultimately help engagement with the community in an effective way in Citizens' Eye. In addition, a partnership organisation staff member noted that one characteristic of the communication between Citizens' Eye and partnership organisations was its 'informal' nature, for example:

we [Citizens' Eye staff and partnership organisation staff] meet when we need to, when there is something to talk about

and

I can just pick up the phone, call [a Citizens' Eye staff member] and call [a partnership organisation staff member] to discuss an issue.

Furthermore, the development of Citizens' Eye involved extensive communication through various channels, such as workshops, meetings, websites, publications, leaflets and social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and Flickr). Additionally, dialogue between the library staff and volunteers from Citizens' Eye was said to occur on a daily basis (Library staff member).

As reported in *Cultural Volunteering in the East Midlands* (CFE, 2009), volunteers in Citizens' Eye claimed that:

We are great believers that community cohesion is communication; it just depends on how you communicate.

In this respect, two-way, proactive, informal, honest, open, direct and constant 'communication' was seen to be an essential element for CE.

A *flexible approach*. ‘A flexible approach’ was defined as using a variety of methods that were employed to engage with the community and to work in partnership. Having ‘worked with multiple partners’ (see Table 1), Citizens’ Eye opened up avenues and opportunities for Leicester Central Library to work with different organisations, strengthening the existing relationship with partnership organisations, and developing new partnerships. ‘Adopting various ways of working with different partnership organisations’ was identified as another aspect of flexibility. In addition to sharing resources, partnership organisations in Citizens’ Eye also supported each other through sharing information (e.g. reporting news and promoting events), using Citizens’ Eye as an information point for advertising voluntary opportunities, and physically attending each other’s events or activities.

Seeing the diverse and changing nature of a community, ‘involving different community groups’ was considered to be the beauty of Citizens’ Eye (Library staff member), which helped make Citizens’ Eye accessible. As a local community member explained:

If you’re gonna focus on just the single part, then it’s not going to be as successful as if you’ve got something like Citizens’ Eye, which is something for everybody.

Recognising that as technology changed, people’s lives changed and their expectations changed, Citizens’ Eye ‘embraced different methods to engage with the community’ through informing, consulting, involving and empowering. In this regard, a partnership organisation staff member stated that Citizens’ Eye provided a new vision for public libraries, in terms of how they could interface with local communities. This was thought to be important, especially when the public libraries are facing economic challenges (Library staff member).

‘A flexible approach’ was emphasised as an essential element in Citizens’ Eye, which showed an appreciation of the complexity and unpredictability in a CE process. This was reflected in the fact that Citizens’ Eye embraced a wide range of methods to work with multiple partners and involve different community groups, which implied that the CE process was not fixed or predetermined.

Genuineness. ‘Genuineness’ was defined as authenticity or a true reflection of what was said to be. The importance of ‘turning community needs into action’ was highlighted, as a local community member noted:

A successful community engagement project is a project that actually gets out in the community and does what it says on the tin.

As a result of turning community needs into action, key informants indicated that Citizens’ Eye was successful in many ways, for instance increasing volunteer hours, library

visits, and usage of library services, as well as launching ground-breaking initiatives. *The Wave* was a good example of a ground-breaking initiative, which

not only put Citizens’ Eye on the map but also put Leicester Central Library and Leicester City on the map. (Library staff member)

Through demonstrating its success, Citizens’ Eye also enhanced its capacities by attracting more funding, support and resources from various partnership organisations.

Through working with Citizens’ Eye, interviewees identified a range of ‘misconceptions and stereotypes’ in the CE context. For example, the term ‘community leaders’ was seriously challenged by key informants. The founder of Citizens’ Eye argued that most of the people who claimed themselves to be ‘community leaders’ did not represent the community, but had the loudest voices historically or were good at speaking in public, which helped explain why some consultation activities that local authorities had carried out did not reflect community needs.

Furthermore, CE in this case was not seen as a box ticking exercise. A partnership organisation staff member indicated that CE required a proactive ‘can do’ attitude:

It’s not something that somebody can do by sitting in the office and looking at forms. It’s not about that. It’s about going out there and doing it.

‘Genuineness’, recognised as an essential element for CE, stressed the importance of the implementation of action, instead of ticking boxes. Without genuineness and action, there were no meaningful outputs or outcomes from CE.

Relevance. ‘Relevance’ was defined as the degree of relevance or benefits of the project to relevant stakeholders. When it came to partnership working, the importance of ‘working towards the same goal’ was highlighted. Nevertheless, there existed conflict between library staff towards Citizens’ Eye:

I have quite a lot of resistance from library management. Some supported it [Citizens’ Eye] and some didn’t. (Library staff member)

In this respect, he further explained that librarianship has been quite conservative and introducing the idea of community journalism to a traditional library service could be regarded as a revolution.

Furthermore, interviewees indicated that both Citizens’ Eye and Leicester Central Library ‘have commonalities’, for instance involving everyone in the community. Citizens’ Eye was also useful to library services in terms of information. As a partnership organisation staff member noted:

Libraries are all about communicating information and Citizens' Eye are an additional organ for that logical communication.

A library staff member added that Citizens' Eye provided a neutral environment in delivering information through using technologies. Indeed, it was important to give everyone equal opportunities to deliver and get information.

The importance of 'mutual benefits' was also highlighted by key participants. As a local community member noted:

Any relationship between organisations should be mutually beneficial.

Indeed, the majority of the interview respondents identified the mutual benefits of working with Citizens' Eye. Increasing capacities was one of the common benefits to Leicester Central Library, Citizens' Eye and various partnership organisations due to the collaborative nature of the partnerships. Another benefit from working with Citizens' Eye was to strengthen the relationship between those organisations that took part.

The community was the main focus when it came to CE in Citizens' Eye. A genuine CE process would place emphasis on the 'relevance' of the services to all those who wanted to engage, which was believed to be a better outcome for both the community and the service.

Sustainability. 'Sustainability' was defined as the continuity of the project and the impact of the project on relevant stakeholders. Citizens' Eye was said to 'go beyond project work'. While a partnership organisation staff member regarded Citizens' Eye as 'a community project based in the library', a library staff member argued that: 'we don't really like to call it [Citizens' Eye] a project' and explained 'projects lack sustainability'.

Citizens' Eye sustained its service by building a personal relationship with wider communities and by increasing capacities through partnerships. A library staff member noted:

It [Sustainability] is one of the main reasons that I started looking at getting the community and partner organisations involved at a really integral level in the library service.

A good example of that was housing Citizens' Eye in Leicester Central Library and actually working in partnership. Working with partners was one of the ways to build up capacities, for example space, staff and expertise, leading to a greater chance of sustainability. Also, improving the relationship with local communities enhanced the community's commitment to the service and fostered more involvement from them, and hence helped sustain the engagement process.

It was observed that individuals and organisations embraced 'an ongoing process of learning' in Citizens' Eye in order to achieve sustainability. At an individual level,

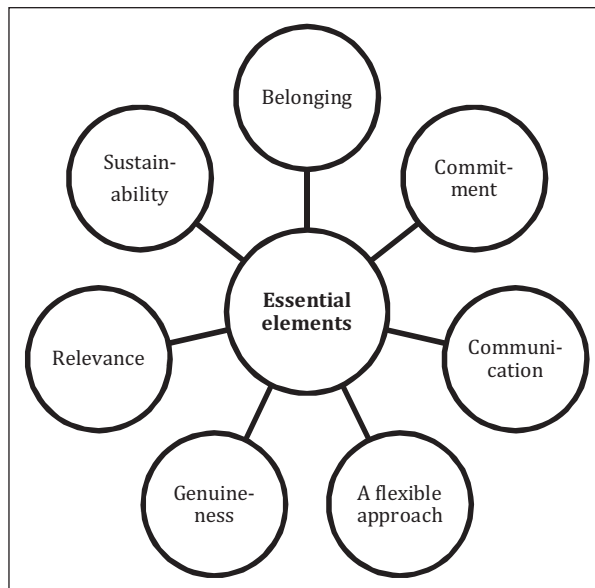


Figure 3. Essential elements of community engagement in Citizens' Eye.

Citizens' Eye enabled its participants to publicise issues that were important to them and encouraged and supported them to develop skills in writing and journalism, which could be beneficial for their future. At an organisational level, Citizens' Eye was involved in 'double loop learning' in the form of feedback and ongoing engagement with customer groups (Leicester City Council, 2010). This experiential learning enabled Citizens' Eye to grow as an organisation.

'Sustainability' was identified as an essential element in Citizens' Eye, which highlighted the fact that CE in Citizens' Eye involved a continual learning process and went beyond projects and therefore helped enhance community development.

It was concluded, therefore, that the essential elements of CE in the case of Citizens' Eye were: 'belonging', 'commitment', 'communication', 'a flexible approach', 'genuineness', 'relevance' and 'sustainability' (see Figure 3).

Discussion

The findings of this case study provided an insight into a range of essential elements of CE emphasised by key stakeholders as seen through the Citizens' Eye initiative. This section compares and contrasts the findings of this case study and other CE models that were identified in the literature.

Echoing Scottish Community Development Centre's (2007) model, Ipsos MORI's (2006) model and CSV Consulting's (2006) model, community involvement and partnership working were two key aspects in the CE process. However, these two strands did not stand alone but were interconnected and dependent on other essential

elements in this study. For instance, ‘a flexible approach’ indicated the need for a variety of methods for working with partnership organisations and engaging with the community. ‘Sustainability’ indicated how working in partnership and involving local communities in the service at an integral level increased capacities and the ability to sustain the engagement process.

Different models embraced different approaches towards CE. Rather than putting ‘money/resources’ at the heart of CE as in Ipsos MORI’s (2006) model, it was shown that the community was at the heart of the CE process – Citizens’ Eye was community initiated, community led and self-sustained, and Leicester Central Library acted as a facilitator rather than an instigator under this approach. Similar findings were evident in CSV’s model (2006), where ‘customer focus’ was recognised as one of the key ingredients for success in the process of CE.

The community-led feature also helped to explain why ‘leadership’ was not identified as an important element for CE in this study, whereas in Ipsos MORI’s (2006) model, ‘leadership/champion’ was identified as a core element and ‘community-driven’ as a secondary element for engagement; in Scottish Community Development Centre’s (2007) model, ‘being a leader and encouraging leadership’ was identified as one of the developmental elements of CE practice. Accordingly, the models of Scottish Community Development Centre (2007) and Ipsos MORI (2006) placed less emphasis on the bottom-up nature of CE whereas, by putting the community at the centre of CE, this model is more likely to reflect the ethos of genuine CE.

In addition, the ingredient ‘targets’, identified in Ipsos MORI’s (2006) model, implied a different ethos from the one that evolved naturally as proposed in this case study. It was understood that setting targets or performance indicators might help formalise engagement and encourage senior management buy-in from the organisation. However, this study indicated that genuine CE evolved naturally and organically, which depended on the input of the community.

The natural and organic development was also different from a ladder or a spectrum of the engagement process, as proposed in Arnstein’s (1969) Ladder of Participation, Wilcox’s (1994) Level of Participation and IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (2007), which were then translated into *Duty to Involve* for all public authorities in England in 2009 (*Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act*, 2007). Citizens’ Eye was community initiated, community led and self-sustained, rather than following different levels of engagement, for example informing, consulting and involving.

‘Single issues’, defined as ‘a single issue will motivate/polarise opinion to such an extent that engagement increases’, was proposed as a secondary ingredient for engagement in Ipsos MORI’s (2006: 57) model. However, the findings of this study indicated that if CE focused upon

single topics or issues, it would not be as successful in engaging with a wide range of people as when CE involved a variety of topics or issues, due to the diverse nature of modern day communities. Additionally, being able to identify and meet different needs was seen as a strength. This study highlighted the importance of ‘a flexible approach’ and ‘relevance’, which suggested an approach that not only appreciated the diversity but also recognised the importance of relevance to key stakeholders and meeting diverse needs in order to increase support in the process of CE. ‘A flexible approach’ was also identified as a key ingredient for success in CSV Consulting’s (2006) model and highlighted in Rogers and Robinson’s (2004) definition of CE, which reinforced the finding of this study.

This case study also highlighted the importance of emotional attachment and support, for example ‘belonging’ and ‘commitment’, from both service providers and service users in the CE process. Pateman and Vincent (2010) also suggested that organisational culture must change in terms of ways of working, attitudes, behaviours and values, in order to develop a needs-based library service. An example was a shift from libraries that were based in communities to community-based libraries, which suggested a positive and dynamic relationship between the library and the local community (Pateman and Vincent, 2010).

However, there was little literature focusing on emotional attachment in the process of CE. These elements were not taken into account in the models of Scottish Community Development Centre (2007) and Ipsos MORI (2006), which reflected a service-led conception of CE and hence focused on the service-related aspects (for example ‘organisational culture and structure’, ‘targets’ and ‘leadership’) and what methods or strategies the service could use to engage with local communities (for example ‘involving communities in planning services’ and ‘recognising diversity and designing inclusive ways of working’). This case study highlighted essential elements of CE that were more grounded in the reality and perceptions of the community and the participants, including those in the library, rather than from an institutional perspective.

Conclusions

This study addressed the research question set out at the start and answered Cornwall’s (2002) call for an investigation into key ingredients for CE and a call for wider, deeper and stronger levels of CE in library services (Goulding, 2009; Hart, 2007; Mehra and Srinivasan, 2007). This was indicated by the identification of essential elements of CE from the perspectives of library staff, partnership organisation staff and local community members involved in Citizens’ Eye: ‘belonging’, ‘commitment’, ‘communication’, ‘a flexible approach’, ‘genuineness’, ‘relevance’ and

'sustainability'. It is therefore argued that recognition, acceptance and application of the seven elements are likely to contribute to a genuine, bottom-up and community-driven CE process, as opposed to a service-based approach.

Although these conclusions seem evident from this case study, it should be noted that further studies have taken place in Derby and Leicestershire. These additional studies do support these findings and will be reported in due course.

This model has implications for how CE could be improved. These include:

1. a flexible and adaptive approach in the CE process in order to enable the community to express their opinions on issues that affect them;
2. the importance of 'a flexible approach' and 'relevance', which suggests an approach that not only appreciates diversity of the community but also recognises the importance of achieving relevance to a broad range of key stakeholder groups and meeting diverse needs;
3. recognising the natural and organic development of a successful CE process, which heavily depends on the input of the community;
4. putting the community at the centre of the engagement process, thus reflecting the ethos of genuine CE that appreciates the community's capacities to initiate, run and sustain CE practices; and
5. emphasising the importance of an emotional connection between service providers and service users in the CE process and evidence of relationship building.

To sum up, there is a need for staff to be trained in CE skills and attitude that necessitates good communication skills and an entrepreneurial 'can do' culture. In addition to the skills and attitudes of individuals there are also implications for the organisational culture in libraries and the way they are run which may impose barriers to genuine CE. For example a highly hierarchical and authoritarian approach to management is likely to hamper CE since it is likely to influence the relationship and attitude towards members of the community. Furthermore, senior staff will need to trust their employees to instigate initiatives that may be relatively unstructured, so that they can respond to evolving needs. They will also need to be comfortable with projects that are less well defined than may normally be the case. Staff will also need to be flexible in how they use their space and resources and not expect an immediate return on resources. They will also need to be open to collaboration with other organisations and develop a belief that the community has the capacity to understand their needs, although they may need help expressing these needs. Therefore, library services are faced with a challenge, i.e. to learn how to genuinely

facilitate community-based projects – enabling CE to become a truly transformational development tool.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the two anonymous referees for their constructive advice on the original manuscript.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- Arnstein SR (1969) A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of American Planning Association* 35(4): 216–224.
- Big Lottery Fund (2007) *Community Libraries: Summary of the Programme*. Available at: http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog_community_libraries (accessed 11 April 2011).
- Birdi B, Wilson K and Cocker J (2008) The public library, exclusion and empathy: A literature review. *Library Review* 57(8): 576–592.
- Black A and Muddiman D (1997) *Understanding Community Librarianship: The Public Library in Post-modern Britain*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Braun V and Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77–101.
- Brodie E, Cowling E and Nissen N (2009) *Understanding Participation: A Literature Review*. Available at: <http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Pathways-literature-review-final-version.pdf> (accessed 1 March 2011).
- Bryman A (2004) *Social Research Methods*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cabinet Office (2010) *Building the Big Society*. Available at: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/407789/building-big-society.pdf> (accessed 27 May 2011).
- CFE (2009) *Cultural Volunteering in the East Midlands*. Available at: <http://www.cfe.org.uk/uploaded/files/CFE%20CV%20case%20study%20citizens%20eye.pdf> (accessed 13 April 2011).
- Charmaz K (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. London: SAGE.
- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (2011) *Libraries*. Available at: <http://www.cipfasocialresearch.net/libraries/> (accessed 12 February 2011).
- Cornwall A (2002) *Beneficiary, Consumers, Citizens: Perspectives of Participation for Poverty Reduction*. Gothenburg: Sida Studies.
- Cornwall A (2008) Unpacking 'participation': Models, meanings and practices. *Community Development Journal* 43(3): 269–283.
- Creswell JW (2009) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- CSV Consulting (2006) *Community Engagement in Public Libraries: A Toolkit for Public Library Staff*. London: MLA.
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2003) *Framework for the Future: Libraries, Learning and Information in the Next Decade*. London: DCMS.

- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2008) *Public Library Service Standards*. London: DCMS.
- Goulding A (2008) Libraries and cultural capital. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 40(4): 235–237.
- Goulding A (2009) Engaging with community engagement: Public libraries and citizen involvement. *New Library World* 110(1/2): 37–51.
- Hart G (2007) Social capital: A fresh vision for public libraries in South Africa? *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 73(1): 14–24.
- Hillenbrand C (2005) Public libraries as developers of social capital. *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Service* 18(1): 4–12.
- International Association of Public Participation (2007) *IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation*. Available at: www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/spectrum.pdf (accessed 28 February 2011).
- Ipsos MORI (2006) *Ingredients for Community Engagement: The Civic Pioneer Experience*. Available at: www.ipsos-mori.com/DownloadPublication/1178_sri_ingredients_for_community_engagement_092006.pdf (accessed 28 February 2011).
- Kranich N (2005) *Libraries & Democracy: The Cornerstones of Library*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
- Leicester City Council (2010) *Embedding Equalities: Submission for LGC Equality & Diversity Award*. Leicester: Leicester City Council.
- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/28/section/138?view=plain> (accessed 8 March 2011).
- McCabe RB (2001) *Civic Librarianship: Renewing the Social Missions of the Public Library*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Mehra B and Srinivasan R (2007) The library-community convergence framework for community action: Libraries as catalysts of social change. *Libri 57*: 123–139.
- Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2010) *Community Engagement in Public Libraries: An Evaluation as Part of the Big Lottery Fund Community Libraries Programme*. London: MLA.
- Pateman J and Vincent J (2010) *Public Libraries and Social Justice*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Rogers B and Robinson E (2004) *The Benefits of Community Engagement: A Review of the Evidence*. Available at: www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/151525.pdf (accessed 8 March 2011).
- Sarkissian W, Hofer N, Shore Y, et al. (2009) *Kitchen Table Sustainability: Practical Recipes for Community Engagement with Sustainability*. London: Earth Scan.
- Schull D (2004) The civic library: A model for 21st century participation. In: Nitecki DA (ed) *Advances in Librarianship*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, pp.58–81.
- Scottish Community Development Centre (2007) *Better Community Engagement: A Framework for Learning*. Available at: www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/1046/0055390.pdf (accessed 28 February 2011).
- Stilwell C (2006) ‘Boundless opportunities?’: Towards an assessment of the usefulness of the concept of social exclusion for the South African public library situation. *Innovation* 32: 1–28.
- Vincent J (2009) Inclusion: Training to tackle social exclusion. In: Brine A (ed.) *Handbook of Library Training Practice and Development*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 123–146.
- Wilcox D (1994) *The Guide to Effective Participation*. Available at: www.partnerships.org.uk/guide/frame.htm (accessed 28 February 2011).
- Working Together Project (2008) *Community-led Libraries Toolkit*. Available at: http://www.librariesincommunities.ca/resources/Community-Led_Libraries_Toolkit.pdf (accessed 4 March 2011).
- Yin RK (2009) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 4th edn. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Appendix I: Complete set of themes identified.

Belonging	Commitment	Communication	A flexible approach	Genuineness	Relevance	Sustainability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community-driven approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment from the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-way dialogue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with multiple partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turning community needs into action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working towards the same goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Going beyond project work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The library as a facilitator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enthusiasm and energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being proactive, informal, honest and open 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting various ways of working with partnership organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing misconceptions and stereotypes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having commonalities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing capacities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment from the service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking through ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving different community groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not ticking boxes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying mutual benefits for key stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A learning process
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust and support 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing different methods to engage with the community 			

Author biographies

Hui-Yun Sung undertook PhD research, with supervision from Dr Mark Hepworth and Dr Gillian Ragsdell, in the Department of Information Science at Loughborough University and will be awarded a doctorate in September 2012. The focus of her PhD was community engagement in public libraries. She was 2011's recipient of the John Campbell Trust Scholarship award, administered by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals.

Mark Hepworth is a Reader in the Department of Information Science, Loughborough University. He teaches information literacy, people-centred service design and online information retrieval. His research focuses on information behaviour and understanding how people interact with information. This has

involved projects in the community; in the health domain; local government; and the work place. This work has led to the investigation, development and implementation of information literacy and information management capacity building initiatives and the design of people-centred services in the UK and overseas.

Gillian Ragsdell is a Senior Lecturer and Director of Research Degree Programme in Department of Information Science, Loughborough University. Her teaching and research focuses on knowledge management. Gillian has a particular interest in the management of project knowledge and in the management of knowledge in the third sector. She has recently led a British Academy funded project that brought these two interests together.