PROFESSIONS, LEGITIMACY AND CHANGE: THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FORCES ON A LARGE CITY LIBRARY SYSTEM IN BRITAIN

Antonio Chiarenza

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Department of Sociology
The University of Leicester

Abstract

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The aim of this research is to investigate developments in public librarianship in a period of fundamental change which took place in the first half of the nineties. Within the framework of the sociological approach to the study of occupations, an attempt is made to understand how the profession responded to changed circumstances due to external political and economic pressures. The general hypothesis is that the librarian's process of adaptation to new cultural and technological conditions has, in the last decade, undergone rapid acceleration because of political reforms and economic constraints which seemed to have the potential to undermine the distinctive identity of the profession. Financial pressure, government reforms, emphasis on accountability, competition, cost-effectiveness and consumer choice reshaped the internal organisation of library work and questioned the principle governing quality of library service. The conflict between the economic criteria for the establishment of the aims and objectives of the library service and the statutory duty to provide a "comprehensive and effective" service to the public created a feeling of uncertainty and lack of confidence in those who had to carry out those tasks. The librarians' traditional orientation to service, their qualifications and competence seemed no longer sufficient to ensure either user satisfaction or public benefit. The purpose of this research is to draw a picture, from the testimonies of professional librarians, manager librarians, politicians and administrators, of how public librarianship has changed its internal organisation, its relationship with the public and its professional practice and culture. The focus of analysis can be grouped into the following areas of investigation: the organisational context, the working context and finally the institutional context where the legitimacy of the librarian's status and competence is brought into question.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASLIB	The Association for Information Management
BLRDD	British Library Research and Development Department
DNH	Department of National Heritage
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
IIS	Institute of Information Scientists
LA	Library Association
LISC	Library and Information Services Council
LISU	Library and Information Statistic Unit
OPAC	On-line Public Access Catalogue
PUPILS	Public and Private Sectors in the Provision of Library and information Services
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Introduction

In the course of the past thirty years, the librarian has been defined as an occupational figure in transformation, in crisis, in decline and lastly in danger of extinction. This ancient profession has found itself up against radical changes since contemporary society entered into what sociologists have termed the post-industrial society (D. Bell, 1974; A. Touraine, 1974)[1], thereby emphasising the importance of information and telecommunication technology, rather than traditional structures for the production and diffusion of knowledge. In fact, the increasing social complexity caused by the upsurge of new forms of social division of labour and by the growth of specialised knowledge and technological innovations has raised the problem of organisation and access to information as an indisputable necessity for individuals in society and their development. Indeed, information has rapidly spread beyond books and journals to digital archives, databases, networked collections of images and sounds, the Internet and Intranets, to name but a few, challenging the traditional organisation of information and library service provision.

Librarians have answered this need for renewal by gradually modifying their own role from that of mere keeper of books to that of information mediator and evaluator of the best information sources, whose prime duty is to provide access to knowledge and to library materials in order to satisfy the demands of an increasingly competent and differentiated public. Nevertheless, the profession's process of adaptation to new social, cultural and technological conditions has undergone rapid acceleration during the last decade because of new and unforeseen pressures of an economic and political nature. In addition to the proliferation of electronic information, libraries have since faced many other pressures, including falling budgets, increasing costs, demands for expansion of services, government control and external scrutiny of librarians' work emphasising value for taxpayers' money.

[1] Other sociologists have, in turn, referred to contemporary society as the post-industrial age (B. Kleimberg, 1973) and the post-modern condition (Lyotard, 1984 [1979])

Rapid, yet radical changes determined a set of circumstances, which, N. Roberts (1992) points out, as never before, rendered the direction the profession was taking uncertain and which had the potential to undermine its distinctive, stabilising identity. The effects of these disruptive forces, N. Roberts and T. Konn (1991 p.69) maintain, *"threaten librarians' ability to maintain the demarcated professional jurisdiction established during the earlier part of the twentieth century"*. It was the very nature of librarianship which was being questioned and with it, the professional identity of librarians, that is its models and structures of organisation, its practices and work standards, its attitude to work and its relationship with the public. For the first time in its history, the profession of librarian, in order to survive, had to confront the principles of 'market economy': cost-effectiveness, accountability, competition and consumer choice. The librarian's traditional devotion to service, professional qualifications and respect of a code of ethics seemed no longer sufficient to ensure that a librarian's work be considered well executed or that a librarian has achieved the aim of public benefit or customer satisfaction. New criteria for evaluation and external systems for monitoring work efficiency were progressively encouraged by government policies with a view to establishing improved quality service and a more open relationship with the public. (N. Roberts, 1992, pp. 450-452)

The resulting contrast between new economic type criteria to be used in defining service strategies and objectives and the spirit of the welfare state epitomised by the statutory duty *"to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service to all persons desiring to make use thereof"*, as stated in the Public Library and Museum Act 1964 (Section 7/1), created a feeling of uncertainty and lack of confidence in those professionals entrusted with the task of managing and providing library and information services. In some cases the situation was rendered more complicated by the pressure of new and old socio-cultural needs which made it difficult to define priorities in the provision of services and the roles and tasks of the librarians who executed them. As pointed out in a national survey (Comedia Report 1993), it is astonishing that some six million adults lacked the literacy skills they needed at a time when access to knowledge and information was essential. Moreover, the threat of unemployment and the concentration of ethnic minorities and elderly people in inner city areas stressed the relevance of public libraries in society in providing opportunities to all people. Thus the destabilising effects which the introduction of central government and institutional policies may have had on local authorities and consequently on the organisation and control of the provision of library services in Britain over the last few years constituted important factors influencing professional change. What is argued here is

that financial pressure and emphasis on market economy principles were likely to have two major effects on the library profession: firstly that they threatened to destabilise the division of expert labour within public libraries and secondly that they shifted the previously established power relations at work and at a political level between professionals and administrators.

The changing scenario in librarianship

The aim of this research is to investigate how changing political and economic conditions and circumstances interact with internal forces within the public library profession, not with the intention of making hypotheses on the future of librarianship, but rather in an attempt to describe what has been happening to this profession and to appraise changes. To this purpose, attention is focused on work arrangements, the subjects involved, work tasks, occupational roles, rules, and procedures for delivering library services. Particular interest is placed on the structural and normative resources used by librarians to exercise and maintain control over work, over power relations within the library between professional and administrative orientations, between librarians and the library authority and, more generally, between the spheres of professional expertise and politics. Within the framework of a sociological approach to the study of professions, public librarianship's response to changing circumstances due to external political, economic and social pressures is examined. Moreover, an attempt is made to provide a theoretical insights into the significance of these changes, linking them to the wider body of specific knowledge. The actual focus of this analysis is, therefore, the nature, scope and development of librarianship as a form of professional expertise with specific and legitimated forms of organisation, practices and rules.

Indeed, in broader terms, the general aim of this research is to try and understand how a profession is socially structured. Some of the questions dealt with here are certainly not new and have been studied by many theorists of the professions using different approaches, functionalist, Marxist and Weberian. What makes a profession become institutionalised in certain forms and ways in society? What are the forces that have the power to create circumstances able to produce structural and normative changes in a profession: that is in its composition and organisation, in its body of knowledge and ability, in the rules for managing it and in the relevant roles to be played within the profession? In order to achieve these objectives, attention is placed on the forces and subjects involved in these processes in order to understand how and where changes take place and are negotiated at

different levels. It is the type of relationship between the subjects involved, which is used to explain how arrangements are established in a new, accepted situation once turbulence has passed.

From a purely theoretical point of view, emphasis is placed, obviously, on the influence of social structures rather than merely on the actor approach..[2] In fact, the sociological focus of this research is an attempt to demonstrate that transformations in the profession of public librarianship cannot be fully understood by considering only the relationship between organisational changes and the professional position of librarians but that it is essential to also place this relationship within the wider context of the changing economic and political ideology of the time. Nevertheless, the intention here is not to suggest that political and economic changes have a direct, automatic effect on social structures and behaviours, but that these forces may have the power to determine new circumstances and conditions, in which new accepted discourses and actions take place, giving way to negotiations which involve individual librarians, decision makers or influencers and political authorities. In the case of British public libraries, it may be seen how economic pressure and government reforms seriously affected the reorganisation of libraries not only from a structural point of view, but also from a normative and institutional one. These changes are part of a far more complex process in which a new definition and social function of information and library service provision are negotiated at a political level, within the work setting and by the public, that is by service users and their elected representatives in local authorities, before finding a new legitimated format. As H. Jamous and B. Peloille (1970) point out, the major transformations in a profession have the greatest chance of occurring when internal dynamics, mainly determined by technological and organisational innovations, are coupled with external dynamics, an expression of the balance of social forces. In accordance with this general hypothesis, it is argued here that major transformations in the library profession are likely to occur when shifts in the cultural and political ideology, an expression of the balance of the social order, are accompanied by shifts in the principles legitimating the definition and social aims of the library service and the system of evaluation and control of library work.

For this reason, particular importance is given to the relationship between the state with its form of administrative organisation and political orientation and the status goals of

[2] This approach, neglected in part in this research, has however been adopted by most of those works which deal with the professions (Hughes, 1963, 1971; Freidson, 1970, 1973, 1986, 1994; Macdonald, 1995).

occupational groups, because on this relationship depend many other variables which give shape to a profession, that is, its internal organisation, its professional market with defined areas of competence, its professional work with legitimated tasks and standards, its specific body of knowledge and skills with its educational and training process and finally the clientele to whom its professional services are directed. Therefore, one of the main areas of investigation is identified in the shifting relationship between the political apparatus of the state and expert labour. As T. Johnson (1982; 1993; 1995) has strongly argued in many of his recent writings, the administrative sphere of the state has constantly used professional principles, methods and judgements to achieve political aims and objectives. Service professionals, in particular, have been involved in the identification of new social problems or needs and the construction of means and strategies to solve or respond to them. According to more recent studies of the professions (T. Johnson, 1995; E. Freidson, 1994; Sarfatti Larson, 1977, 1990; A. Abbott, 1988, 1991 to mention but a few), it is possible to say that the ideology of professionalism has served as a means of institutionalising service expertise. Therefore, one of the questions posed here is whether the ideology of professionalism, which has dominated the provision of public services since the establishment of the welfare state, has reached an end? This leads to two further questions: what new ideology is going to take its place and what are the consequences for library practice? It is suggested that professionalism is losing its legitimating role in public libraries and that this role is being taken over by the fetish of a new form of managerialism or commercialised professionalism.

The impact of change on public librarianship: a case study

Empirical research has concentrated on the consequential effects of political reforms and economic restrictions, during 1994-1995, in a large metropolitan city library system in UK, which included 41 branch libraries together with a large reference library. The libraries under investigation, by virtue of the important role they occupy at a national level, represented a valid indicator of the changes underway at that time and the direction that the library profession may take, at least, in Great Britain. This library system was chosen as a case for studying the processes underway, as a number of major restructurings in the organisational of the library service under investigation had been underway since 1989, the most recent of which entailed the merging of the Library Services Department with two other departments of the city council. Whereas previous restructurings had tended to be directed within Library Services and had aimed at improving the quality and efficiency of

service provision, establishing a different approach to the user/customer, the latest, and most dramatic due to the resulting job losses, was driven above all by the need to react to severe budget cuts and to adapt to central government's policy of privatisation and deregulation of public services.

A qualitative methodology was adopted, together with a variety of techniques for the collection of primary and secondary data. The choice of case study and of a qualitative research method, was based on certain theoretical perspectives and on the very aims and objectives of the research which were not so much the search for causal explanations, as the attempt to describe and understand how the phenomenon under investigation was manifest in the chosen context. The aim was not, therefore, to 'quantify' collected data in order to make statistical generalisations, but rather to try and highlight the links between concepts and actions, ideas and social behaviour which emerged from the research findings, although no attempt was made to 'measure' the extent of these links. The same considerations determined the choice of the actual units of analysis needed to provide the research data and information. The sample was not identified according to criteria of probability or random sampling, but rather in view of certain characteristics through which the phenomenon under investigation might be illustrated. Consequently, the formulation of hypotheses was orientated more towards identifying conceptual rather than causal relations between variables. Thus, the objective was to ascertain the very existence of these conceptual relations.

The research project, bearing in mind the choice of methodology and actual problems of access to people and places, was organised into three separate stages:

1. the first stage aimed at gathering information on the impact of change on the institutional set up of the profession of librarian and was based on the examination of legislative and government documents and records relevant to the process of institutionalisation of librarianship in UK;

2. the second aimed at gathering information on the impact of change on the principles legitimating the professional activities of public librarians in the socio-cultural context in which they operate and was based on in-depth interviews with key figures and decision makers and influencers, as well as participant observations at discussions, meetings and seminars involving library staff;

3. the third, aimed at gathering information on the impact of change on the tasks, roles, career models and levels of cohesion and unity amongst librarians as a professional group, was based on in-depth interviews with professionally qualified library staff.

Outline of the thesis

This work has been divided into three parts: the first illustrates the research framework, the second the methodological approach and the third data analysis. The first part is covered in chapters 1, 2 and 3 which provide, respectively, the literature review, the historical development of public librarianship and the definition of the research problem. The literature review of the major relevant authors focuses above all on the concepts of professionalism, occupational control and legitimacy with the aim of constructing a conceptual model by means of which the effects of external pressures on librarianship as a profession may be analysed. Chapter 2 looks at the facts from the perspective of the relationship between the form of the state with its policies and ideologies and the historical development of the profession of librarian and its social status. Chapter 3 identifies the major factors of change, which, it is contended here, had the potential to destabilise the context in which librarians operate. The factors examined, in order to define the research problem and to try and reach an understanding of their importance, are reductions in public funds and government policies involving the local authorities on whom public libraries depend, the questioning of certain fundamental principles of the welfare state, an emergent managerial ideology applied to public service and the deregulation of professional services at a political and social level. The chapter concludes with the research questions posed.

Chapters 4 and 5 constitute the second part of the thesis and deal with the conceptual model of analysis, the presentation of the methodological approach and the case study of the research. Chapter 4 presents the model for analysis of the empirical data. Chapter 5 provides explanations and justification of the choice of case study as research strategy. The analysis of the data collected throughout the phases of the empirical research is presented in chapters 6, 7 and 8. Chapter 6 describes, in some detail, the public library system under investigation and the social, cultural and political context in which it operated; chapter 7 describes the actual working context of professional librarians in order to reach a firmer understanding of the changes that were taking place, reactions to the changes and the degree of professional identity and cohesion revealed by librarians. Finally, chapter 8 studies the profession's chances of maintaining the position reached in consideration of the

external perception of the validity and credibility of librarians' work. The aim of the conclusions is to present the outcome of the research with respect to the research questions identified in chapter 3. This chapter also deals with the conceptual and theoretical aspects highlighted by the research and which might be considered as representing innovative elements in the field of the study of the professions. Limitations, which may have emerged during the research, are also discussed here.

Definition of controversial terms

It is, perhaps, advisable at this point to clarify the definitions of certain key terms which recur throughout this thesis and which represent certain theoretical standpoints not shared by all theorists of the professions. The use of the terms 'profession' and 'professionalism' is meant in what might be considered the classical sense identified by T. Johnson (1972) and clearly summarised in the words of E. Freidson (1994 p.10) as being used respectively *"to refer to an occupation that controls its own work, organised by a special set of institutions sustained in part by a particular ideology of expertise and service. I use the word 'professionalism' to refer to that ideology and special set of institutions."* Both the word expertise, just mentioned, and the term institutionalisation need clarification and for this purpose, A. Abbott (1991 p. 3-4) provides a suitable definition *"by expertise I mean the ability to accomplish complicated tasks; I could alternatively speak of it as complex knowledge (...) I shall thus leave my definition of expertise deliberately vague, insisting only that it combine knowledge and action and that it involve some degree of socially-defined complexity"*[3]. As Abbott points out 'institutionalisation' is an even more controversial term than expertise. *"It refers to the emergence of clusters of social organisations carrying out general social functions, (...) institutionalisation means the emergence of a set of rules for handling expertise, a set of roles to play relative to it, and arrangements of those norms and roles into larger structures"*. A firm understanding of the conceptual link between the terms 'institutionalisation', 'expertise', 'profession' and 'professionalism' is suggested, again, by Abbott with the aid of a significant example: *"under the regime of institutionalised professionalism, the roles are those of professional, client, etc., the norms concern client service, ethical behaviour, etc., and the structures are hospital, law firms, (libraries), and other intra- and interprofessional hierarchies and groups."*

[3] A. Abbott. "The Future of Professions: Occupation and Expertise in the Age of Organisation", *Research in the Sociology of Organisations.* 1991, 8, p.17-42. The quotations used here are taken form the draft version of the same article presented by Abbott as a paper at the Leicester conference on the professions in 1990.

Conclusion

This section has laid the foundation for the thesis. It has introduced the impact of political and economic pressure on public librarianship as the central research problem, whereas the consequent shifts in the previously established situation concerning the division of labour, work practice and power relations of public librarians have been presented as groups of research questions. Furthermore, justification for the research has been provided, the qualitative methodology has been briefly described and justified and the thesis outlined. On these foundations, the thesis can now proceed with a detailed description of the research.

PART 1
DEVELOPMENTS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIANSHIP: A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Chapter 1

PUBLIC LIBRARIANSHIP AS A PROFESSION: PROFESSIONALISM, OCCUPATIONAL CONTROL AND LEGITIMACY

1.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to review the relevant literature and theories that have tried to explain the phenomenon of formation and transformation of specialised occupations within specific forms and ways in society. The breadth of the analysis of sociological literature on the professions will focus on achieving an understanding of the theoretical orientation of the various authors who have studied the professions and on identifying the main concepts, theoretical tools and research questions needed to then analyse the impact of political and economic forces on the profession of the public librarian in the sample chosen for data collection. For this very reason, the scope of this chapter will not simply be to describe the different contributions to the study of the professions, but will also, and above all else, highlight how these contributions link up to the central purpose of this study in order to build a theoretical foundation upon which the research can be based. Throughout this chapter, this primary aim will be kept, first and foremost, in mind, that is the analysis of librarianship as a profession in order to identify the main theoretical concepts to be used as operational heuristic tools in the research.

The theoretical perspectives on the professions under consideration are roughly divided according to the three main areas of sociological tradition: the functionalist, Weberian and Marxist schools, although, with the exception of the early studies of the professions, borders between schools of thoughts are not so sharp and theoretical contributions could be better identified as neo-Weberian, neo-Marxist, neo-functionalist and post-modernist. Moreover, it has to be noted that frequently individual authors' thoughts seem to draw on more than one sociological theory. Within this broad division, the study of the profession of librarian is articulated in three linked-up dimensions, which will progressively enlarge the focus of analysis: the first will look at professionals as individual workers, with their peculiar characteristics and status, the second as collective workers within the social division of labour and the third as part of a particular form of bureaucratic organisation within the wider

socio-political system. Attention will also be focused on three key issues of the specific literature: professionalism, as a model and ideology for institutionalising expertise, occupational control over professional work and the market, as a measure of professional status, and lastly legitimacy, as a formal validation of the claim to that professional status, being in accordance with the general system of values and principles forming the dominant political ideology.

Unfortunately there are very few sociological studies of the profession of librarianship. Theorists of the professions have mainly focused attention on the analysis of the more 'established' professions of doctor, lawyer, engineer etc. When the less 'established' professions have been examined, theorists of the professions have preferred to look at the teacher, social worker, nurse, etc., simply placing librarians in the group of 'semi-professions' without undertaking a full analysis. There are, nevertheless, a few examples in the professional literature, which, as shall be seen, have been mainly based on the systematic confrontation of librarianship with an ideal-type profession, drawn from the classical professions, the ministry, law and medicine. However, with the exception of a few cases (W. Reeves, 1980; A. Abbott, 1988; 1998), little attention has been given to understanding the historical and social conditions, which have brought librarianship to be shaped around peculiar structural and normative elements and librarians to achieve a certain social standing.

The outcome of this approach (W. Goode, 1961, 1969) has been a relegation of the profession of librarians to the status of 'semi or quasi-profession', sometimes 'marginal' or 'doubtful' profession, or, at best, to the status of an occupation 'in the process' of becoming a 'true' profession. In this latter case, analysts of the professions have preferred to justify the evolution and growth in importance of this profession as part of a more general process of professionalisation (W. Goode, 1960) which, according to this view, has involved the specialised occupations of the industrialised society[1], while no attempt has been made to link these developments to changed political, social and technological

[1] This conception, which is well represented by Goode's statement *"an industrialising society is a professionalising society"* (1960, p.902), is based on the conviction that highly industrialised societies are subject to a rapid increase in the number of the old and new professions, a sort of mass professionalisation. Drawing on this conception, some authors have argued that the tendency towards professionalisation is a constant in industrialised societies, a kind of "historical-natural" process that involves the specialised occupations, so that the degree of professionalisation of an occupation can be established at any given moment according to the degree to which it is in possession of the essential "characteristics".

circumstances[2] which made it possible for librarians to gradually reach a position of greater prestige and authority in social policy (E. Hughes, 1971).

The starting point here shall be a perspective which D. Klegon (1978) has named the 'taxonomic approach' and which includes two of the best known proposals for the study of the professions: the 'attributes' model and the 'functionalist' model, as it is essential to overcome certain conceptual cruxes emerging from these theoretical models, before proceeding with this analysis. It is well known that these two approaches have influenced many works on single professions and have for many years particularly conditioned the debate on the library profession. These two models are still referred to today in order to try and provide a possible answer to the time honoured question which has fascinated certain sociologists and very many librarians: is the occupation of librarian a 'true' profession?

1.1 The rise of mass professionalism

1.1.1 The early studies

The first systematic studies of the professions go back to the start of the 20th century, and this has to be related, in part, to the emergence and diffusion of the social sciences. This development also reflects the profound changes to which the professions were exposed during the industrialisation process. At first, in fact, interest in the professions was manifest above all in those countries in which the effects of the industrial revolution first became evident. At the end of the 1940's, the major authors on this subject were of British origin: authors such as R. H. Tawney (1952) [1921], E. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson (1933) and T.H. Marshall (1939) represent a few of the most illustrious exponents of that British tradition which saw in the professions the hope of a new form of *'altruism'* able to contrast the economic-productive selfishness of industrial capitalism. However, from the outset, the role of professions in society was not seen as a positive force by everyone, in fact, the professions were considered by some as a threat to freedom, in terms of new power centres. The liberal economists, (S. Kuznets and M. Friedman, 1945) above all, saw the professions as monopolistic oligarchies, which could lead to a disastrous distortion of the market. These authors believed that the client's interests could be best looked after by weakening the professional monopolies. This type of criticism represented the main body of attack launched against British professional institutions by Conservative government

[2] E. C. Hughes (1971) was one of the first sociologists who emphasised that the study of the profession is not so much the identification of the criteria by which an occupation can be classified as "true" profession, but rather of the conditions that permit a given occupation to turn into a profession.

policies, permeated by a strong neo-liberal idealism, from the beginning of the 90's. The thrust to deregulation of the professions through a revision of the mechanisms for licensing and access to the professions is present not only in Great Britain, but also in the majority of the other European countries[3].

Despite initial efforts to link the rise of modern professions to the significant changes in the division of labour and in the class structure of the industrialised societies (J. Ben-David, 1964)[4], as T. Johnson (1972) maintains, sociologists of the early period focused attention on two questions which were to condition the majority of the subsequent works on the occupations: how to define the essential *characteristics* by means of which a profession can be identified as such and how to define the social *role* of the professions themselves. According to this critique what has been ignored is that the problems connected to the process of professionalisation inevitably involve both class structure-professions and organisation-profession relationships.

This was perhaps due, M. Burrage (1990) observes, to a lack of interest on the part of the two fathers of sociology, Marx and Weber, in the themes of the formation and role of professions in society, having preferred to analyse changes in the social stratification and in work relations using the sociological concepts of *class* and *bureaucracy*. The absence of a specific theoretical basis, continues Burrage, led the first sociologists of the professions to devote themselves mainly to a simple exercise in classifying the occupations, neglecting to explore the impact that the emergence of the new professions had on patterns of conflict and inequality and on the distribution of power and in society[5].

1.1.2 The trait approach and the process of professionalisation

According to the proponents of the trait approach, the process of professionalisation of specialised occupations coincides with the process of the acquisition of certain attributes and characteristics. Some of these authors (W. Goode, 1960; B. Barber, 1963) saw, then, in

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[3] See, for example, L. Orzack, The General Systems Directive: Education and the Liberal Professions, in I. Hurwitz and C. Lequesne, The State of the European Community: Politics, Institutions and Debates in the Transition Years, 1989-90. London. Longman, 1991

[4] According to J. Ben-David the professions should be analysed by referring to their position in the market of professional services and its peculiar mechanisms of division of labour. Cfr. J. Ben-David, "Professions in the Class System of Present day Societies", in *Current Sociology*, vol. 12, n.3, 1964, pp. 247-330.

[5] The importance of the relationship between the professions and the class system was also highlighted by T. Johnson (1972), Daniel Bell (1973) and M. Sarfatti Larson (1977) among others and has also been confirmed by more recent studies on the professions: M. Burrage, "Introduction: the professions in sociology and history", in M. Burrage and R. Torstendahl (eds.) Professions in Theory and History. London, SAGE, 1990, p. 2.

the process of achieving and perfecting these essential *attributes*, a sort of natural history of the professions, a tendency towards the *'professionalisation'* of the occupations along the lines of the traditional professions, the final stage of which coincided with the acknowledgement of their *'professionalism'*. The differences in the nature of professional practice, in professional characteristics and organisation, are to be explained by the fact that occupations are not equally professionalised. The fact that professions occupy varying positions and enjoy differing privileges in society is determined by the actual diverse characteristics possessed by the distinct professions (T. Parsons, 1954), thus by the same token, what makes a profession become institutionalised in certain forms and ways in society depends on the acquisitions of special characteristics. For these theorists, therefore, the analysis of a given profession means comparing its professional characteristics with those of an *ideal-type profession* with the aim of establishing what stage of the professionalisation process has been reached by that particular occupation. H.M. Vollmer and D.L. Mills (1966) explain these concepts very clearly when they suggest that

> *"the concept of 'profession' be applied only to an abstract model of occupational organisation, and that the concept of 'professionalisation' be used to refer to the dynamic process whereby many occupations can be observed to change certain crucial characteristics in the direction of a 'profession', even though some of these may not move very far in this direction. It follows that these crucial characteristics constitute specifiable criteria of professionalisation"*. (1966, p.VII)

Although no consensus of opinion has ever been reached on these *"crucial characteristics"*, the exponents of this theory, nevertheless, agree that it is possible to draw up a list of characteristics for each occupation and judge whether occupations have the right to claim professional status or not. All these authors are convinced that a particular status does exist for occupations, called *professionalism*, a status already in existence for the older and long-standing professions and toward which the new occupations are tending.

Some proponents of this approach (E. Greenwood, 1957; W. J. Goode 1957, 1960; G. Millerson, 1964) have limited it to defining a list of attributes, amongst which certain attributes are fundamental, professions must possess them if they want to distinguish themselves from occupations[6]. As Greenwood points out, the difference between a

[6] Greenwood identifies a main group of five attributes. The first consists of a *superior skill based on a systematic body of theory*: a practical and theoretical body of techniques, principles, general ideas and values on which the profession is based. This superior skill is based on a long period of professional training needed to be able to perform the complicated activities, which make up professional practice. The second attribute,

professional and a non-professional occupation derives from the fact that the latter, while possessing the same attributes, do so to a lesser degree. It is not possible, according to Greenwood (1957, pp.10-11), to make a clear classification of the professions, rather:

> *"we must think of the occupations in society as distributing themselves along a continuum. At one end of this continuum are bunched the well-recognised and undisputed professions (e.g., physician, attorney, professor, scientist); at the opposite end are bunched the least skilled and least attractive occupations (e.g. watchman, truck loader, farm laborer, scrubwoman, busboy)"*

A variation of the trait theory in addition to what has already been mentioned, maintains that the fundamental attributes of a profession have to be acquired in a specific temporal order. Thus, for a profession to reach full professionalisation, it must necessarily pass through a precise sequence of stages, the so-called *"process of professionalisation"*. This approach is clearly explained in the works of H. Wilensky (1964), and T. Caplow (1954)[7]. H. Wilensky, after examining a certain number of American professions, maintained that the history of the majority of them had followed a series of common stages. According to Wilensky all professions are the result of an identical process, which evolves through the achieving of certain goals, and provided a precise mapping of the stages each profession must accomplish. [8]

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and a direct consequence of the first, is *professional authority*: the ability to exercise control over the work process and it implies that it must be the professional who decides what is good or bad for the client. The third attribute is the *sanction of the community*, the legitimation of a profession, considered necessary and useful for the well-being of the community, through forms of protection and regulation of its practice, and from which the forms of privilege and monopoly of the professionals descend. The fourth attribute is the *regulative code of ethics*: the need to regulate relations between the professional and the client, as well as between colleagues, both of which must be oriented towards service and not personal gain. The final attribute is *professional culture*: the body of values, norms and symbols which form the very base of the tradition of the profession and which provide a guide for professional behaviour.

[7] Theodore Caplow based his idea of the process of professionalisation upon an historical analysis of the development of the professional group of medical technicians in USA. He presented a sequence of four steps: the establishment of a professional association; the change of name; the promulgation of a code of ethics; prolonged political agitation. His work firstly appeared in an editorial in the journal *Minnesota Medicine* (1952) and was then reprinted *in The Sociology of Work*, Minneapolis: Minnesota Univ. Press, 1954, pp. 139-140. The reprint from H.M. Vollmer and D.L. Mills, *Professionalization*, op. Cit., pp. 20-21, has been used.

[8] Wilensky describes these stages as follows: initially, the occupation becomes a *full-time occupation*, then a *training school* is set up and this will later be associated with a university. University schools, generally, appear before the foundation of the *professional association*. The association, in fact, is established only subsequently, when the need to provide common training for professionals, to promote activities which encourage the development of professional knowledge and finally to protect the field of action from possible external encroachment emerges. The next step towards professionalisation is, according to Wilensky, the beginning of a phase of *political agitation* the final aim of which is to gain support from the state to protect the occupation from competition or from external encroachment. Without legislative support, in fact, the association would not have the strength needed to bring about social recognition of the professional competence of its own members. Authorisation to use the professional title, licenses, certifications and official examinations are all part of this stage in the development of occupations. Once the thrust towards

It is evident that the variant of the process of professionalisation does not provide a solution to the initial problem of understanding how this process is developed and above all how and why the process is embarked upon. Both the historical and technological processes at the basis of this development and the power relations, which characterise it, are ignored. Furthermore, as Johnson (1972, p. 27) and Abbott (1988, p. 17) highlighted, the process of professionalisation appears as a fundamentally ahistorical process. Although it is a system for evaluating occupations according to their acquisition over time of certain characteristics, it appears immutable. When attempts have been made, Johnson claims, to describe the process of professionalisation, the stages of this process have been confused with the very characteristics of a profession, so that the setting up of a professional association, the adoption of a code of ethics etc. are seen as being at the same time essential conditions for the emergence of a profession and the very characteristics which define a profession as such. They "*are therefore both cause and effect of the developments*" (Johnson 1972, p. 30).

1.1.3 The functionalist approach

The major exponents of the functionalist approach, B. Barber (1963) and Parsons (1951, 1954, 1968) with greater ideological emphasis, maintain that the process of professionalisation is not so much the process of acquiring certain attributes, as the process through which certain occupations achieve an important *role* in society. According to the functionalist perspective, the study of the professions is only one aspect of the more general problem of maintaining the complex *equilibrium* between the various social forces and the efficient functioning of society. The functionalist model, in particular, sees the professions as a group of occupations oriented to serving the client and the collectivity rather than to serving individual interest, a group that applies a high level of generalised and systematic knowledge to problems strictly connected to *central values* in society as a whole. The particular link between the professions and the interests of the collectivity is demonstrated by the fact that, for example, the professional activity of the doctor is connected to safeguarding the health of individuals, that of the lawyer to regulating social order and that of the engineer to controlling physical processes.

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political power and legal recognition has been completed, the last step is self-regulation by adopting a *formal code of ethics*. It follows that the ethical code represents an act of good faith on the part of professionals, which confirms their respectability and the occupation responsibility and at the same time serves as a guarantee to the public that the right to self-control granted to the professionals has been well deserved.

The work of Durkheim [9] (1957, 1933), unlike those of the two other classics of sociology, Marx and Weber, represented a model for the functionalist theorists of the professions. Durkheim, Burrage (1990) stresses, although he provides no historical analysis of the development of the professions in France, has in fact written at some length on the role of the professions in society and endows them with the important function of moral cohesion at a time in which social differentiation and the breaking down of the trades brought about by capitalist economy risked provoking dangerous detachment between the individual and the collectivity. For Durkheim, the moral characteristic of the industrial society is *anomie*, that is the absence of norms capable of ensuring the social integration so seriously jeopardised by the division of labour. The origin of anomie, for Durkheim, should be looked for in the fact that the individual and society as a whole have lost contact with those forms of traditional moral consensus with respect to what was previously considered right or wrong. Industrialisation, Durkheim points out, together with technological innovations, the multiplication of the occupations and material well-being have strongly encouraged the development of an individualistic ideology dominated exclusively by economical and productive interests. Durkheim (1957) entrusts the professions with a moralising function, their task being to recreate order and cohesion in a society characterised by instability and lack of moral discipline. In order to hinder the thrust towards anomie and the loss of values, Durkheim advocates the formation of professional organisations, structured like the ancient medieval guilds, characterised by a culture of their own and by internal mechanisms of control over their work and which should distinguish themselves from other occupations for their *altruism*, an expression of the orientation to service of the professional. A primary function of the occupational associations, as legally constituted groups, would be to reinforce moral regulation at the "nodal points" of the division of labour thereby promoting *organic solidarity* instead of expressing only various combinations of particular interests.

Despite the importance that Durkheim attributes to the professions, it is only with the affirmation of the functionalist theory during the fifties and sixties that professions occupy once more a significant position in sociological analysis. The work of T. Parsons (1954, 1968) is of particular significance and its analysis constitutes one of the most developed and coherent applications of the basic theoretical apparatus of the functionalist school.

[9] Durkheim's argument is in the preface "Some remarks on occupational groups" of the second edition of '*The division of labour in society*', although A. Giddens argues that Durkheim discussed the role of occupational associations in 'La famille conjugale'. A. Giddens, "Individualism, socialism and the occupational groups" in A. Giddens, *Capitalism and the modern social theory*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1971, p.103

Parsons' work focuses on discovering the *role* of the professions in the social system and emphasising their distinctiveness from business. Parson (1954) affirms that, although the professions and business have much in common in industrial society, the professions distinguish themselves for their *orientation towards the collectivity* rather than towards personal interest, proof of their high sense of responsibility.

> *"... by contrast with business in this interpretation the professions are marked by 'disinterestedness'. The professional man is not thought of as engaged in the pursuit of his personal profit, but in performing services to his patients or clients, or to impersonal values like the advancement of science."* (Parsons, 1954 p.35)

It is this orientation to service which, according to functionalist theorists, defines the relationship between client and professional and which guarantees the professional's correct behaviour, given that the client is unable to assess professional performance, ensuring that is, that the professional has acted in the client's interest and more generally, in the interest of the entire collectivity. According to functionalists, the professions themselves are, in fact, the entities most suitable to provide forms of protection from possible cases of incompetence, disloyalty and exploitation. This particular type of authority exercised by the professions in their relations with clients is based, Parsons argues, on two elements: *the superior technical competence* of the professional who is best able to judge the professional work carried out, and the professional's high sense of *responsibility* which is such that no further supervision is needed. In fact, in those rare cases in which it is revealed that a professional is not carrying out his/her work with due competence and ethical correctness, the profession itself demonstrates that it is capable of taking adequate corrective action. The possession of superior competence and a sense of altruism is rewarded by the client's trust in professional services, an expression of the principle *confidat emptor* [10] (let the customer trust us!) as opposed to the rule of *caveat emptor* (let the customer watch out!), which governs the producer-consumer relationship in business services (E. Hughes, 1963 p.657).

According to Parsons, service orientation ensures that *science*, insofar as it is a powerful instrument of control over nature and society, is put to the service of the collectivity. For Parsons (1968), the professions represent a sector of the cultural system of society, in

[10] This quotation is drawn from the expression that E. Hughes used in his article "The Professions" where he says, *"A central feature, then, of all professions, is the motto – not used in this form, so far as I know – credat emptor."* 1963, p. 657.

which the *primacy of cognitive rationality* is widely recognised. By emphasising the primacy of cognitive rationality and thus the intimate relationship between profession and knowledge, Parsons (1954) pinpoints the fact that rationality controls not only professional practice, but also the relations between professionals and between professionals and clients.[11] The bridge between functionalism as a general theory of social life and Parsons' own theory of the professions is the very concept of *institutionalisation*. As the professions are types of occupations whose task is to provide certain essential services, Parsons argues that in order to be able to carry out that task, the professionals have to undergo a lengthy period of suitable training. The institutional aspect of the professions resides in the very fact that they are part of a whole social system, and, in particular, of that part of the system whose function is to provide a higher educational level. (Parsons, 1968)

> *"The professional type is the institutional framework in which many of our most important social functions are carried on, notably the pursuit of science and liberal learning and its practical application in medicine, technology, law and teaching."* (Parsons, 1954 p.48)

Legitimation of the professions' position of privilege is explained, according to functionalists, by the bargain they have struck with society: the professions place their superior technical competence and integrity at the service of the collectivity and in exchange they obtain relative freedom from controls and external interference, protection from unqualified competition and an elevated social and economical status. The professions repay this trust with the creation of careful training and recruitment policies, the setting up of institutional structures and the adopting of a code of ethics.

As the functionalist school of thought becomes more and more widespread, but thanks also to the affirmation of the attributes theory, analyses of the professions start to proliferate. It is to the credit of these two theoretical models that the attention of sociologists was drawn to the problem of the professions; however, this increasing interest in the professions, confirmed time and time again by the flourishing of studies on single professions, was not rewarded by a like abundance of fruitful results. In fact, the majority of these studies were restricted to establishing the differences between the profession under analysis and the

[11] To this purpose, Parsons identifies three functional characteristics: professional training, which should be based on a cognitive discipline, as opposed to a technical or practical discipline; professional skills which should be linked to this type of knowledge and, finally, an institutional framework with the task of controlling the application of these skills.

'true' professions, or to the degree of professionalism reached by a given profession according to the stage reached in the process of professionalisation.

The most significant consequence of these types of approaches has been the adopting of a model of professionalism by all those occupations that strove to improve their own economic and social position. Thus, not only has professionalism been adopted as a model by those analysing the occupations, but it has also represented the rhetorical foundation and structural model to which those professions who claimed social status and official recognition aspired (T. Johnson, 1972; M. Saks, 1983). The case of British librarians can be inscribed into this conceptual framework: as technological advances together with changes in the perception of the growing importance of libraries as relevant providers of information and knowledge in contemporary life have created the circumstances for a heightening of collective professional aspirations, the struggle to achieve recognition of librarianship *as a profession* became fundamental in order to gain better economic conditions and social prestige.

1.1.4 Librarians' struggle to display professional traits

Despite all the efforts made by librarians to secure a growing professional status for librarianship, forecasts by early sociologists of the professions, as to whether librarians might achieve the goal of professional status, were not at all favourable. In conformity with the ideals of professionalism diffuse in the fifties and the sixties, sociologists were then engaged in the attempt to "assign" recognition only to those professions which demonstrated possession of the characteristics required by the trait and functionalist theories (N. Roberts and T. Konn 1991). Librarianship, according to early sociologists of professions, was one of a group of occupations found to be lacking the full range of traits needed. Although librarians could claim to possess many of the required characteristics of the established professions, service orientation, a professional association, formal education and ethical codes, librarianship, it was held, could never aspire to the status of real profession (W. J. Goode 1961, 1969). The reason for this announced failure resides in the fact that the profession of librarian does not possess a high level body of knowledge to apply in practice, does not produce theoretical contributions to the development of this knowledge, does not have legitimated monopoly over this knowledge and, lastly, does not enjoy the necessary recognition of status on the part of the public. According to this view, the professional status of librarianship had to be measured by confronting its characteristics with those of an ideal type profession derived from the romanticised models of nineteenth

century medicine and law. (W.F. Birdsall 1994, p. 71). Only these "mythical" professions could, in fact, enjoy complete monopoly over an area of expertise, rights of self-regulation, control of professional education and recruitment and a high degree of autonomy from the state and the clients for the provision of service.

This type of critique, N. Roberts and T. Konn (1991) maintain, reveals an imperfect understanding of the role and achievement of librarians together with an approach relying heavily upon self-justifying definitions. In fact, looking at the professional literature on librarianship, it appears that the librarian, along with the nurse and social worker became, in the sixties, the occupations most quoted by those authors using their model of professionalisation to explain the phenomenon of modern professions. H. Wilensky (1964), W. Goode (1960, 1961, 1969), R.H. Hall (1969), to mention but a few, all referred to the example of librarians in order to explain their analytical model, placing the librarian at times amongst the semi-professions, at other times amongst the professions in the process of being professionalised. The justification of librarians' status of 'incomplete' profession given by functionalist and trait theorists rests on the conviction that an occupation becomes professionalised when it acquires a series of characteristics determined by two main ones - a prolonged specialised training in a body of abstract knowledge and a service or collectivity orientation[12] - so that while some occupations are already fully developed, such as architecture, engineering, public accountancy, others are still striving to move upward on both these dimensions, like social work and librarianship.[13] After analysing the profession of librarian, comparing its traits with the two core, or generating ones, W. Goode (1961, 1969) concludes that librarians, despite certain initial advantages, such as prestige from links with knowledge, dedication to service, the presence of a professional association and the complete absence of competition in the field, will, nevertheless, be unable to reach the goal of full professionalisation.

1.1.5 Librarians lack the two fundamental traits

In all sociological analyses on the profession of librarianship (C. Boissonas, 1972; W. Goode, 1961; J. North, 1976), which have been developed mainly in the States, the librarian's knowledge base, library science, emerges as scarcely definable and intellectually insufficient. The librarian does not enjoy recognition of scientificity neither

[12] William J. Goode, "The Theoretical Limits of Professionalization", in A. Etzioni (ed), *The Semi-Professions and Their Organisation: Teachers, Nurses, Social Workers*, New York, Free Press, 1969, pp. 266-311.

from clients nor, worse still M. Winter (1988) argues, from librarians themselves. According to these authors, the problems of indeterminacy in the discipline of librarianship derive from the fact that it is unclear *"what"* and *"how much"* librarians need to know in order to carry out their work. There seems little point, therefore, in defining librarians' knowledge as *"specialization in generalism"*, in other words, it is not easy to think of a problem that can only necessarily be solved by a librarian. Furthermore, no special skills needed to be a librarian are acknowledged from outside the profession. Only the technical functions of cataloguing and retrieval of material in the library are evident, whereas it is less evident what the abstract knowledge, the *"science"*, underpinning these tasks, should be. The reason is, Goode observes, that librarians have not been able to develop a general body of knowledge which can be applied to this problem, there is no connection between the theoretical knowledge base and professional practice, indeed librarians themselves are not sufficiently interested in the growth of the discipline of librarianship. Somewhat surprisingly Goode argues, there are, in fact, no scholars among librarians who consider it useful to further develop this knowledge base through research.[14]

Even the proven dedication to service, which should be the librarian's strong point, turns out to be a weak and inadequate element in the thrust towards the distant goal of full professionalisation. The librarians' orientation to service is in these functionalist analyses synonymous of a "servile" and "harmless" attitude on the part of those whose duty it is to help the client but who do not have the power to assert their own ideas and professional knowledge. *"The public"*, Goode maintains, *"believes libraries, but not librarians, are important. At present, the librarian has little power over his client"*. (Goode, 1961 p.316) The client's idea of a librarian is that of a clerk who, upon request, will assist the client in locating a book or the information needed. The very acquisition of book stocks is submitted to control by the public who may complain and assert their own demands above those of librarians, who are unable to resort to a recognised professional *authority*. In short, it is claimed that librarians have no *power* over the client, their decisions have little influence over strategies of allocation of book stocks and librarians are, intellectually, forced to work within the confines of the client instead of imposing their professional categories.

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[13] William J. Goode, "Encroachment, Charlatanism, and the Emerging Profession" *American Sociological Review*, XXV, 1960, pp. 902-914.

[14] W. J. Goode, 1961. op. cit. P. 312-313

1.1.6 Librarians' occupational status in the functionalist analysis

The direct consequence of the lack of recognition of the scientific nature of their knowledge base is, Goode argues, that librarians cannot aspire to *control* over the occupation, that is, cannot achieve that *professional autonomy* which would make it possible for librarians to be their own judge of any dispute within their sphere of competence. *"If the problem itself is not generally recognized, and the fund of the knowledge for its solution not developed, it is hard to know even in what sense or for what, an occupation demands autonomy"*. (Goode, 1961 p. 316)

For Goode, and for the other functional analysts of the profession of librarian, therefore, the recognition of professional status of an occupation is linked mainly to the development of its knowledge base, to which the concepts of authority over clients and professional autonomy in the workplace are closely connected. However, in indicating a *body of professional knowledge* and *social recognition*, as the two elements 'essential' to legitimate professional authority, the causal relationship between these elements is far from clear, given that social recognition depends on the fact *"that people at a certain point come to 'believe' that the application of that knowledge can actually solve the concrete problems of living"*. The functionalist approach does not, that is, explain if it is sufficient to increase the scientificity of professional training in order to obtain official recognition of the profession, and thus greater professional authority, nor does it take into consideration the possibility that this authority may have other sources. Similarly, it remains unclear how clients and society in general reach the conclusion that a profession is essential and useful to the well-being of the collectivity and, consequently, how official legitimation is granted through forms of protection and regulation of practice, from which forms of privilege and monopoly are in turn derived. The solution proposed by M. Winter (1988) emerges, therefore, as unconvincing insofar as it maintains that recognition derives from social awareness of the importance of a given profession and therefore librarians would achieve status recognition only when their client-users realise how significant a role information plays in society.

Goode's mistake, E. Freidson (1970a) affirms, is that in order to explain the professional status of librarians, he refers once again to the structural characteristics of a profession. In Goode's analysis, Freidson comments, what proves most striking is not so much the fact that American librarians lack possession of prolonged specialised training in a body of abstract knowledge, as that the librarian has failed to *control* access to professional

knowledge, to schools, curricula and examinations. What is lacking in librarians, Freidson therefore goes on to affirm, is full *autonomy* in formulating that training:

> *"not training as such, but only the issue of autonomy and control over training granted the occupation by an elite or public persuaded of its importance seems to be able to distinguish clearly among occupations. (...) As I suggested in my analysis of the medical division of labor, the possibilities for functional autonomy and the relation of the work of an occupation to that of dominant professions seem critical and the process determining the outcome is essentially political and social rather than technical in character - a process in which power and persuasive rhetoric are of greater importance than the objective character of knowledge, training and work".* (Freidson, 1988 [1970a] p. 79)

The explanations provided by Goode for the lack of social recognition of librarians, like many other analyses of the professional phenomenon, fail, however, to convince the new generation of sociologists who studied the professions in the seventies and who rejected the functionalist approach according to which professional recognition is granted only to those professions who are able to demonstrate that they apply a specialised body of knowledge and skills to problems which are important for the main values of society, such as justice, truth, health, rationality, wealth, etc. The idea of a system of social rewards, functionally connected to a hierarchy of individual talents so that these talents are made available to respond to society's needs and problems, fails to convince.

To this purpose T. Johnson (1972) points out that the functionalist explanation that the professions' various positions and privileges in society are the result of the differentiation of roles required to ensure the correct functioning of society is, in fact, a distortion of reality. The professions, Johnson maintains, are the result of a historical process in which certain powerful occupations succeeded in attaining privileges and in creating systems of legitimation. For those authors of the seventies, collectivity or service orientation, the second core characteristic of professionalism, just like the nature of occupational training, had also to be seen as an element of a deliberate rhetoric of political persuasion aimed at obtaining forms of control over work. It cannot be proved empirically, these authors affirm, that service orientation is the distinct, exclusive or predominant possession of professional occupations.

1.1.7 Critiques of the taxonomic approach

From the critiques raised against the functionalist and attributes approaches by E. Freidson (1970a, 1970b) and T. Johnson (1972), critiques which were picked up and developed upon throughout the seventies by, among others, authors such as P. Elliott, (1972), D. Ben-David, (1971), H. Jamous and B. Peloille (1970), J. Roth (1974), M. Sarfatti Larson, (1977), a veritable theoretical shift in the study of the professions developed, a shift which now focused on the concepts of *power*, *control* and professional *autonomy*. The earlier approaches were criticised for the fact that they had contributed to creating a "static" idea of profession, based on the model of the liberal professions taken as a necessary reference point for the study of all occupations which, it was presumed, with the modernisation of society, tended inevitably towards becoming "true professions". This interpretation was now being countered with the assumption that the 'ideal' characteristics of the professions are, in reality, expressions of the ideology of the professional organisations themselves, for which these characteristics serve as a means of legitimising occupational privileges (P. Elliott, 1972; J. Roth, 1974).

Thus, these attacks, in censuring the earlier approaches for failing to reflect reality, effectively dismantle the greater part of *professional mythology* (J.B. McKinlay, 1973): the peculiarity of the training provided; the choice of the profession as a 'calling'; altruism and the ideal of service to society; the authority of competence over clients; the capacity of the professions for self-regulation through their own codes of ethics. The affirmation of the *professional ideology* (H. Jamous and B. Peloille, 1970; G. Gyarmati, 1975) is now explained through its affinity to the dominant ideology of bourgeois society, which exalted the principles of individualism, work ethics, equal opportunities and free initiative. In this ideology professionals are considered middle class representatives who stand as a bulwark against the overweening powers of corporate business, governments and the state.

Particularly effective is Johnson's critique (1972) in which the very heart of the functionalist analysis is assailed, contending the validity and universality of certain assumptions. As stressed earlier by D. Rueschemeyer (1964), the first assumption to be attacked, an assumption based on the importance the functionalists attribute to the existence of shared values as guarantee of stability in society, is that the knowledge used by the professions is of equal value to all groups in society. Secondly, that society possesses the necessary mechanisms to ensure that the trustees of this precious knowledge are mysteriously imbued with the communitarian spirit needed for that knowledge to be

used in the interest of the collectivity, and that such *altruism* is sustained by the high rewards guaranteed by society itself. Thirdly, that professions form *"a sector of the cultural system where the primacy of the values of cognitive rationality is presumed"* (Parsons, 1968) is an overestimation of the degree to which rationality dominates the content of professional practice and the relations between professionals, clients and peers (Johnson, 1972 p. 34-35).

The functionalist approach, Johnson points out, lacks a historical perspective, insofar as it provides a description of the professions as they are at a given moment and in a particular historical context, yet it provides no indication of the conditions, which might have made it possible for some groups to assume control over certain occupations. Those who advocated the functionalist and attributes approaches, neglecting the historical dimension, ended up by providing a definition of profession through a series of "abstract" characteristics, mutated from those of the liberal professions, while ignoring a whole range of important phenomena, particularly in the area of social conflict. In order to achieve an understanding of the nature of the professions, Johnson argues to the contrary, it is necessary to identify and assess the variations in institutional forms of occupational control. During the course of history, the changes in the distribution of power in society have contributed to determining the nature of the relationship between client and occupational groups and consequently to determining the institutionalised forms of control (Johnson, 1972 p.37).

In short, the major limitation of the functionalist approach is that it fails to take into consideration the existing *power* in the professional phenomenon. It cannot be ignored, D. Rueschemeyer (1983) argues on this very issue, that behind the symbolic facet of the 'bargain' that society strikes with the professions stand, in fact, political-economic institutions and status groups who all take part in this bargain. For the new generation of sociologists, the professions appear to be based not so much on adherence to the social values of competence and dedication to service, but rather on the instruments of power the various occupational groups derive from their position in the work structure and in the labour market (D. Rueschemeyer, 1983 p.44).

1.2 Professional power, autonomy and control

During the seventies, an alternative approach was, therefore, developed, on the basis of theoretical contributions from works not overtly connected, an alternative, which went beyond the limitations of previous approaches. In this new perspective, professionalism

now assumes a negative connotation, consequently, the professions are no longer characterised by the former virtues of ethics and service, but rather by the desire for *power* and social *control*, which underpin the achievement of professional status. The very idea of profession has thus been arraigned by certain theorists of the "power" approach, highlighting issues of competitiveness and conflictuality rather than social progress and functionality, as emphasised by the authors of the previous two decades.

Studies in this period deal with various aspects of the relationship between professions and power, some focus their attention on the relationship between institutional power and the professions (D. Rueschemeyer 1964, H. Jamous and B. Peloille 1970, T. Johnson 1972, J. Roth 1974), whereas others concentrate on the problem of political and cultural conditioning of the professions (E. Freidson 1970; D. Bell, 1973), and others still on the relationship between the professions, economic market and social classes (Ben-David, 1963; M. Larson 1977, T. Johnson, 1977, 1980). There are three fundamental elements in the new approach: the emphasis on the historically contingent character of the professional phenomenon, the prominence given to the theme of power, formally excluded by the functionalists, and the importance attributed to the strategies of collective groups, that is the professions themselves in terms of organised social groups.

1.2.1 Profession as a means of occupational control

The starting-point for Johnson's theory of control is a quite different consideration of the relationship between professional and client. In fact, according to Johnson, it is the forms of power, which govern the relationship between these two entities, which determines the type of profession and not vice versa. Johnson's model examines the professions from the point of view of control, completely discarding the attributes or functionalist characteristics, and focuses, therefore, on who should decide which services are necessary and how they should be delivered. According to Johnson, changes in the social division of labour and the emergence of the occupational specialisations brought about, at the same time, relations of social and economic dependency, yet relations of social distance too. This social distance determines an asymmetrical relationship between those who possess specialised knowledge and those who don't. What is clear to the expert is, therefore, impenetrable to the profane. Dependency on other people's expertise becomes a source of *uncertainty*, which may vary in favour of one or the other according to the relations of power, which govern the socio-structural context in which a particular occupation operates. Looking at the occupations from a historical perspective, Johnson notes how occupations

generated a variety of social mechanisms to control this uncertainty, with the aim of imposing their own definitions over the producer-consumer relationship: professionalism specifies the characteristics of a particular *institutionalised form of occupational control* where the balance of this relationship swings in favour of the producer by means of legitimated occupational authority. For Johnson, therefore, the professions cannot be defined as special types of occupations with determined structural or functional characteristics, but rather as a complex system of procedures which seek to attain control over work activities and where the producer has the power to define the needs of the client and how these needs should be catered for, that is the power to establish, on the basis of professional knowledge and beliefs, the very needs of people, determining, for instance, the definition of health and illness, normality and deviancy, legal and illegal.

> *"Professionalism,"* Johnson argues, *"becomes redefined as a peculiar type of occupational control rather than an expression of the inherent nature of particular occupations."* (1972 p.45)

This particular form of occupational control, that Johnson terms *collegiate control,* exists when the very professions, through their own associations, establish the boundaries of the areas of competence, thus determining the type of labour division and, consequently, who is entitled to assume certain tasks and how these should be carried out. For Johnson, the professions are merely powerful occupations, which have succeeded in gaining control over various aspects of their own work. In particular, *professionalism,* in its fullest form, describes the power status of a profession, which enjoys a monopoly over professional practice, the right to self-regulation and control over professional training and access to the profession. Under this form of occupational control, the professional association plays a fundamental role in bestowing professional status and identity. It promotes uniform policies, sustains collective interests and develops role definitions and standards, which are maintained by a code of ethics and autonomous procedures. Individual professionals form a homogeneous community where common values and beliefs are shared, career patterns are well defined and a system of referral ensures that those members who most clearly exhibit the desired characteristics and standards gain the highest rewards. As a result, technical competence is an important criterion of individual worth. The occupational community considers itself as a repository of specialised knowledge, which is the source of authority in the one-to-one relationship between practitioner and client. A heterogeneous but dependent, therefore exploitable clientele is a condition of professionalism. Consumer

choice is, thus, seen as a counterbalance of occupational control insofar as it favours differentiation of the professional community, patronage control and competition.

There are, however, other forms of occupational control, which vary in relation to historical epochs, to socio-cultural contexts and to forms of government. *Professionalism* merely represents one of these forms, but it is by no means the only possible one. The ideal model of professionalism can be placed in antithesis to two other ideal models to be found in contemporary society. The first, called *patronage*, describes occupational control directly by the consumers, both individually and in associations. Patronage control can be of two types: oligarchic and corporate patronage. Oligarchic patronage is when the uncertainty in the relationship between producer and client is in favour of an aristocratic patron. This was the case for architects and artists working for the Italian princes during the Renaissance or of pre-industrial professionals working for an aristocratic clientele. The case of corporate patronage is when demand for a professional service comes entirely from large corporate organisations, either public or private, for example, large-scale public accountancy or legal firms.

The second, which is of particular interest to this research, known as *mediative*, refers to control by a third social party, which is interposed between producer and consumer. This mediated form of occupational control exists when an entrepreneur, an administrator in a public or private company, or the state itself intervenes in the relationship between producer and consumer in order to define both needs and how they should be responded to. As stressed by Johnson (1972 p. 77), there can be various forms of mediative control, but for the present discussion it is useful to focus on state mediation in the relationship between producer and consumer. A typical example is when the state entrusts local government with the statutory duty to guarantee a desired provision of services; as a result, the latter becomes the practitioner's employer. Local authority public library services are placed within this institutional framework.

The first important thing to be stressed is that under this form of occupational control, professional work is incorporated within the organisational framework of local government, in the sense of a state agency. It is, therefore, this third party, which actually determines the content and subject of professional practice. As a consequence, neither the producer nor the consumer is in a position to decide directly on customer needs and how they should be catered for, for service content and delivery is part of government policy. For this reason, the degree of uncertainty in the producer-consumer relationship does not

create forms of dependency as, at the one end, there is a professional who is part of a large organisation, representing the community, and at the other end there is the service user who is a guaranteed customer, representing citizenship. The impossibility of establishing a one-to-one relationship with the user based on trust prevents the practitioner from gaining autonomy and control over practice by emphasising the esoteric character of professional knowledge.

Secondly, where control over an occupation is mediated by state agencies, the role of professional associations is less important in maintaining colleague identification, because the functions of granting status and identity are shared, if not completely taken over, by the employing bureaucracies. The power of professional associations to prescribe the standards of practice and work arrangements diminish and, at best, they can hope to establish favourable relationships in order to ensure that local authorities adopt the guidelines they have developed. Therefore, rules and procedures tend to be localistic because professionals tend to identify themselves with the characteristics of the local authority organisation rather than with the colleague community. Consequently, professionals employed in local government organisations form a heterogeneous community where the referral system is based more on inter-professional links than on intra-professional solidarity and cohesion. Career patterns are also affected by bureaucratisation as professional positions are entirely incorporated within the local government career structure with a resulting high differentiation of occupational posts.

Finally occupational monopoly over professional knowledge, training and entry is less possible under state mediation, because the professional association's control over schools and examinations is considered by the state as an obstacle to the expansion of the type of knowledge which should serve the universal provision of important public services. For the same reason, it is easy to encounter situations where technical and ethical questions that are normally part of expert judgement pass under the control and responsibility of the administrative or political decision. The direct consequence of these many factors affecting professional work within a bureaucratic organisation leads professionals who seek to maintain or increase their authority to accept advisory and managerial roles.

In Johnson's analysis professionalism is no longer an immutable reality and professional experts can experience different institutionalised forms of occupational control according to different historical and social contexts. In our present society the most common form of occupational control are the *mediative* or *state heteronomy* and the *corporate patronage* or

corporatism[15] type as the professions practise increasingly less in situations of complete autonomy, as the majority of professionals perform their tasks in large-scale industrial or governmental organisations. It should, however, be noted that there are different forms of mediation of occupational control, in which professional authority, administrative authority and authority by consumers interact, creating a variety of configurations. These particular forms of authority need, now, to be further investigated by focusing on the problematic interaction between the bureaucratic and professional mode of work organisation.

1.2.2 Professional work in organisations

There is no doubt that the library profession primarily owes its existence to the existence of libraries in society. It is therefore fundamental, at this point, to focus analysis on matters involving professionals working in organisations. Indeed the relationship between professions and organisations is the starting point for the analysis of all occupations since it is now clear that the process of incorporation of professional work within organisations has, with the rise of large-scale public and private bureaucracies, become irreversible. According to W.R. Scott (1965) professionals in organisations play out their roles under two general types of arrangements.

The first, which Scott names the *autonomous professional organisation*, exists when *"organisational officers delegate to the group of professional employees considerable responsibility for defining and implementing the goals, for setting performance standards, and for seeing to it that standards are maintained"*. In autonomous professional organisations, professional jurisdiction is well demarcated from that of administrative officials. Scott labels the second type of arrangement as the *heteronomous professional organisation* because here *"professional employees are clearly subordinated to an administrative framework"*. Scott places librarians together with many other public service professions in this second category, where they enjoy little autonomy and are subject to administrative control[16]. Both types of work arrangements identified by Scott create

[15] Johnson later modified the types of occupational control described in his 1972 book, by integrating his typology with Abbott's forms of institutionalisation of expertise (Abbott 1991), which now included: Mass professionalism (the equivalent of professionalism), Corporatism (the equivalent of corporate patronage and state heteronomy) and Expert systems, that is where expertise is embodied in commodities.

[16] W.Richard Scott. "Reactions to Supervision in a Heteronomous Professional Organisation", Administrative Science Quarterly, 10, 1965, pp. 65-81. These concepts were firstly used by Max Weber in his book "The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation" where he argued that: *"A corporate group may be either autonomous or heteronomous ... autonomy means that the other governing the group has been established by its own members on their own authority ... in the case of heteronomy, it has been imposed by an outside agency"* (M. Weber, 1947 p. 148, quoted in T. Johnson, 1980 p. 370).

potential for conflict between professional and organisational behaviour. The interaction between professions and organisations is, in fact, presented by early studies (T. Parsons, 1947; C.W. Mills, 1956; A. Etzioni, 1964 W. R, Scott, 1966) as an antithetical and conflictual one, not just because individual professionals find it problematic to work with bureaucrats but because, as stressed by W. Kornhauser (1962), their relations involve two institutions which are based on two completely divergent principles of work organisation.

W.R. Scott's (1966) work provides a detailed description of the differences between professional and bureaucratic models of organisation, which are well summarised by C. Davis (1983). Firstly, professionals in carrying out their work perform autonomous and complete tasks on the basis of the possession of a body of specialised knowledge and skills acquired during a lengthy period of training in universities. For this reason professionals are primarily accountable to their colleague community and are subject to the sanction of a professional code of ethics. The professional employed in an organisation occupies a terminal status and seeks no higher position in the hierarchy.

The contrast between these principles on which the work of professionals is founded and the principles underlying the bureaucratic organisation of work inevitably generate conflictual situations which Scott identified in four main areas: *the professional's resistance to bureaucratic rules; the professional's rejection of bureaucratic standards; the professional's resistance to bureaucratic supervision; and the professional's conditional loyalty to the bureaucracy* (R.W. Scott 1966: p. 265). C. Davies effectively illustrates the two divergent perspectives of work organisation in following table.

Table 1.1 Bureaucratic and professional modes of work organisation

	BUREAUCRACY	PROFESSIONALISM
Task	Partial, interdependent with others	Complete, sole work
Training	Short, within the organisation, a task specialised skill	Long, outside the organisation, a total skill
Legitimation	By following rules	By doing what is to the best of her/his knowledge correct
Compliance	Is supervised	Is socialised
Loyalty	To the organisation	To the professional community
Career	Ascent in the organisational hierarchy	Often no further career steps in the organisation

Source: Celia Davies, « Professionals in bureaucracies: the conflict thesis revisited » in R. Dingwall and P. Lewis (eds) *The sociology of the professions*, London: Macmillan, 1983, p.178.

1.2.3 Librarians' occupational authority

Librarians have in common with other organisational professions that they work in heteronomous organisations where occupational authority and its sources must be distinguished from bureaucratic or administrative forms of authority. However, what differentiates the position of librarians from that of nurses, for example, is that in the library, control over work standards is a matter of balance between the authority of librarians and managers and not balance between the authority of librarians and another dominant profession. Moreover, W. Reeves (1980) argues, there are particular cases where librarians can claim occupational authority even over administrative tasks as long as the bureaucratic modes of control over work arrangements can be traced to the policies articulated by library associations.

Applying Johnson's model (1972) of analysis to libraries, Reeves affirms that, to ascertain who holds the power in the bureaucratic organisation of a library, it is first of all necessary to establish which forms of legitimised authority exercise control over work. According to Reeves the more numerous the forms of control rooted in the profession, the closer we are to a type of *"collegiate control"* thus a type of occupational authority; the more the forms of control come from sources external to the occupation, the closer we are to a type of *"mediated"* control or even *"patronage"* thus a type of managerial or administrative authority or consumer authority. In order to understand how occupational authority can be established in the work setting, Reeves suggests, we must look at the elements on which a profession is founded.

The foundation of an occupation includes normative as well as structural elements. The normative foundation represents the culture, norms, and values articulated by professional associations and schools. In order to achieve market and legal status, a profession tries to incorporate these occupational standards and procedures into the legislative system of the state. The structural foundation represents the economic and political power of a profession able to establish a market monopoly, a monopoly over learning structures or a legal monopoly over the performance of professional tasks. Thanks to these powers a profession is able to enforce occupational standards in the work setting and individual professionals gain that authority, which allow them to have control over everyday transactions.

Both the normative and structural components are ever present in all occupations, yet their weight varies according to the type of occupation and it is how they interact, Reeves affirms, that reveals which type of control is exercised over the occupation, that is who holds the power over work arrangements. In the more established occupations, like the medical or legal profession, both components are prominent, whereas in the service occupations, which lack a strong position on the market, like the profession of librarians, the structural component is weaker. However, Reeves continues, in worksettings oriented towards library association guidelines and policy, the form of authority derived from the normative foundation of the profession of librarianship makes it possible to guarantee librarians considerable occupational control.

Table 1.2 Interaction of normative and structural foundations

		NORMATIVE FOUNDATIONS	
		Minimal	Elaborated
STRUCTURAL FOUNDATIONS	Powerful	Low occupational authority (e.g. union control)	High occupational authority (professional control)
	Minimal	No occupational authority (e.g. management control)	Variable occupational authority (Librarians' occupational control)

Source: William Reeves, *Librarianship as a profession*, Lexington: Lexington Books, 1980, p. 14.

Reeves represents the interaction between the normative and structural foundations of a profession by means of a two-by-two table (Table 1.2), which shows the degree of occupational control according to the relationship between the two types of authority. On the basis of Reeves' model, it emerges that no occupation can be completely lacking in one of these two forms of authority, which are necessarily present to some degree. Normally, in the occupations regulated by *collegiate control*, Reeves maintains, normative authority is prevalent, as, even in cases in which occupational control is based on highly developed structural foundations it is necessary to link work practices to normative foundations, that is to those values, concepts and intellectual orientations shared by the whole professional group. This group cohesion that constitutes professional identity, according to Reeves, cannot be provided solely by legal power. Reeves places the profession of librarian in an area of variable authority, given that occupational control over work is generally based on group cohesion, which derives, in fact, from those very normative foundations. The

structural component, which is, on the other hand, based on the effective demand for the librarian's services on the market, is relatively weak if compared to other occupations.

To verify this hypothesis, Reeves conducted a survey aimed at identifying circumstances and conditions that fostered occupational control over work in a number of organisational worksettings. The key discovery was that librarians' occupational authority depended on the collective orientation of librarians, as well as non-librarians, toward library association policies and guidelines. Consequently, the enforcement of occupational standards, according to the outcomes of Reeves' research, depended on normative orientation based on occupational beliefs and values within the work setting and not on the legal and economic power of the library profession in the larger society. In occupationally oriented library work settings, librarians institute a system of library administration that conforms to library association standards. This formalised organisational structure reinforces the librarians' occupational authority and control over work. The results of Reeves' library survey also revealed that there is considerable variation from one library to another in the level of occupational orientations, depending on the type of organisation and specialisation of the library. Where the library is a large independent organisation, with its own economic budget, the form of occupational control is more secure, whereas it is less so where the library is part of a non-library organisation. The public libraries, where they are sufficiently large and are not administered by external bodies, Reeves affirms, provide a good examples of occupational control. At the opposite pole Reeves places the special libraries, particularly private and government ones, where control is decidedly in the hands of state officers or administrators.

Reeves analysis suggests that the profession of librarian reveals, generally, a high degree of collegiate control, however, this characteristic tends to fade until it moves into other forms of control according to the type of library and the type of relationship between user and librarian. In certain library organisations the form of control is the "mediative" kind, if not determined by the user-clients themselves. Even librarians in public libraries who, at least in the tasks of "selection" and "reference" appear to adhere perfectly to the model of collegiate control, in certain cases have to adapt to forms of mediation. This happens in cases where the libraries are subject to external administrative control, to public influence on library policies and to interference from external professionals as in the case of automation. Academic libraries present numerous cases of mediation and special libraries are closer than any other to control by users (patronage control). The results of Reeves'

empirical study show, in short, that there are different degrees of control over work according to the variations in work organisations and the type of library. However, this heterogeneity of the occupation is counterbalanced by a strong tendency to unity, proven by the consistent adhesion of the entire professional group to the librarians' association and to professional training schemes. This fact highlights, Reeves argues, the significant importance that the associations and schools assume in replacing and reinforcing that part of professional cohesion lost because of specialisations and the variety of forms of organisation. If the tendency towards specialisation is confirmed, as appears to be the case also for the future, Reeves concludes, it means that the importance of the associations and schools will become fundamental for training and for maintaining professional identity, occupational control and thus the degree of professionalisation reached.

Reeves' analysis provides some important results that can be used as a hypothesis for this research. Firstly, that the occupational authority of individual members of a profession is directly related to the power of that occupation to enforce occupational standards in the worksetting. Secondly, that, differently from what is commonly stated, this authority can rest on the normative and not necessarily on the structural foundations of an occupation. For librarians lacking market and legal status, this means that they can achieve a high level of authority in the work setting, provided that their library is an occupationally oriented worksetting and large enough to require rational procedures of organisation. Thirdly, that professional cohesion and solidarity are important normative elements to obtain occupational authority and consequently schools and associations assume a fundamental role in achieving and maintaining professional status. This is an important point for the aims of this research, for the variable of cohesion is considered crucial in evaluating changes in librarianship as an occupation employed in a large bureaucratic organisation. If occupations in large organisation do not act collectively, they risk turning into mere individual workers with no professional identity and dominated by external administrative orientations.

1.2.4 The process of bureaucratisation

The problems arising with the contrast between bureaucratic and professional modes of authority and organisation have given rise to a number of studies, which in turn, have focused on the negative effects of the process of bureaucratisation on professionals (R. Corwin, 1961; W. Kronhauser, 1962; G. Miller, 1968; W.R. Scott, 1969) and on the negative effects of the process of professionalisation on bureaucracies (W.R. Scott, 1965;

A. Etzioni, 1964). Both individual and organisational studies were later criticised by other analysts who argued that bureaucratisation and professionalisation, rather than being two antithetical processes, are, in fact, in some sense complementary. However, sociological analysis of the professions has polarised around two divergent perspectives, a pessimistic one (A. Etzioni, 1964; P.M. Blau and R.W. Scott, 1963) which envisaged bureaucratisation of the professions with a consequent devaluation of professional work and autonomy, and another optimistic one which hypothesised the professionalisation of organisations, with a consequent increase in the power of the professions.

These opposing theoretical positions were later emphasised by a divergent interpretation of the effects on the professions of the process of 'imperative co-ordination' of the social division of labour fostered by the increasing importance of technical expertise in post-industrial capitalism. The first perspective, which refers mainly to the work of M. Oppenheimer (1973), claimed that the professions represented a "middling"[17] group in the process of being swallowed up by one or the other of the great opposition classes and suggested that with the advent of the large-scale technological organisations, professionals would inevitably undergo a process of proletarianisation and that professional work would be devaluated and subordinated to external powers. The second approach, on the contrary, accepted the theory of mass professionalism, but from a completely different perspective, and suggested that with the advent of the post-industrial society the increasing importance of technical-knowledge would introduce radical changes which would include the growing power of the professionals (D. Bell, 1974; E. Freidson, 1973).

Due to changes within occupational work consequent to the process of bureaucratisation, professionals lose, according to the pessimistic view, the prestige and social recognition of the past, modifying their attitudes and behaviour towards the public, their internal organisation and even their own professional culture. C.W. Mills in his study on the American *white collars* (1956) reports that professionals are increasingly losing ground against the powerful advance of managers as a consequence of the standardisation and fragmentation of their work within the bureaucratic administration of the organisations where they are more and more frequently employed. In the impersonal division of labour of the bureaucratic organisation, there is no place for the one-to-one relationship between

[17] This term was introduced by Neale (1972) who suggested that a distinction should be made between the middle and the middling classes: the former refers to the traditional model of social stratification and adhering to the value of 'old society'; the latter refers to the aspiring professional class less deferential and more in favour of a radical change. (K. Macdonald, 1995 p.59)

professional and client and the ideal of altruism and service orientation have given way to the ideal of efficiency and administrative orientation.

R.H. Hall (1968) stresses that the regulation of professional tasks by the administrative mode of organisation represents a threat to professional power and prestige. M. Oppenheimer (1973) focuses attention on the fragmentation and subordination of professional work, consequent to the extensive division of labour, as a process of *proletarianisation*, where professionals experience factory-like conditions of work. In sum, according to this view, occupations are increasingly subject to a process of detailed division of labour, which determines an increasing routinisation of professional tasks and creates the conditions for subordination to the authority of private or public ownership. Finally, automation and bureaucratisation of work procedures and arrangements involve, according to the American Marxist H. Bravermen (1974), a logic of de-skilling and work degradation affecting professional workers who are increasingly subject to the management control of monopoly capitalism.

The proletarianisation thesis continued to receive attention throughout the eighties from sociologists who placed the analysis of the professions within the wider Marxian debate regarding the labour process and its connections with the class structure in society. C. Derber (1982) and J. McKinlay & J. Arches (1985) have both contributed significantly to this debate. Today this thesis has been largely reshuffled as a typical cultural product of late 1960s and early 1970s (K. Macdonald, 1995 p.60). However, it is possible even in studies of the same period to find views where it is suggested, not only that bureaucratisation and professionalisation can be seen as two complementary processes, but also that professional authority is due to replace bureaucratic authority as an alternative form of co-ordination of the division of labour in the post-industrial society (Freidson, 1973 p. 57).

1.3 The power approach in the Weberian tradition

The thesis of proletarianisation of expert work because of the pervasive influence of bureaucratisation and technological advance were overturned by a group of sociologists of the so-called 'power approach', whose most prominent representative is E. Freidson (1970a, 1970b,1973, 1986). Freidson saw in the advent of the post-industrial society favourable conditions for a major development of professionalism. This approach, more in line with Interactionist and Weberian traditions rather than with the Marxian power

approach, suggests that the increasing importance of the role of information and knowledge in the last quarter of the twentieth century has introduced radical changes in the occupational structure of advanced societies, which included the growing power of the 'knowledge-based' workers. This view in the sociology of the professions was enforced by the ideas of D. Bell (1974) who maintained that knowledge has replaced capital as the most important resource in post-industrial society. Bell argued that the rise and diffusion of new technologies have meant a decline in the importance of the 'goods-producing sector' and with it the decline of both the manual workers and the owner-managers of industry as the dominant groups in society. According to Bell the most powerful groups of people in the post-industrial society are not so much the capital owners but rather the knowledge owners, particularly those who control information through education and training.

This view is paralleled by A. Touraine (1974), who also focused attention on the shift from the industrial society to a service-type society where economic growth does not depend solely on the capacity of capitalistic production but rather on a set of social factors, in particular the ability to produce and reproduce new knowledge. The enhanced importance of higher education within advanced societies is thus explained. Such societies, according to these authors, are increasingly characterised by the central role of knowledge, which is seen as the key resource of progress and the most important source of power when it is located in organisations. As a consequence, Bell pointed out, *"we see the dominance of the professional and technical class in the labour force"*[18] and in the whole class structure.

The view that the professional class was destined to occupy a dominant position in the division of labour and in society was supported by the analysis of some theorists of the Weberian tradition who saw post-capitalist society as increasingly characterised by the interrelated processes of bureaucratisation and professionalisation in which the input of scientific knowledge and technology would generate a more elaborated division of labour and a parallel process of 'imperative co-ordination'. In the post-industrial bureaucratic hierarchies in which positions of authority are functional to the co-ordination of fragmented specialist work tasks, it is predictable, according to Freidson (1973) that occupational authority should replace the bureaucratic authority which was the dominant form of co-ordination of the social division of labour under industrialism. *"Such authority"*, Freidson argues, *"gives some occupations the legitimate right to command the*

[18] D. Bell, op. cit. 1974. Quoted in P. McNeill & C. Townley eds. *Fundamentals of sociology*, Cheltenham : S. Thornes, 1986, p.284.

work of other occupations....in medicine, for example the division of labour is ordered and coordinated by a dominant profession rather than by management." (1973 p. 57)

This view is based on the theoretical assumption of the Weberian tradition that an individual's 'life chances' in the labour market depend upon their capacity to make good use of their knowledge and technical qualifications[19]. It is the possession of technical and abstract skills, which endows an individual with power in an exchange relationship in the labour market, "*irrespective*", as stated by E. Hughes (1963 p. 655) of "*political ideologies and system*". In the detailed division of labour of the bureaucratic organisation, Freidson argues (1973 p. 51), "*those strategic skills are of such nature that they resist managerial rationalisation*". For Freidson (1970a) therefore, the professions assume a dominant position in the division of labour to the degree that they are able to operate in conditions of *autonomy*, without having to submit to the external bureaucratic forms of control that we find in both private and public work organisations.

In Freidson's view, autonomy assumes a key role in evaluating professional power. It is, in fact, autonomy which expresses an occupation's position of legitimate control over work, thus it follows that the crucial variables to defining professional status become the nature and degree of autonomy enjoyed by the occupations. According to Freidson, it is autonomy in work, particularly as concerns technical judgements, which gives a profession a dominant position in the work place. "*A profession*", Freidson (1970, p.45) argues, "*bases its claim for its position on the possession of a skill so esoteric or complex that non-members of the profession cannot perform the work safely or satisfactorily and cannot even evaluate the work properly*". Therefore, Freidson maintains, even in the case in which professionals carry out subordinate work within a large-scale working organisation, the technical aspects of the work will be left in their hands, consequently, from this position they are well equipped to influence, if not control, bureaucratic and administrative areas of their work. Freidson is thus very clear when he suggests that autonomy is the test of status of a profession.

However, Freidson suggests, to achieve control over work and a dominant position in the division of labour a profession needs suitable power resources to ensure autonomy in the

[19] Despite the controversies surrounding the translation of Weber's definition to power, for most observers Weber appears to be saying that: "*power is the probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will even against resistance*". Cfr. Walliman's [et al.] translation: «*Within a social relationship, power means any chance to carry through one's own will*» in Walliman, I. [et al], "Misreading Weber: the concept of Macht" *Sociology*, vol. 14 n. 2, 1980. Quoted in P. McNeill & C. Townley, op. cit. 1986, p. 189.

workplace in order to impose its own definition of professional content. To achieve professional autonomy the professions refer to formal actions and political mechanisms, insofar as it is "*the state that has ultimate sovereignty over all and grants conditional to some*". (1970 p.24) However, this autonomy, although organised and juridically legitimised, Freidson goes on to point out, can also become, as in the case of medicine, dominance over auxiliary occupations which happen to operate in the same area in the division of labour thanks to professional control over the technical side of its work.

The more a profession is able to gain margins of autonomy from external controls, the greater will be its power to treat certain problems exclusively and to dominate the structures and knowledge needed to solve them. However, Freidson explains (1986), not all members of a nominally single profession enjoy the same type and degree of power, because the power of individual members of a profession varies according to the position filled in the work setting and to the role occupied in the broader institutional professional system. Freidson (1986a, 1986b) distinguishes four main groups of professionals, two with direct involvement in professional work and two others with a more strategic role in sustaining professional culture and policy: the practitioner, the administrator/manager-professional, the teacher/researcher-professionals and the leader-professional.

The practitioners represent the 'rank-and-file' workers who have become professionals by virtue of training and qualifications acquired in professional schools, which provide the necessary credentials to establish control over work and the market. Being, by definition, the experts to whom lay clients must refer, practitioners are in a position to enjoy authority and autonomy in the work place. This position gives practitioners the relevant power to control much of their work and to exercise considerable discretion in deciding what to do. Practitioners possess a form of *occupational authority* but insofar as they themselves must defer to the higher managerial authority of the administrator-professionals, their own power is somewhat limited.

The administrator-professionals are those who fulfil the function of supervision and management in the professional organisations where practitioners work. Where occupational control is maximised, in the rational-legal bureaucratic organisation, managers themselves are members of the dominant profession, as they must possess the same basic professional credentials as the practitioners and are sometimes required to have had prior experience working as rank-and-file workers before occupying a managerial position. As they are responsible for the coordination and allocation of resources, Freidson

explains, they are sometimes in conflict with the practitioners, nevertheless they must be considered as an organic part of the same profession. Therefore, manager-professionals exercise supervisory power over colleague practitioners and it is because of this role that they may indirectly restrict the work of colleague practitioners in how they decide to allocate resources. However, manager-professionals, being part of the profession, exercise the important role of controlling the way in which colleagues are managed and the criteria by which they are supervised; they have *administrative authority*.

Practitioners and manager-professionals could neither achieve nor maintain an authoritative position without having some members who, instead of being engaged in practising the profession itself, are dedicated to activities fundamental for the cultural and political legitimation of professional power. These professionals are those who teach and conduct research in professional schools and those who sustain and promote professional interests from within the professional association. Researcher-professionals represent the teaching staff of professional schools and although they are normally qualified professionals, they do not practice. They do not exercise direct power over anyone, but insofar as they control developments in the professional body of knowledge, they have the indirect power to mould the thinking of managers and practitioners' professional tasks and behaviour. Insofar as teacher-researchers exercise the function of reinforcing the power of a profession to create and control a body of professional knowledge, they have *cognitive authority*.

The leader-professionals of the professional association are those who have the fundamental role of promoting and sustaining collective interest before public opinion and in legislative and administrative environments. They are involved in developing new ideas, policies and standards through conferences, journals and official guidelines. Professional association leadership pleads for professionals' interests when legislative and administrative decisions may affect professional legal and economic status. Insofar as the professional association is engaged in the collective claim to professional status at a juridical and administrative level, its leaders have *political and economic authority*.

Although knowledge is a formidable means of power through which a profession tries to impose control over work, and although the increasing importance of technical knowledge in advanced societies and the parallel imperative of co-ordination make professionalism the most rational method of organising a division of labour in order to achieve legitimate recognition and status a profession must seek control of the labour market where its

services are exchanged. Therefore, as long as there are different forms of occupational control over work (Johnson, 1972), every occupation aspiring to achieve professional status must engage in activities finalised at obtaining legitimation of its credentials in order to exercise forms of control over the labour market. Attention to this topic is focused in the following section.

1.3.1 Collective mobility and social closure

Within the framework of the Weberian approach, professional status becomes the product of collective action by occupational groups. N. Parry and J. Parry (1976, 1977) see professionalism as the collective strategy of occupational groups aiming at enhancing their social position in the class structure. Similarly F. Parkin (1974, 1979) and Sarfatti Larson (1977) maintain that occupational groups set out strategic projects in order to organise and control the market of their professional services. These authors agree that organisation and control of the market by a profession is realised by virtue of what Weber (1968) terms *social closure*, that is the process by which a profession tries to maximise rewards by limiting opportunities and access to such rewards to a restricted circle of qualified recruits. In history, F. Parkin (1974) maintains, dominant élites have achieved privileged positions in society through the exclusionary control of important resources by a limited number of eligible people possessing certain social characteristics. In capitalist societies, one of the most important mechanisms of exclusion through which the Bourgeoisie maintains and reproduces its power is the possession of professional qualifications and education credentials. In fact, F. Parkin (1974) notes, when Weber writes of the process of exclusive closure he refers to the professions, as is evident from the example he uses of the association of engineers seeking to establish a legal monopoly over certain professional activities by linking it to the possession of educational credentials.

In order to achieve status and social recognition, Sarfatti Larson (1977) maintains, occupational groups adopt strategies, *the professional project*, which seek to create and control the market of their own professional services. The individual professional aim of gaining status through work, Sarfatti indicates, is only possible through a collective effort aimed at the conquest and assertion of social recognition for the whole professional group. The professional project is, therefore, made up of two elements of the same strategy: on the one hand, it is an attempt to gain monopoly of production for a special type of market; on the other hand, it is an attempt to gain monopoly of status in emerging occupational markets. Both monopolising strategies converge towards the educational system, where

training programmes must be institutionalised under the control of the profession itself. It is a law of the market, in fact, that where the demand for services is high and stable, the profession, the provider of a highly valued service, can regulate supply through control of recruitment, thus maximising its power position in the market.

Sarfatti Larson's analysis places professional services in the broader context of exchange relations in the economic system of capitalism, using Marx's concepts of commodity and exchange-value. Within this framework the professions are intended as *organisations of producers of a relatively scarce and mostly intangible* commodity, professional expertise, that they try to sell for *a price* on the market in the form of a service (1977, 208-209). Therefore, individual professionals need to acquire specific skills with a view to selling them and this is possible through a relatively long process of training in educational institutions, which the profession seeks to control. In this analysis, training becomes the central element of a collective professional project. In fact, on the one hand, it provides the standardisation of professional knowledge necessary to make it a marketable commodity, and, on the other hand, it links the provision of professional labour to the educational system, with consequent allocation of status and prestige.

The central role of the body of professional knowledge in Sarfatti Larson's model is, therefore, explained by the singular nature of services provided by professionals. As professional commodities are intangible products, the organisation of services is more concerned with the selection and training of producers or providers of services. Furthermore, the more *standardised* and well-defined is the cognitive basis of a profession, the easier it is to attain visibility and good results. However, for a profession to gain social recognition and economic rewards it has to possess a body of knowledge, which must not only be standardised, but also *rationalised* into abstract principles useful to establish the superiority of its product and hence to legitimate the control of the relevant market.

The cognitive basis of a profession is, thus, crucial in Sarfatti Larson's analysis. Both standardised and formal knowledge are used by professionals, firstly, to gain control over a politically and economically sheltered labour market, secondly, to face interprofessional competition, and thirdly to legitimate validity and status of the profession. What is significant in Sarfatti Larson's study for the prosecution of this work in identifying important theoretical tools to analyse the profession of public librarianship is that the main instrument in a profession's project aimed at attaining or maintaining control over work

and the market, is the profession's capacity to claim esoteric and identifiable skills, that is to create and control a cognitive and technical basis.

As will emerge from the historical evidence discussed in the next chapter, the Library Association succeeded in establishing, firstly, a monopoly over professional training and, then, in sharing this monopoly with those educational institutions, which provided Library Association, accredited courses. The second assumption that can be drawn from Sarfatti Larson's work is that the knowledge base of a profession plays a dual role in establishing professional status and legitimation, firstly as a fundamental structural element and secondly as a crucial resource for credentialing.

1.3.2 The credentialing role of knowledge.

Sarfatti Larson's work has contributed to clarifying that cultural legitimation and the collective actions in handling a professional body of knowledge are a fundamental means for achieving forms of occupational control over work and the labour market. Indeed the authority of a professional body of knowledge and skills, as emphasised by T. Haskell (1989), B. Bledstein (1976) and T.Halliday (1987), provides the profession with status and social recognition by linking its expertise to society's general system of culturally legitimated values, principally to those of rationality, efficiency and science.

However, E. Freidson (1973) points out, knowledge is not a means of domination in itself, but rather an instrument of power, a means of facilitating the exercise of power. Therefore, in order to understand how knowledge becomes a form of power, it is necessary to understand how knowledge is translated into human activity, *"into men who are recruited, trained and then led to engage in the work of producing, communicating or practising knowledge, technique or skill"* (1973 p. 58). Professionals, E. Freidson argues in another of his works (1986, p.9), are *"agents of knowledge."* However, in order to identify which professions effectively hold a position of power, we have to consider the institutions, which contribute to creating and sustaining that position, the institutions in which a profession carries out its activity and, finally, the institutions through which its power is upheld. To this purpose, E. Freidson identifies a credentialing system of which the various professional categories avail themselves in order to seek and maintain their own privileged position. The aim of these *credentials* is, then, to provide professionals with the guarantee that other occupations do not encroach upon their area of work and to maintain exclusive right to exercise certain professional activities.

"The most impressive form of credentialism," Freidson explains, *"works to produce an occupational cartel, which gains and preserves monopolistic control over the supply of a good or service in order to enhance the income of its members by protecting them from competition by others."* (1986, p.63)

The production of credentials – degrees and certifications - is entrusted to institutions, which issue special qualifications to professions who then organise the production of particular kinds of services. Degrees are awarded by high educational institutions and certifications are issued by legitimate private associations, in the form of professional regulations and accredited training, or may be directly contemplated in the very laws of the state, in the form of licenses or Charters. In order to establish a monopoly of practise, and control over professional knowledge and recruitment, occupational groups need however, Freidson argues, the support of the state. In his work, *Professional Powers*, Freidson, in fact, advances the crude but minimal criterion of professionalism as a state licensed position based on some formal educational credentials (1986, pp.65-69).

Freidson (1983) also uses the Weberian concept of social closure to explain professional status, which in his analysis can only be achieved by the establishment of a *"labour market shelter,"* the creation, that is, of a *sheltered position* in the labour market. According to this conception, a protected position in the labour market is achieved through the imposition of the claim that only those in possession of *credentials* generated by the occupation itself can be employed in the exercise of a given body of work activities. The instrument which makes it possible to exercise forms of dominion over the labour market, and thus to construct forms of *legally protected* monopoly, is the cognitive basis of a profession and in particular, Freidson specifies, the use that is made of this knowledge base to control technical aspects of work. Within a sheltered socio-political environment, or one that is guaranteed by the state, a profession can be safeguarded from competition from 'alternative occupations' and can, at the same time, exercise sufficient power to control practically all technical and managerial aspects of work.

The access to professional status and to the privilege of a sheltered position in the market is based on the possession of a body of knowledge credentialed by high-level qualifications, typically a university degree and certified training. Therefore, S. Brint (1994) points out, universities become the most relevant institutions in the successful establishment of a profession. Neither 'service orientation' nor 'ethical standards' or 'collegiate control', represent the essential characteristics of professions that base their legitimation in the links

between professionals tasks, professional education and access to a protected market for demanded tasks (1994, p.23). Once again Weber's conception of certified and credentialed knowledge is used to explain occupational groups' establishment of a legally protected market and achievement of professional status. However, as the professions need state support to create and control monopoly over practice and knowledge, it is not clear why and how the state decides to grant a range of privileges to a particular occupational group. The relationship between the state and professions is investigated in the following sections, where the focus of analysis is enlarged to include external factors relating to the wider economic and political order in the determination of professional status.

1.4 The power approach in the Marxian tradition

Sociologists who base their analysis on a Marxian, or neo-Marxian, approach for the study of the professions argue that it is not possible to fully understand how occupations achieve different positions and prestige in society by simply looking at power relations within the division of labour or the market, because these very relations are influenced, if not determined, by wider social structures of power. Analysis of the professions is thus placed in the broader context of economic and political power relations of society. The work of Terry Johnson (1977, 1980) provides a thorough and sophisticated contribution to the study of professions, which overturns the Weberian approach. Johnson also sees work and the market as relations of power but maintains, however, that the ways in which people relate to one another in work and in the market can not be explained by merely looking at the technical division of labour or at individual skill capacity, because both are products of social power.

Johnson argues that the Weberian concepts of 'imperative co-ordination' and 'life change' provide inadequate explanations of the position of power and privilege of certain professions. The social division of labour and the derived problems of co-ordination are not only the outcomes of technological innovations but also the products of the dominant economic and political processes. By the same token, 'life chances' are not simply determined by individual market capacities based upon the possession of professional skills and credentials because they are an aspect of the way in which work is organised in society. Whereas in the Weberian approach, exchange in the market is a relationship of equality, which generates inequality only because of individuals' different capacities based upon knowledge and qualifications, in the Marxian approach exchange in the market is unequal because of the capitalist mode of production.

Johnson argues that both opposing trends of proletarianisation, identified by Oppenheimer (1973), and of professional expansion, suggested by Freidson (1973), as a consequence of bureaucratisation and technological innovation, fail to grasp the real conditions of change in the occupations. According to Johnson (1977), in order to understand whether or not a profession is able to resist the rationalising and routinising effects of bureaucratic authority, it is necessary to consider both the dualistic nature of the occupational organisation of knowledge and the dualistic character of the capitalistic mode of production. Investigations into the dualistic nature of professional knowledge are central to the work of many sociologists of the professions, who have, in turn, spoken of indetermination and technicality, H. Jamous and B. Peloille (1970), rationalisation and standardisation of knowledge, Sarfatti Larson (1977), formal knowledge and working knowledge, E. Freidson (1986) and abstract knowledge and practical knowledge, A. Abbott (1988). All these authors have stressed the problem of the difficult balance between the two components of professional knowledge. The very definition of this ratio seems, in fact, somewhat ambiguous, for professional knowledge must be neither too broad, nor too narrow, but 'indeterminate', falling between the purely theoretical and purely technical.

In fact, the more the cognitive basis of a profession is standardised, the more the results can be easily evaluated and the public is consequently better disposed to recognising the usefulness of the profession. Nevertheless, in this way the profession seems to rely on codified, routine working procedures, which devalues the professional work, resulting in a consequent loss of control. Similarly, the more the expert demonstrates his own intellectual ability and creativity by taking rational decisions even in conditions of uncertainty, the more the profession obtains forms of cultural consensus and recognised authority in work. However, as those occupations, which adopt essentially routine procedures, risk being subordinated to others, so those professions, which turn to abstract knowledge for the solution of almost all problems, do not appear credible, thereby increasing their vulnerability. In sum, therefore, to suggest that all problems are routine, dequalifies the profession, at the same time, to demonstrate that it is necessary to resort to abstract knowledge for the solution of the simplest problems weakens the legitimacy of the profession.

The inherent dualism in the content of professional work is used by T. Johnson (1977) to refer to the indetermination/technicality ratio conceptualised by H. Jamous and B. Peloille (1970) for the analysis of changes in the French medical profession due to government

political and administrative reforms in the late fifties. Technicality forms the basis of professional practice and represents what has been learned in the training process. It is standardised and transferable knowledge, which makes the profession visible and provides the practitioners with the necessary justification of competence. However, Johnson points out, the necessary codification of professional knowledge also exposes professional work to fragmentation and routinisation once incorporated into the production process of the bureaucratic organisation. On the other hand, indetermination refers to the esoteric character of professional knowledge and determines that social distance which establishes a condition of 'uncertainty' in the relationship with the client, favourable to the professional. The esoteric character of professional knowledge is also the major source of legitimation of professional authority. It is this component of professional knowledge, in fact, which underpins the monopolistic position of a profession and which provides the necessary power to resist external forms of authority.

In short, technicality demonstrates competence and indetermination provides status and legitimacy to the professions. The validity of professional work is then guaranteed by a mixture of technical competence and legitimation, proven by the possession of educational credentials. What should be noted, H. Jamous and B. Peloille maintain, is that the esoteric and specialised nature of professional knowledge is part of the professional ideology used by the dominant professions not only to create social distance between the expert and the profane, but also between those possessing legitimate knowledge and those possessing potentially innovative knowledge. Therefore, as long as the dominant principles of legitimation underpin and maintain a professional ideology, this dualism of knowledge in the labour process is concealed and the dominant definition of professional content is presented as the only valid option.

According to this view the profession is a self-generating body, which provides the definition of its work, legitimates its technical and intellectual skills and creates its own system to control and sanction the validity of outputs. Changes in this situation will not occur unless the links between the principle of legitimation of professional ideology and the external ideological and political processes cease to be tightly bound. For H. Jamous and B. Peloille, therefore, changes in a profession are only possible when internal dynamics, for example technological innovations, are coupled by external dynamics, for example a new political order or new legitimating principles, aiming at introducing new definitions of professional content and a different social function of professional services.

In line with the conclusions drawn by H. Jamous and B. Peloille in their study of the French medical profession, T. Johnson (1977), also inspired by the work of G. Carchedi (1975) argues that the technicality/indetermination ratio, derives from a more fundamental dualism which characterises the capitalist mode of production: the labour process and the super value producing process. Johnson sees in the labour process, the involvement of technicality at the level of social division of labour and in the process of surplus value, the involvement of indetermination in the fulfilment of the global functions of capital. Therefore professionals, who for Johnson do not form homogeneous occupational groups, are viewed, when employed in organisations, both as lower professionals who perform the typically fragmented and routinised tasks of the 'collective labourers' and élite professionals who undertake specialist tasks of control and surveillance in fulfilling the global functions of capital.

Therefore, in T. Johnson's view, E. Freidson's conclusion that occupational authority is able to resist external bureaucratic authority in the rational-legal bureaucratic organisation is only valid when professional tasks are embedded in the global functions of capital. Professionalism, Johnson points out, takes place when monopolisation of the core professional activities coincides with official definitions of social reality. Therefore, when the means legitimating indetermination as, for example, credentialism, are related to the ideology sustaining the economic and political status quo, then an occupational group is in the condition to create a monopoly of practice and an occupational closure in the market. For Johnson (1980), as long as the social mobility project of improving the status of occupational groups coincides with the interests of maintenance and reproduction of the economic and political system, professions are guaranteed a privileged and powerful position in society.

Both the professions and the state are, according to Johnson, implicated in the maintenance and reproduction of the capitalistic mode of production. As the state becomes more and more actively involved in economic and social life, the authority to determine the consumers' needs and the way they are catered for is given to state agencies where professionals are employed. Above all the provision of professional services in the public sector is entrusted to heteronomous organisations where occupational definitions, as for example health, education, justice, etc., become subordinated or derived from 'official definitions'.

The occupation of public librarianship, for example, just like many other professional services, was largely a creation of the welfare state, therefore the content of practice, definition of library services and of user needs were not generated autonomously by librarians, but in agreement with state policies. Johnson stresses the existence of mutual support between the professions and the state: the professions need the state to enforce monopoly and social closure and the state needs the professions to perform important social functions. However, the granting of monopoly of practice and control over work and the labour market also means the creation of centres of power, which seek autonomy from state intervention. The peculiar relationship between the state and the professions is examined in the following section.

1.4.1 State and professions

The relationship between state and professions has been described by many sociologists as one where the increasing dependence on various governmental agencies has resulted in a *"progressive lowering of the social and economic status of the professions"*(R. Lewis and A. Maude, 1950 p. 197). In fact this relationship is generally presented as an antithetical one: *more State intervention* corresponds to *less autonomy* for the professions. According to Johnson (1980, 1982) this commonly accepted relationship conceals an apparent paradox, which is revealed by the fact that *"the very conditions which are deemed necessary for the 'autonomy' and 'independence' of an occupation include a state guarantee of their maintenance. State credentialism, in issuing to specific occupational associations a monopoly of practice in their fields, is a major condition for colleague control over entry to the profession."* (1980 p. 365)

If we accept the assumption that professional status is determined by the level of autonomy enjoyed by an occupation in practising its work, an autonomy which, if we reject the functionalist model, we discover has been obtained, although differently from country to country, through various *forms of protection* (registers, regulatory bodies, licensing, accreditations, system of certification etc.), E. Freidson (1970b) asks: how can it be possible to think that a profession is *"truly autonomous, a profession 'free', when it must submit to the protective custody of the state?"* For Freidson, the answer to this question can be found by distinguishing between two types of autonomy: technical and socio-economic, in fact, Freidson claims that *"so long as a profession is free of the technical evaluation and control of other occupations in the division of labor, its lack of control over the socio-economic terms of work do not significantly change its essential character as a*

profession". (Freidson 1970b, p. 25) The state exercises control over the socio-economic aspects of professions and leaves the questions of a technical nature in the hands of the professions themselves. For this reason dependence on the state does not reduce either autonomy or professional status of an occupation, we can, therefore, argue, T. Johnson claims, that for Freidson the autonomy of a profession depends on its 'dependence' on the state.

What distinguishes E. Freidson's (1970a, 1970b, 1986) approach from T. Johnson's (1982, 1993, 1995) is that for the latter even technical autonomy emerges not so much in the absence of state intervention as within government programmes and policies. The mistake committed by many who have studied the professions, Johnson maintains, is to consider that the relationship state/professions has always been one between two separate, coherent and calculating political subjects, in which one intervenes and the other strives for autonomy. On the one hand, we have professions striving for maximum autonomy and on the other hand, the state tending towards continual expansion to obtain control over everything. Certain professions contrarily, Johnson claims, *"are absorbed into the state apparatus"* (1980 p.365) and thus professional status does not mean autonomy from state intervention, but on the contrary the *product of state intervention.* The degree of professional autonomy cannot, therefore, be considered absolute, but should rather be considered the result of a historical-social process, which has gradually determined the boundaries between technical-professional judgement and government policies. Once we accept that the crucial dynamics of the process of institutionalisation of the professions is the relationship between emergent government needs and the objectives of mobility and status of new and existing occupational groups, it follows that professions and politics have never been two separate entities. Far from the idea that professionalism represents a guarantee of neutrality and objectivity in professional practice, for Johnson, the processes of formation and transformation of the professions bear witness to the developments in a continual involvement on the part of the professions in government policies.

Johnson (1993, 1995) uses M. Foucault's concept of "governmentality" (1979) to argue that the professions have had a central role in the formation of the modern state in their desire to carve out governable spaces in the social reality. According to Johnson, this means that the institutionalisation of professional specialisations in the form of professionalism has led not only to governments granting recognition, protection and even forms of monopoly over working activities to professional associations, through more or

less direct state intervention, but it has also involved these professions in the effort to render new areas of social policy more adaptable to the governing process. Thus, there has always been a reciprocal relationship in which the processes of professionalisation of occupations and the processes of formation of the state have developed together thanks to the very tight bond that links them.

For Johnson (1993, 1995) the policies of control, or deregulation, of the professions throughout the various historical-social contexts do not simply demonstrate the diverse institutional systems of 'regulation' of professional specialisations, through more or less liberal legislation, but also demonstrate the incorporating process of the professions within government policies and programmes. The professions, as 'neutral' agents, have been used for the very definition of the parameters of government activity and to determine which parts of social reality could be considered governable, including the concepts of illness, health, justice, education, poverty, deviancy and even death. These areas of professional competence do not only circumscribe governable areas - constructing the social world in such a way as to render it adaptable to the form of government - but they also ensure that human problems are adaptable to professional services, thus defining the parameters of subjectivity. The policies for regulation of the professions have, therefore, a much broader field of action ranging from social policies to policies of subjectivity and the body. When the state needed to use the technical and neutral judgement (insofar as it is autonomous and competent) of certain professions to sustain its own social and economic policies, it granted those professions forms of protection and margins of autonomy. For Johnson, therefore, technical-professional knowledge and other forms of occupational authority can only be seen as *instruments of negotiation* to delineate the confines between professional authority and external control. As the form of the state mutates, so this relationship changes.

1.5 From occupational to jurisdictional control

The work of the American sociologist A. Abbott (1988) introduces new elements in the study of the professions while, at the same time, moving away from previous analyses. Abbott argues that in order to understand the nature and developments of the occupations in society it is wrong to focus only on single professions, rather it is essential to consider all professions as parts of an interdependent system, where each profession exercises its activities under various kind of jurisdictions.

Abbott (1991), overturning the model of analysis put forward by the functionalist approach, affirms that if we want to understand how expertise is institutionalised in society we must first identify a *task area* and analyse the factors which have determined its emergence, to then consider the *forces* which determine in which *social structures* (organisations, individuals, commodities) expertise is embodied and which norms and values are legitimately authorised to regulate it. Instead of concentrating on the sterile, in the sense of futile, exercise of defining the characteristics of a profession, we should, according to Abbott, consider that the development of a single profession does not happen independently of other professions and that single professions are not homogenous entities, but present significant internal differentiation due to external structural conditions.

Abbott maintains that all studies of the professions, however much they may differ in form and content, have in common an excessive attention to the forms of organisation (associations, legal certifications, codes of ethics etc.) and to control (mediated, monopolistic or cultural) of the profession, ignoring, on the other hand, who and what determines the type of work a profession carries out. Abbott draws attention to two aspects considered fundamental in order to understand the development of the professions. The first of these concerns the socio-structural conditions which determine the emergence, or availability, of a task area, that is not so much the formal aspects of a profession as the *object of its work*. The second, concerns the political-social 'forces' which make it possible for specific forms of occupational control to assert themselves, that is the recognition of the exclusive *link* between one profession, with its system of knowledge, structures and specific norms and an area of specific competence.

Frequent use of the terms 'system' and 'function' has led some sociologists (K. Macdonald, 1995, p. 14) to classify Abbott's work as "*a kind of neo-functionalism*", although Abbott himself points out that his model of analysis "*arises, essentially, by extending the Hughes logic to its limit and focusing on jurisdictional interactions themselves*". Hughes, in fact, in rejecting the traditional model of professionalisation, had concentrated his analysis on the workplace and on the negotiated character of professional dominance. However, Abbott maintains:

> "*I have gone one step further ... by treating jurisdiction not only in the work environment but also in the much more formal public and legal environments I have tried to handle what I regard as the classic problem of interactionism – its inability to explain the evident stability of many interactions overtime. My solution, ... is to*

demonstrate several layers of interaction, each operating at a different speed, such that the slower ones afford stability to the elements that are negotiated in the faster one." (1988, pp. 112-113)

Abbott (1995) elaborates an interesting theory of territoriality, or physical space, which he eloquently calls the *Turf-Based Theory*. According to this theory, the history of the professions becomes a history of 'wars' fought between competing occupations over territory in order to secure dominion over determined areas of competence. Abbott theorises the existence of a kind of ecosystem, in which the professions operate and where available areas or *turfs* represent possible areas of professional competence and above these areas are the "*jurisdictions.*" To use a geographical metaphor, *the system of professions* could be described as a socio-cultural mapping illustrating a kind of political dividing up of physical territory. *Jurisdiction,* Abbott (1988) explains, is the *link* between a profession and an area of professional activity. This link represents the more or less exclusive right of a profession to control a particular area of competence. The content of the *jurisdictions* is not, therefore, something which is established *a priori* or which is determined by a process of functional differentiation. It is, rather, a question relating to the struggle over an area of competence. The logical conclusion of this theory is that it is impossible to achieve an understanding of the professions through static functionalist or attributes theories. There are no 'transcendent' functions that the professions are called upon to serve, insofar as professional functions themselves change according to how the *system of the professions* is set up.

From the perspective of Abbott's theory, the professions appear, therefore, in perpetual motion, new professions are born, others disappear and others still are transformed, thus creating an interrelated system in which the professions *compete* with one another in the struggle to achieve forms of official recognition of their right to control certain services and above all to control what Abbott calls 'jurisdictions'. Similarly, professional functions and tasks traditionally assigned to one profession may be passed on to another, with a completely different scientific basis. If, for example, in a particular historical-social context, the phenomenon of alcoholism may be considered as responsibility of the professional competence of clinical services insofar as it is an individual problem caused by a biological, nervous and mental illness, in another context it may be assigned to social-welfare services as a social problem caused by poverty and injustice. Cultural, political, economic and technological changes are always the source of these variations. It may happen that the very advancement of a profession creates internal differentiation which,

taken to the extreme, may lead the profession to completely abandon its original jurisdiction, leaving the field open to boundary or emergent professions.

New or old problems are, for Abbott, potentially *professionalisable*, thus existing or emerging professions try to locate these problems within its own *jurisdiction*, that is within a coherent system of knowledge, norms and structures predisposed for solving them. To this purpose, professions try to obtain from 'society' forms of recognition, which legitimate how they describe, classify and treat problems and how they control social structures predisposed to solving them. The structural aspects of the profession, which represented the fulcrum of literature on professionalisation, are important for the negotiation of margins of autonomy and control over work, thus: the professional association, the code of ethics, educational and training institutions. However, to obtain forms of recognition of its own cognitive and social structures, which may bring about the concession of more or less exclusive rights over jurisdiction, a profession must not proceed in one direction, concentrating, for example, only on the goal of obtaining legal protection by the state, but must advance these claims in three *arenas* which may represent as many scenarios of *negotiations* or of *conflict*: the legal system, public opinion and the work place.

Abbott's attempt is to overcome what he calls the limits of previous theories, which, being based, in his opinion, on the concept of professionalisation, were all, concentrated on the study of individual professions or of the bureaucratic organisations in which they operated. The model proposed by Abbott is founded on three postulates: first, that the essence of an occupation is in its work rather that in its organisation; second that the content of a profession is influenced by many variables (internal and external forces); third, that all professions make up an interrelated system. Abbott's idea of system, however, is different from that of Parsons or from other systemic theories, as he points out:

> *"I use it [system], in the place of the more trendy 'structure'. Because it suggests boundedness and necessary interaction. ... I should also note that I am not using system in the Luhmannian sense objected to by Bourdieu (1986). I am using it in a sense akin to Bourdieu's 'champ', but Bourdieu means by 'champ' what I will later call 'task areas', and in any case, 'system' implies codetermination and structure, which 'field' in English (outside mathematics) does not."* (1988, p. 343)[20]

[20] Luhmann, like Parsons, identifies a general theory of social systems. Whereas the Parsonian system rests upon the concept of actors' interactions, for Luhmann, the system rests upon the separation between system and individual subjects, or actors, who are considered environment, external to the system. See N. Luhmann, *Social systems*, Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 1995. Bourdieu uses the notion of "champs" to indicate the places of collective and individual strategies and conflicts in the cultural market. See P. Bourdieu,

Abbott's theoretical model could then be placed in the middle between R. Boudon's (1982) two paradigms of social action: 'interactionism' and 'determinism', where in determining the interaction between the subjective and objective dimension of social action, the former tends to underestimate the influence of structural conditioning over action and the latter to overestimate it. Neither 'subject-professionals' nor 'structure-professions', have, in Abbott's analysis a direct influence on the creation and development of the professional system, they can only negotiate the boundaries of jurisdictions that have become available. The concept of jurisdiction is in fact, in Abbott's theory, broader than the concepts of power and dominion used by other authors, it is more flexible and it indicates the territorial control of a 'task area' linked to one, or more than one, profession and other alternative professions which have a sort of right of pre-emption over the same area or part of it. These 'other' professions could take on a task area in the place of the profession, which has left it *vacant*, or they could undertake actions to occupy it. This is the reason, Abbott explains, why it is difficult for a form of exclusive control to be established over a single jurisdiction.

The suggestions, which ensue from Abbott's analysis, are of a methodological kind. The variables necessary to interpret the process of the development of a profession are the structural and cultural forms of control over work and the market already highlighted in previous studies of the profession, the difference lies in the context in which these factors are observed. No longer in the isolated dimensions of the history of a single profession, of the power relations between client and professional, of the mechanisms of control of demand and supply for service, nor of the control of the systems of access to knowledge and to specialised skills, but in the effective context in which all these elements are created and interact, that is in those arenas where jurisdictional claims are made: the legal system, the public opinion and the worksetting.

1.6 Conclusion

Recent studies of the professions emphasise, therefore, that attempts to define the concepts of profession and professionalisation with the aim of establishing differences between professions and between professions and mere occupations have ignored the problems, which, in fact, come first, of distinguishing between *institutionalised forms of control* of the occupations, of taking into account the organisations in which professionals work and

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La force du droit, éléments pour une sociologie du champ juridique, in *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, N. 2-3, 1986

of considering the decisive role played by the state in creating the conditions for the achievement of forms of *authority* in the workplace and of protection in the labour market.
Through the specific literature reviewed in this chapter it has been possible to identify occupational control as the central variable in evaluating a profession's position in the division of labour and in the market. Sociological analyses of the occupations, although drawn from different approaches, have contributed to defining a number of theoretical issues, which are considered fundamental in order to confront the profession of public librarianship in a period of fundamental changes. Firstly, the relevant role of certified knowledge in establishing forms of control over work and the labour market and in legitimating professionals' status has been emphasised. Secondly, the collective action necessary to claim and achieve status and recognition in the workplace as well as in the professional market, by means of shelter, which requires that only those equipped with the proper credentials may perform or supervise certain tasks, has been stressed. Thirdly it has been suggested that occupational authority is based both on structural as well as normative foundation. The latter becomes essential to achieve a consistent degree of control over work for those occupations, which do not enjoy a strong legal and economic status, as for example, some organisational professions like librarianship. Finally, the ideological character of professionalism has emerged as a means of seeking and maintaining a powerful and privileged position in the division of labour and the market for every occupation. High status and privileges are safeguarded and reproduced as long as the principles legitimating professional status concur in legitimating the wider social order.
Moreover, it has been stressed here that it would be mistaken to consider the process of professionalisation as a linear process tending towards a final goal which would bring state recognition and/or monopoly over educational structures and professional activity. It is rather, an ongoing process of *negotiation* and *conflict*, which involves competing occupations, state agencies and consumers, each of which is engaged in defending their own autonomy and authority. In the following chapter attention is centred on the historical and social processes, which have created the condition for the formation and transformation of the public library profession.

Chapter 2

THE INSTITUTIONALISING PROCESS OF MODERN LIBRARIANSHIP: THE ROLE OF THE STATE

2.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to give a clear and coherent picture of the rise of modern librarianship from its outset. To do this we need to analyse, on a historical base, how public libraries, and, at the same time, the profession of librarianship, have developed from their very origin. In order to accomplish this task, our objective in this chapter is to focus on structural and normative changes that have characterised the long historical process of the institutionalisation of modern public librarianship during the course of one hundred and fifty years. The scope of this chapter, therefore, necessarily includes an investigation into the relationship between an area of work, which has emerged from structural and political changes in society, and the profession of public librarianship, that is those structural and normative elements through which librarians claim to possess specific expertise. Once the type of relationship between work and profession has been made clear and how this relationship has been established, changes can be analysed and evaluated. This chapter, because of the complexity of the issues treated from both a historical and theoretical standpoint, is organised on the basis of certain theoretical convictions. It is, therefore, an attempt to give an account of the rise of modern public librarianship as a profession and at the same time to suggest a theoretical perspective for the study of professions. The perspective adopted here is one chosen by some of the more recent sociologists of the professions (T. Johnson, 1972; M. Sarfatti Larson, 1977; I. Waddington, 1984; A. Abbott, 1988; G. Larkin, 1983; M, Burrage, 1990; S. Holloway, 1991; S. Brint, 1994) who see the theoretical explanation of the emergence and transformation of the professions as almost undecipherable without some reference to their historical development as types of social organisations, as status groups and as specialised work activities.

The relationship between profession and work, A. Abbott (1988) stresses, may, at first sight, seem very simple: on the one hand, there is a series of tasks to perform and on the other hand, a group of people with certain characteristics whose job it is to carry them out. The structure corresponds to the function. Yet, in reality, it is far more complicated. If we

analyse this relationship from a historical perspective, we realise that the tie between profession and work changes constantly. There are new professions emerging and others disappearing, functions and occupational tasks, traditionally entrusted to one profession, are passed on to another profession, which might, in turn, be founded on scientific premises completely different from those of its predecessor.

In fact, as A. Abbott (1988) has clearly pointed out, the fashion in which the tasks of an occupation are carried out is shaped into accepted structures, norms and roles and depends on circumstances, which are historically and socially determined. T. Johnson (1972) and, in a different manner, E. Freidson (1970a, 1970b) add to this that the way in which an occupation is institutionalised in society, in any particular historical instance, is determined by the exercise of political and economic power, thus stressing the important role of the state. It follows that social determinants and changes in structures, norms and values have created the conditions for the emergence of roles, rules and tasks that have in time formed the profession of librarian as it is known today. Similarly, the nature and functions of librarianship are socially structured and therefore subject to change whenever the action of forces, diverse in origin and character, threaten to unbalance the social conditions and circumstances in which these activities operate.

So far the expertise required to carry out the specific tasks, aimed at the public provision of library and information services, are formalised in specific institutions, occupational groups and services, which are the result of a long historical process and the expression of longstanding principles, such as intellectual freedom, personal and community enrichment and free access to sources of knowledge for all, which have dominated society for a long time. It is argued here that social determinants and changes in structures and values created the conditions for the emergence of a new professional practice and knowledge substantially different from that of the pre-industrial age. Similarly, the political and economic changes that have characterised Great Britain over the last decade may have had, therefore, the potential to change the way in which the profession of librarian is organised and institutionalised in society.

2.1 The rise of modern librarianship

The profession of librarian, as we know it today, although strongly linked in many aspects to ancient traditions, owes its origin nevertheless to the profound technological and social transformations, which characterised society throughout the nineteenth century (M. Winter,

1988). In fact, the development of the modern profession of librarian is in many ways similar to that of other professions which have emerged, or which have been subject to profound transformation, in Great Britain, as in other western societies during the nineteenth century. In order to understand the nature and the evolution of this profession, we must, therefore, focus our attention on that crucial period of the development of contemporary society during which the industrial revolution irreversibly transformed the organisation of work, the role of expertise and the very relation between work and expertise, thus creating the conditions for the development of new professional activities and for a different model of institutionalising the professions in society. Four factors, in particular, are identified as having influenced the development of the profession of modern librarianship:

- the overwhelming growth of knowledge and the diffusion of books and periodicals thanks to scientific and technological innovations;
- the rise of professionalism as a means of institutionalising expertise in society;
- the sudden diffusion of public libraries as part of a vast government project aimed at remedying the negative effects of the market economy in British society.
- the emergence of a new type of public service bureaucracy characterised by large-scale technological organisations;

2.2 Scientific progress and the growth of knowledge

The transformations, which characterised this period, were made possible largely by scientific inventions and technological progress. The application of the various technical inventions increased the capacity and efficiency of the productive system and provoked significant changes in organisation and in relations between man and work. These technological developments were accompanied by an incredible rise in the number and types of occupations stimulated by the increasing demand for expertise able to run the new and complicated industrial machinery. The occupational structure, which, in pre-industrial society, the reflected the defined roles of belonging to a class or caste, became progressively more and more complex to the point of producing a totally different type of society, characterised by a vast network of interdependent specialisations.[1] With the growth and specialisation of the occupations, the amount of knowledge required to carry out a determined working activity also increased. Each occupation contributed, therefore,

[1] A. Fabris e R. Merli, "Il Lavoro Organizzato", in D. De Masi e A. Bonzanini, *Trattato di Sociologia del Lavoro e dell'Organizzazione: le Tipologia*, Milano, F. Angeli, 1987, pp. 73-104

to creating a new specialised body of knowledge or, at the very least, a group of techniques and skills linked to work.

In the nineteenth century specialisation emerged, P. Rossi (1988 p.315-357) stresses, as the fundamental characteristic of scientific knowledge, completing that process of detachment from the idea of scientific research intended as 'natural philosophy', which had begun between 1700 and 1800. In this period, the link between scientific research and society became increasingly close, insofar as the applied sciences provided highly prized inventions for industry. Science was recognised, therefore, as socially important and useful to society, exciting the interest of the emerging middle class. From this moment on, Rueschemeyer (1983 p. 51) argues, scientific knowledge became institutionalised in a more differentiated, thus specialised way, and received the cultural recognition and power of legitimation that it is granted today. Naturally, this differing idea of knowledge also modified the figure of the scientist who from being scholar-philosopher of nature, of a universal cultural background, thus became an intellectual-scientist, possessing a body of knowledge within the confines of his own discipline. The development of scientific knowledge, in other words, no longer depended on the activities of individual scholars, but on the co-operation of many scientists. Before research results and new theories could be accepted, they had to be submitted to and verified by the new scientific community. Consequently, the *collection* and the *distribution* of knowledge became essential for the *production* of science itself and for recognition of the validity of discoveries. In this context, many important scientific reviews emerged and their distribution became widespread from the mid-nineteenth century; amongst those best known, we can mention, for example, the review *The Lancet* published from the beginning of the century.

In the same period, E. Freidson maintains (1986), in which this specialised knowledge became widespread, the general level of knowledge also increased, as a part of this new specialised knowledge gradually became a common inheritance for all. Altogether the growth of the amount of knowledge was unprecedented; to the *pure knowledge* of the various branches of knowledge, the relevant *specialised knowledge* of the various occupations and *commonsense knowledge* used in everyday life, were added. Knowledge, until then the unique and exclusive inheritance of a very restricted and privileged part of society, was thus transformed into a plurality of types of knowledge, more or less connected and co-ordinated to each other (E. Freidson, 1986 pp.1-19). This rapid growth of knowledge and its application to human activities became such prominent aspects of the

industrial society that structures, professions and specific disciplines had to be created in order to preserve, produce and circulate this knowledge. In fact, Rossi observes, the need to preserve its own cultural patrimony and transmit it from generation to generation is typical of every society.

> *"This is particularly true of the sum of knowledge according to which society organises experience and which it recognises as institutionalised knowledge. The function of preservation is placed in an intermediate position with respect to two other functions, equally indispensable (...) finding its own presupposition in the first, and becoming, in turn, the precondition for the second: on the one hand the function of the production of knowledge, and on the other the function of the diffusion and circulation of knowledge."* [2]

This social need, made urgent by the extraordinary diffusion of books and readers fostered by the role of the printing process for the dissemination of knowledge, required the emergence of new occupations and the transformation of existing ones in the information field, in which the profession of librarian, together with other 'modern professions' substantially changed its own identity and its own role. From this time onwards, the occupation of librarian took on the characteristics of a modern profession, ceasing to be an individual activity in which professional knowledge was lost upon the death of the scholarly librarian, to become a profession with its own specialised body of knowledge transmitted by specific educational institutions (M. Winter, 1988; M. Albaric, 1989). As early as the end of the nineteenth century, the profession of librarian in Great Britain sought to organise itself along the lines of modern professions, entrusting its own growth and social recognition to the achievement of a legitimate professional status. In 1877 a professional association was created, specific schools for librarians were set up and appropriate criteria were defined for professional qualifications. In fact, according to the emergent ideology of professionalism, T. Johnson (1972 p. 58) stresses, legitimation of status, especially for those occupations, which were client-based with a relatively low technical content, rested on the possession of specific qualifications obtained through lengthy periods of training.

[2] P. Rossi, "Prefazione" in *La Memoria del Sapere*, Op. Cit., p. v, my translation.

2.3. The rise of professionalism as a means of institutionalising expertise

By the end of the nineteenth century, Sarfatti Larson (1977) points out, the specialised professions were characterised by the fact that their professional competence was no longer legitimated by their ties to an elevated social class or to the approval of an élite clientele, but to the type of formal education undertaken and by the qualifications possessed.

> *"Before the industrial revolution, the profile of the free practitioner was defined for lawyers and physicians, and to a lesser degree, for architects as well. But even the profession of law - which was the first to disengage itself, in the fourteenth century, from the tutelage of the Church - had not yet developed the stable and intimate connection with training and examinations that came to be associated with the professional model during the nineteenth century".* (Sarfatti Larson, 1977 p.2)

In pre-industrial society, Sarfatti Larson explains, services which were based on the specialisation of knowledge, were reserved almost exclusively to a restricted cultured élite on whom the experts depended for their existence, whereas specialised craftsman or commercial services were intended for a popular clientele. There was a clear distinction between the so-called *'learned professions'* who referred to the Church and to the universities and the *'common professions'* who referred only to the medieval guilds. Those belonging to the first category - essentially doctors, the legal professions and the clergy - aimed at receiving a liberal university education in the classics and were thus associated with the world of the cultured élite to whom their services were addressed. Those belonging to the second category - common lawyers, apothecaries, barber-surgeons, etc. - were trained through various forms of apprenticeship based essentially on acquiring practical skills and were intended for a much wider public (A.M. Carr-Saunders and P.E. Wilson, 1933; W.J. Reader, 1966; Sarfatti Larson, 1977, E. Krause, 1996).

Under what T. Johnson (1972 p. 66-67) called 'oligarchic patronage', the professions were also profoundly tied to class structure, where *learned* and *common professions* acted in different social worlds and did not compete with each other. Recruitment was based on sponsorship by a patron with whom the professional shared the same values and tastes. The established professions enjoyed elevated social status, less for possessing a sum of knowledge or for recognised technical competence than for possessing a higher education appropriate for a *gentleman* and based on knowledge as an end in itself, uninterested and gratuitous, and therefore not to be used as a means of sustenance. The professional's claim

to possessing superior competence was based on a different way of using education and qualifications, that is on being a gentleman endowed with that candid, just and impartial spirit which leads to a noble and *courteous life* [3]. The great professionals of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, whether they were physicians, architects or librarians, were known for their eloquence, wit and culture rather than being evaluated for their technical competence. Whereas several examples of knowledgeable professionals can be found in medicine or law, for librarianship we have fewer, but nonetheless prestigious cases, like the philosopher Leibniz who was a librarian in Hanover and Mazarin who was in charge of the Bibliothèque du Roi, which later became the Bibliothèque Nationale. The chances of a career for the professional 'gentleman' depended on birth or on connections to the prestige and power of an élite clientele. Legitimation of competence, obtained through ties between professionals and their aristocratic patrons, lost its validating importance with the rise to power of an urban middle class, which provided, Johnson (1972 p. 52) stresses, not only an expanding market for individual services but also provided recruits for both the existing and new professions. Medicine, for instance, I. Waddington (1977) points out, managed to free itself from the control of patients and became an independent profession only with the emergence of a differentiated clientele, which allowed a more powerful professional-patient relationship on the part of the professional.

Following the great socio-structural transformations of the nineteenth century, which involved the university educational system, and the establishing of a powerful middle class, a different educational model was created, which included new disciplines and a new way of considering apprenticeship. Achieving social status no longer depended on the judgement of a restricted aristocratic community but on specific training and on possessing certain qualifications. Career chances, consequently, were opened far more to individual talent and to the abilities demonstrated by those belonging to the emerging middle class. For the first time, Sarfatti Larson (1977) emphasises, it became possible to gain social status through one's own work. The criteria for the definition of social status in the pre-industrial period remained unaltered and were incorporated into the modern model of

[3] Liberal education referred back to the aristocratic Aristotelian ideals of higher education: knowledge for knowledge's sake, a gratuitous intellectual exercise that formed the gentleman, this was to have been the objective of university education. A more profound discussion of this topic can be found in the debate between the proponents of the so-called *liberal education* and those who supported *professional education* in Britain in the first half of the 18th century in M. Sanderson, The Universities in the Nineteenth Century, London, Routledge & Keagan, 1974; P. Rossi "I Luoghi della memoria collettiva", in P. Rossi (ed.) *La Memoria del Sapere*, Op. Cit. Pag. 275-313; R. Lewis & A, Maude. Professional People, London, Phoenix House, 1952. pp. 19-23

profession. Thus university links, disinterestedness for the venal aspects of commerce, a sense of altruism and of responsibility towards the client and the community continued to be the arguments of a professional rhetoric in which the aim was to create a differentiation between the 'true' professions and mere occupations. Indeed, this reliance on the characteristics of the ideal-typical profession of the pre-capitalism age strongly conditioned the earlier studies of the professions, which tried to explain the sudden growth in the number and importance of specialised occupations in 19th and 20th century society.

2.4. Professions, economic liberalism and the protection of society

By the mid-nineteenth century, the sudden growth in the demand for professional services and the passage from the old to the new system of professional recognition had created considerable problems in the market of professional work where the credibility of the professions could no longer be guaranteed by a declining social class, the aristocracy. Competition from colleagues with no reputation gradually made it necessary to define new forms of protection from incompetence, disloyalty and exploitation. Furthermore, the professionals belonging to the middle-class also had to compete with the traditional professions who had control over licensing. To this purpose, professions began to organise colleague-controlled institutions and to demand legislation aimed at regulating and controlling the market of professional services. In a short time, the main existing and emergent occupational groups were organised into either renewed or brand new national professional bodies: The Law Society, 1825; The British Medical Association, 1832; The Royal Institute of British Architects, 1834; The Royal Pharmaceutical Society, 1841; The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, 1844; The Society of Engineers, 1854; The National Union of Teachers, 1870, *The Library Association, 1877*; The Institute of Chartered Accountants, 1880, The Royal British Nurses and British Dental Association, 1887; The British Optical Association, 1895. During this phase the state became of fundamental importance in guaranteeing that the professions operated correctly (R. Lewis and A. Maude, 1952, pp.23-27; M. Sarfatti Larson, 1977, pp.2-8).

The professional organisations, from this moment onwards, combined state control with the autonomy achieved through their own historical evolution. This characteristic mixture is expressed in the pursuit of the interests of the professional groups through the power they acquired by becoming regulatory bodies by Act of Parliament, or Royal Charter. As far as the professions were concerned, this state recognition, and the power that entailed, aimed at protecting public interest. The state, in its attempt to give order to the social

structure of the nineteenth century, hitherto characterised by instability and tension between the social classes and where economic and individual interests overrode those of the community, placed great importance on the interests of professional groups insofar as it considered the interests of these groups instrumental also to the good of society at large.

In order to better understand how the relationship between the state and the professions developed, it is helpful to analyse the evolution of the professional organisations within the wider context of the changed economic, political and social circumstances, which characterised society during the first half of nineteenth century. As K. Polany (1957) so aptly stated, this period of 'great transformation' was characterised by a *double movement*, which can be summed up as the action of two organisational principles in society:[4]

- the principle of economic liberalism, which aimed at a self-regulating system and which hailed, as its methods, *laissez-faire* and the free market;
- the principle of social protection, which aimed at the conservation of the human kind and nature, in addition to that of the very organisation of economic activities.

In this context, dominated by contrasting principles which nevertheless supported the free market, Sarfatti Larson (1977) points out, the modern professions developed as an answer, on the one hand, to the increased opportunities for business offered by modern society and, on the other hand, to the decline in traditional guarantees of competence and moral integrity provided by the old professions. However, just as centralised state intervention opened, and kept open, the way to the free market, so the emergence of the modern professions likewise came about thanks to the state's commitment to organising and controlling the market of professional services. In fact, Sarfatti Larson claims (1977), government legislation, which favoured industrial development while keeping it under control, yet, at the same time, endeavoured to safeguard society from the negative effects of this same development, brought about the very conditions which made the birth and growth of modern professions possible.

As state intervention, above all in Great Britain, took the form of intense legislative activity aimed at regulating both existing and emerging professional activities, the occupational groups formed associations whose 'professional project' aimed at creating a market for their services and at achieving social status for their members (Sarfatti Larson,

[4] Polany, Karl. The Great Transformation. Boston, Beacon Press, 1957, p. 132

1977 pp. 9-18). Among the most important legislation of this period, the following are worthy of note: the Pharmacy Act of 1852, the Medical Act of 1858, the Education Act of 1870, the Public Health Act of 1875, the Dental Act of 1878, and the Veterinary Surgeons Act of 1881, in addition to many others, all aimed at imposing order over the market of professional services by introducing university examinations, training programmes and specific rules for accreditation, intended to protect the public, on the one hand, from forms of disloyalty and exploitation and the professionals, on the other hand, from competition by incompetent and unqualified colleagues.

In nineteenth century Britain, professionalism became the dominant mode of regulating expert services. The modern professions, which arose out of the technical imperative of the division of labour, established themselves with the aid of the state, adopting an idealised model and characteristics in order to claim control over the market of professional services. The rhetoric used to gain legitimation of status was based on the claim to possessing esoteric and technical knowledge, which provided individual professionals with authority over clients. Alliances between professional organisations and universities created the condition for establishing a monopoly over production and access to professional knowledge, which guaranteed control of the market by restricting competition. This privileged position and social rewards were reciprocated by the professions with prolonged specialised training and with a commitment to altruistic service, proven by adherence to a self-regulated code of conduct.

In the context of this historical development, what should be noted, T. Johnson (1982) points out, is that the rise of modern professions was a reciprocal process in which professionalisation and state formation were closely related. That is to say, the institutionalisation of expertise in the form of professionalism entailed not only state recognition, protection, licenses and even granting monopolies over practice to professional associations, it also involved such experts in rendering new areas of social policy more amenable to the process of governing. In particular, Johnson argues (1992), the establishment of the modern personal service professions in nineteenth century Britain was tied to the implementation of government policies relating to public health and hygiene, pauperism, political reforms, company law, communications etc., and these professions were granted status and social recognition. This was, also, the case for public librarianship.

2.4.1 Social reforms and the rise of public librarianship

The birth of public libraries in Great Britain takes place in this context of great social and structural change. In fact, although a few isolated examples of public libraries can be found in British history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the passing of the first Public Library Act 1850 officially heralds their birth. This act was one of the many reforms aimed at raising the country above the horrors of the Industrial Revolution, striving towards the ideal of a more humane and democratic society and legislated for the creation of a network of municipal libraries throughout the whole country.[5] These libraries, intended for the lower classes, were to offer free access and were financed by public funds. The act was passed thanks to the campaign of awareness lead by the 'Public Library Movement' which insisted on the need to improve the conditions of the lower classes through education and reading, although we know that the act was, in fact, passed without the express support of those for whose benefit it was intended. Public libraries owe their creation, in fact, to the initiative and enthusiasm of a handful of intellectuals belonging to the upper ranks of society. Two Members of Parliament of the time numbered among the main promoters, William Ewart and Joseph Brotherton, with the aid of Edward Edwards, assistant librarian to Antonio Panizzi at the British Museum and who later became librarian in the new Public Library of Manchester.

The cultural climate, which formed the backdrop to the birth of the public libraries, was, therefore, profoundly different from the climate, which had characterised, for example, the lively discussions of the French revolutionary groups and which a few years later influenced the work of the parliamentarians in the recently united Italy. The proceedings and reports[6] of the Select Committee on Public Libraries during preparation of the text of the 1850 Act reveal, in fact, very few references to library collections intended as historical 'heritage' to be safeguarded and preserved, or to problems such as the acquisition of ecclesiastical libraries. Two basic themes do, however, appear in the foreground: the need

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[5] Thomas Kelly, *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845-1975*, London, Library Association, 1977. pp. 3-16. The historical connection between the Industrial Revolution and the birth of public libraries, which represents a classic notion in British historiography, also indicates that the context in which the development of public libraries is studied is the very context of social phenomena and problems. The same view can be found in works by other authors who studied the history of public libraries in GB: Thomas Greenwood, *Free Public Libraries. Their Organisation, Uses and Management*, London, Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1886; J. Minto, *A History of the Public Library Movement in Great Britain and Ireland*, London, Allen and Unwin and the Library association, 1932; W. J. Murison, *The Public library: Its Origins, Purpose and Significance*, London, Harrap & Co. 1955.

[6] House of Commons, Select Committee on Public Libraries, *Report, Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (1849).

to create a network of library institutions freely accessible to the public and the aim to attribute these same institutions with the specific task of promoting culture and education. In particular, the importance of the new libraries, as a place for self-education and recreation for the poorer classes, was highlighted. This is demonstrated by the fact that in some cases the libraries were even seen as an alternative to the pub.[7] Clearly, the public library in Great Britain was intended essentially to serve, above all, the lower strata of society, those identified in continental Europe as the 'people' and in industrialised Britain as the 'working class'. This was, in fact, the leitmotif of the inaugural speeches for new libraries and the words of Charles Dickens at the opening ceremony of the public library in Manchester in 1852 illustrate this dominant theme:

> *"That as, in this institution, special provision has been made for the working classes, by means of a free lending library, this meeting cherishes the earnest hope that the books thus made available will prove a source of pleasure and improvement in the cottages, the garrets, and the cellars of the poorest of our people"*[8]

This declaration, behind the noble social ideals it expresses, barely conceals a fundamental belief in cultural class distinction, a widespread trend of that age, and at the same time clearly marks the role assigned to this new institution. The use of the very adjective 'public' is ambiguous, in that it was interpreted above all by intellectuals as referring to membership type libraries meant for the 'public' of their own members. In fact, before the final denomination public library was adopted, 'free library', or 'free public library' was given preference, as the library was most certainly meant to be freely open to all, but was, above all, intended as a free service on the same level as other social and educational services intended for the working classes.

Thus, the theme of the libraries moved from its own natural cultural terrain, where it should have developed, to what could be defined as a 'moral social' arena to be treated as one of the possible instruments to improve the habits of the lower classes.

> *"Where witnesses approved the need for the public library,"* argues W.J. Murison *"they almost unanimously showed themselves to be concerned with its effect as a*

[7] Thomas Kelly, A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1977, op. cit., p. 113. Cf. also W.J. Murison, The Public Library, second edition, London, George G. Harrap, 1971, p. 51.

[8] Charles Dickens, Speeches (edited by K.J. Fielding), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960, pp. 152-54. Cfr. also T. Kelly, A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, op. cit., p. 27

counter-agent to evils rather than a positive force for educational or recreational benefit".(W.J. Murison, 1971 p.30)

The true intentions of the majority of the champions of the liberal political class who had given birth to the idea of the public library were, thus, mainly bent towards maintaining above all, social morals, as they intended them, of a political order. It can, therefore, be stated that in the Great Britain of the mid-nineteenth century, public libraries, like elementary education, were created and sustained by proponents of two divergent ideologies: Paternalism and Self-help or Empowerment. The former were those who believed in controlling the increasingly powerful masses. Libraries and schools were instruments of social control, the unwashed masses needed to be tamed, to be civilised to make them accept their new but subordinate roles in economy and society. The latter were those who believed in using schools and libraries to create responsible and enlightened citizens, ultimately capable of taking power in a democratic society, in a civilised community. Despite the differences, both these groups believed that suitably trained 'professionals' - teachers and librarians - could be entrusted by the state to fulfil the roles of 'guides', 'cultural leaders', and 'educators'.

2.4.2 The professionalisation of librarianship

Librarianship, in these early years, was, however, far from being a recognised profession. In this period, there was no professional training, nor library schools, no official qualifications. Librarians came from many different walks of life. With the exception of a few who came from university and subscription libraries, most of them had no previous library experience at all. They were unlucky schoolmasters, unsuccessful booksellers, minor journalists and even returned soldiers and sailors. What was required at this stage was a love of books and a passion for order. The status of public librarians was very different from their colleagues at university and subscription libraries where people like Antonio Panizzi and Edward Edwards were regarded as erudite scholars. The status of the librarians of the early public libraries was rather low, they received low salaries, working conditions were precarious and they were regarded as little more than mere servants of public administration. Even the Library Association, which was founded in 1877, was dominated at the outset by the non-rate-aided institutions, like the British Library, university libraries and the big private libraries of the metropolis. At this stage, the

association was not even a purely professional body, it was rather an institution formed to promote libraries and to encourage bibliographic research.

Things started to improve towards the end of the century with the gradual consolidation of the principles of democracy and mass education. The rise of democracy meant that libraries could no longer continue to be the exclusive hunting ground of the élite, whereas the spread of education meant that libraries had to take on the task of providing the cultural content required for mass education. (J. Thompson, 1977; T. Kelly, 1977) The passing of the 1870 Educational Act created the conditions for the development of the profession of librarian, which, at this stage, took the form of specialisation in the field of education and recreational activities. In both fields, librarians claimed the expertise for preparing not only the material for retrieval but also for defining what ought to be retrieved. Just like teachers and social workers of the time who aimed to improve people's lives, many librarians saw their role as encouraging users to read only the 'best books'. The essence of this 'professionalism' was respectability, deference to and acceptance of dominant 'bourgeois' values, and loyalty to the state. The professionals' task was to guide and direct the reading of the masses in directions appropriate to the maintenance of social order.

> *"The provision of public libraries was therefore supported by the persons who saw in them a potential method of restraining their workers from reading books then regarded as revolutionary and harmful".* (W.J. Murison, 1971 p. 53)

The growing sense of civic responsibility, the ideals of universal literacy and equal opportunity, which had characterised British society at the turn of the century, fostered the approval of the second Public Library Act in 1892. The guiding principles of this act remained valid right up to 1964, when the present legislation came into force.[9] This legislation, in which the Library Association had taken an active role, brought about significant changes to the profession of public librarian. The main change was represented by the introduction of *open access* to lending libraries, which gave the readers direct access to books and created the conditions for a true revolution in library practice.

As readers were allowed to move freely among the books, to choose autonomously their own reading matter, it became necessary to reorganise the shelving. In fact, until libraries

[9] The Public Library Act 1919 did not bring about any substantial changes with respect to the 1892 Act. The most important innovation was the birth of the County Libraries thanks to which library services were extended to rural areas.

granted free access to the shelves, the organisation of the catalogue (more often than not, a book) was the only thing that counted, whereas the actual ordering of the books themselves was of little importance. It was sufficient for each book to be assigned a number, which made it possible for the assistant to locate it. Now that the books had to be shelved in such a way that the public would be able to find them without needing to continually consult either the catalogue or the assistant, it became essential to create smaller subject groups with a self-guide system. Very soon it became evident that the card catalogue and the Dewey system of classification were the most suitable methods to respond to the need for a reorganisation of the library.

As a consequence of this, the specialisation of the librarian moved towards more technical and scientific classification and cataloguing skills and reference work and assistance to the public became increasingly important. Thus the profession of librarian now focused on tasks based on the function of access, rather than on 'education'. Special training in classification, bibliography and library management became indispensable to fulfil the new duties. The task of the librarian was now to cope with problems of an organisational nature: to set up 'organised' collections of documents and procedures for access to their contents with the aim of making it possible for the library user to locate the desired books and information. The new concept of bibliographic organisation, which included cataloguing, indexing and classifying techniques, had to fulfil the vital function of allowing for efficient identification, selection and location of the information contained in the documents. According to the sociologist J. Ortega y Gasset (1961), this represents the librarian's true mission, the librarian's task being that of mediator between the user and the increasingly complex bibliographic universe of the chaotic world of publications.

At this point in time, there was a veritable explosion in the number of new public libraries being opened (98 between 1868 and 1886, as many as 440 between 1886 and 1918), which needed to employ staff trained according to the guidelines of the Library Association. In response to the changed context in which the profession of librarian now played its role, and this did not concern only public libraries, individual talents and choices were no longer sufficient, but appropriate scientific systems of analysis based on a theoretical body of knowledge became essential. The creation of a new group of disciplines - *library science* - became vital and these had to be taught in specific schools able to provide a high level of education for librarians. The former bibliographic methods used until then by the erudite librarians, educated in philosophy, natural sciences and philology were, in fact, no longer

suitable in the changed cultural conditions which made it necessary for librarians to be trained in managing organisational problems. The new library science had, consequently, to be a sort of 'metascience' consisting of a body of knowledge whose subject would be the organisation of knowledge itself. (M. Winter, 1988 p.5)

From this moment in time, the profession of librarian tried to obtain legitimation as a recognised profession, adopting a system of professional certification and creating courses for specialisation in librarianship. In 1909 the first Professional Register of Chartered Members of the Library Association was created, this was, and still is, maintained directly by the association which had already been granted the Royal Charter by Queen Victoria in 1898. [10] The words of Henry Tedder, president of the Library Association at that time, spoken at the annual meeting of that same year, are of particular significance:

> *"The year has been memorable for us in the acquisition of a Charter of Incorporation. This has made a great alteration in the position of our profession, which has thus been officially recognised by the state. Our future work in the direction of ameliorating the status of raising the qualifications of librarians cannot but be greatly aided by this royal mark of favour, while our influence in spreading library facilities will be more powerful."*[11]

The Library Association thus played a fundamental role in the process of professionalisation of librarianship, insisting particularly on the need to define programmes of formal education, professional qualifications and thus making the advancement of social and economic status possible for librarians. The very first librarian diploma, the Diploma of the Library Association, was instituted thanks to the association and was granted only after candidates had successfully passed a series of examinations in history of literature, bibliology, classification, cataloguing, library history and management, in addition to presenting an original piece of research work. The biggest problem at that time was the lack of sufficient specific educational institutions and, in fact, the first full time library school did not appear until 1919 when it was founded by the University of London, with the aid of the Carnegie foundation.

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[10] In 1986 Queen Elizabeth II granted a Supplemental Charter, which amended the purposes and powers in the original Charter to reflect the Association's contemporary role.

[11] W.A. Munford, *A History of the Library Association*, London, The Library Association, 1976.

The profession of librarianship truly developed, however, during the years immediately following the Second World War and once again the Library Association was the driving force behind this development. In 1939-45 the association appointed McColvin to undertake a national survey of public libraries. In his final report McColvin, argues P. Whiteman (1986, pp.71-79), drew great attention to the problem of improving staffing in public libraries, which he found very deficient. McColvin's recommendations identified four categories of library staff: the higher administrative and executive officers, the subject specialists, the general professional staff, and the non-professional staff. The basic professional grade, the general professional, would comprise the majority of librarians with appropriate qualifications.

To access a general professional post, McColvin suggested that a university qualification was needed, followed by at least two years at a library school and then three years of library experience. However, because of the shortage of graduates, in the first phase the Higher School Certificate was adopted as the minimum entry qualification for potential professionals. All entrants to the professional grade, after three years full-time paid work in a library and two years attendance at a library school, could qualify through a professional examination by the Library Association and become entitled to register as Associates (A.L.A.). In order to access specialist and managerial posts on a salary above the general grade, in addition to the qualifications needed to gain the general professional grade, candidates also had to pass a final examination leading to Fellowship (F.L.A.). To achieve the higher qualification one had to have been registered as an Associate for a certain number of years, with some professional practice and had to complete a thesis or submit a publishable work. Professional librarians had to have status, the McColvin report recommended, comparable with that of school and high school teachers. With the implementation of the McColvin guidelines in the following years, there was a conspicuous increment of professional posts in libraries looking for children's librarians, reference librarians, technical librarians, music librarians, readers' advisors etc. Over a period of ten years, from 1950 to 1960, the number of Chartered librarians more than doubled, going from 3011 to 7173.[12]

The other aspect of the effects of the McColvin report was that with the definition of a specific educational and vocational process, the creation of the professional register and

[12] By 1980 the Library Association had about 18.000 chartered members. N. Moore, "The employment market for librarians and information specialists in the UK, *Journal of Information Science*, 1987, p.327.

the introduction of differentiated professional qualifications, a division between professional and non-professional staff within the library was created. However, even though in principle the division of library staff into two categories was fully accepted, in practice this division was not always respected, particularly in the case of small library authorities. Nevertheless, specific educational requirements were defined and promoted by the Library Association and other educational institutions, such as the Royal Society of Art, in order to access the post of non-professional staff in libraries. It is clear, therefore, how the Library Association, with its powerful influence over public libraries, had done its utmost to obtain control over educational and training processes and over systems of access to the profession. In fact, although the Association had, on the one hand, involved both universities and local education authorities in promoting the opening of library schools, on the other hand, it had demanded that all students be submitted to a final exam established by the Library Association, thus ensuring a certain measure of control over entry qualifications and library expertise. When, in the second half of the sixties, the Library Association permitted the development of 'recognised' courses provided by independent university institutions, many professional librarians saw the establishment of this multi-portal system of recruitment to the profession as a threat to maintaining their status, a status achieved with such difficulty during the welfare state years.

2.4.3 The welfare state and librarians' achievement of professional status

The institutionalising process of modern librarianship that had started in the mid-nineteenth century reached a stable stage with the definition of the welfare state during the post world war years. As we are well aware, according to the emergent ideology of the *welfare state* (M.P. Hall, 1953; T. & D. Wilson, 1991; M. Hewitt, 1992) the powers of the state were supposed to not only guarantee the rights of citizens: personal freedom, freedom of speech, of thought, of religious belief, etc., but were supposed to also actively ensure the individual's full development and active participation in the political, economic and social life of the community. During these years, by means of intensive legislative activity, the European states were committed to intervening directly in the lives of their citizens with the aim of providing greater opportunities and social security to the more disadvantaged members of society. In Great Britain, above all, the welfare state, despite frequent political and economic difficulties, succeeded in creating the conditions for increased material prosperity for individuals of all classes. Free public access to library services, along the same lines as the free National Health Service to all, were part of that same principle of

'universal provision', which was the basis of welfare policies. This principle underlying the government's programme of a social state to create a more equal society in which the citizens' basic rights - to knowledge, to health, and to education - had to be guaranteed even to those who could not afford them and therefore had to be funded by universal taxation. It was believed that free access to public services would have created better opportunities to the more disadvantaged citizens and would have broken down previous inequalities of wealth, status and power.

The implications of these policies for public libraries were both structural and normative. On the one hand, there was a new upsurge in the growth of the number of libraries, of reference sections and study areas and, on the other hand, librarians assumed a new and important role in intermediation between state and citizen. Librarians of public institutions, just like the 'helping professions', took on an increasingly crucial role in the management of welfare, particularly regarding the organisation, redistribution and democratic access to knowledge and information (B. Usherwood, 1989). From this moment onwards, the work of the librarian, like that of the teacher, social worker, city planner and psychologist, became intimately linked to the political ideology of the welfare state. Following the beliefs of what P. Halmos (1970) has called the *"counselling ideology"*, librarians' primary focus was to achieve, through their work, a change in the behaviour or socio-cultural development of an informed and autonomous individual.

The librarian's 'mission', similarly to many *personal service professions* was now to help individuals to help themselves to become self-sufficient. Some proponents of the ideology went so far as to affirm that the role of the public librarian should approach that of therapist (W.F. Birdsall, 1994 pp.71-83). In order to provide effective reader guidance, the librarian needed a good understanding of the motivations, emotional needs and background of individual library users. In periods of economic and social difficulties, it was the librarian's duty to assist people in understanding the problems facing society. Consequently, the profession of librarian, in this period, moved towards the skills needed to achieve the new objectives. It became essential to possess communication and interpersonal skills relevant to the transference of knowledge and to the provision of a more effective advisory service. The implementation of the reference service provided the institutional framework for the client-professional service, calling for a new facet of the professional expertise which stretched from that of 'reference librarian' to 'assistance librarian' and from that of 'counsellor librarian' to 'therapeutic librarian'. According to

W.F. Birdsall (1994), interpersonal and communication skills provided librarians with the authority over clients, which the old professions had achieved through the monopoly of a body of scientific knowledge. Along the same lines, S. Brint (1994) stresses that personal service professions, in adopting professionalism as a means for institutionalising expertise, sought collective mobility by claiming, not so much to possess superior knowledge, as rather a kind of moral superiority and to represent community interests.

2.4.4. Public librarianship and the state

In referring to the welfare years, P. Wilding (1982 p.23) in his book "*Professional power and social welfare*" wrote that "*evidence of the power and influence of the welfare professions in policy making and administration is plentiful*" thus arguing that society was increasingly dependent upon professional services. To this purpose it is interesting to note the particular relation, which was being built up, during these years, between state and professions, in particular the service professions. Many of the public services, guaranteed as citizens' rights by the state, were provided by *welfare professionals* P. Nokes (1967), such as those in healthcare, housing, education, youth services and economic development services, to name but a few. The alliance between the state and the welfare professions, Sarfatti Larson (1977) maintains, is confirmed by the fact that these professions contributed from their outset to *the definition of the form* that the provision of public services would take. With the expansion of state functions, the application of social policies depended increasingly, in fact, on the technical-professional judgement of experts, a judgement, however, that the state was trying, at the same time, to control politically and to regulate juridically (T. Johnson, 1980 p.366; M. Bertillson, 1990). According to Johnson this meant that the institutionalisation of specialisations in the form of professionalism entailed, on the one hand, that the state granted forms of protection (professional registers, licenses, credentialing systems, certifications etc.) to certain professions and, on the other hand, involved these professions in its attempt to render new areas of social policy more suitable to government needs. The whole post-war society, observes Perkin (1989), was organised around the principles and ideals of professionalism. This was, Johnson (1993) maintains,

> "*a period in which the goal of professionalisation was seriously and optimistically pursued by teachers, social workers, librarians, planners and a legion of new, technically based experts. Such optimism was the product of seemingly successful*

strategies in eliciting both public approval and official benefits, insofar as professionals were increasingly located in new, 'corporatist' structures as 'neutral' experts, with the task of implementing the social and political goals." (1993 p.145)

Confirmation of these interpretations can be found in the fact that during the years between the fifties and the sixties the alliance between public administrators and the professions became tighter and tighter. For example, in many cases staff employed at local authority libraries of some importance were allowed to attend library schools free of charge in order to obtain professional qualifications.[13] Public library services were organised in respect of Library Association policies and guidelines; elected councillors and chief officers attended conferences and seminars organised by the association in order to draw indications for their strategy plans and professional librarians were appointed by government departments to provide professional advice and to visit and report on local services. Moreover, many local authorities became affiliated members of the Library Association, which in 1961 decided to transform itself into a purely professional association. (T. Kelly, 1977 p.419) At the same time librarians, just like the other aspiring professions, tried to obtain forms of protection and official recognition from the state, in order to gain control over work and collective prestige by making access to the profession dependent on formal education and qualifications, also with the aim of excluding 'unqualified' competition.

Some authors (N.J. Russell, 1985; N. Roberts and T. Konn, 1991) saw the move to create a clear-cut distinction between professional and non-professional staff in the library an important part of the librarians' professional project to achieve professional status. The desire to obtain a recognised place in the occupational hierarchy of an increasingly meritocratic society required, according to these authors, a separation of professional from non-professional tasks and the creation of a managerial élite. In accepting Library Association policy, which stated that library assistants did not require the standards of education of the professional librarians, many library authorities started to recruit library assistants at a lower level, thus introducing a sharp distinction between professional and non-professional careers.

[13] As far back as the end of the thirties, L. McColvin, Honorary Secretary of the Library Association suggested that local authorities should promote and finance professional training for librarians following the example of their American counterparts. (Lionel R. McColvin. *Libraries and the public*. London : G.Allen & Unwin, 1937, pp. 73-75)

Following the implementation of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, occupational patterns within the library profession, N.J. Russell (1985) explains, changed as a consequence of the new qualifying system for accessing professional posts introduced by the Library Association. The major change was the opportunity for schools to examine their own students. Initially the new and the old system of certification functioned in parallel. Entrants to the profession could now either be university graduates or people with the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level in at least two subjects. In both cases, librarianship students had normally to complete a two-year full-time course in a library school. At this stage, mid sixties to early seventies, recruitment would mainly be from sixth-form directly to a school of librarianship or from traineeship schemes sponsored by libraries themselves who would send junior employees to library schools after two or three years of experience. This latter case was quite frequent in large library authorities like Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Liverpool. From the early seventies, professional qualifications became accessible through specific degrees or postgraduate diplomas in Librarianship, which later became 'Information and Library Studies', as universities started to set up their own courses when the Library Association finally decided to renounce the monopoly over examinations.

To acquire the professional status of 'Chartered Member of The Library Association' it was then necessary to undertake prolonged and rigorous training. The normal route would be to take a degree or postgraduate diploma in librarianship and information science at one of the fifteen schools (there are sixteen today) and departments of library and information studies in universities, polytechnics and technical colleges. Following this, a period of supervised work in a library unit would be the norm together with the submission of a professional development report. Both the courses provided by the educational institutions and the programme of supervised work required the approval of The Library Association. This meant that university courses and professional training were probably, although not necessarily, accredited by the professional association which maintained its role, albeit less powerful than in the past, as formal judge in establishing the appropriate knowledge, skills and standards needed to enter the profession.

Professional librarians, however, have never possessed the legal authority and economic power to enforce those standards on the job, nor have they enjoyed the autonomy of work typical of the established professions, such as the type of autonomy enjoyed by nineteenth century doctors. Public librarians, in fact, are employed in heteronomous professional

organisations under the control of local authority. It is sufficient to note that librarianship, unlike medicine, arose only with the development of libraries in society. As has been stressed in earlier comments, it was the proliferation of public libraries in the nineteenth century that provided the institutional foundation for the emergence of modern librarianship as a profession. A profession, W. Birdsall (1994, p.4) stresses, which is intimately bound to a specific organisation as distinct from the usual stereotype of autonomous professions.

The public library profession, therefore, cannot be placed among the more powerful professions like that of doctor or lawyer, as it lacks that legal authority which depends on juridical recognition or *direct* state protection as occurs for some professional groups particularly in continental Europe. The profession of librarian belongs to that category of professions, which in the UK represents the majority, regulated *indirectly* by the state through the concession of a Royal Charter to the professional association entrusted with the task of establishing the requisites for admission and for maintaining high professional standards.[14] Unlike the professions regulated by *ad hoc* laws through Acts of Parliament or Statutory Registration, which make enrolment compulsory, this second category of professions is regulated by the Royal Charter in accordance with the Privy Council and sets up voluntary registers. In the case of the profession of librarian, the Royal Charter sets out the objectives of the association and provides the legal framework under which it operates. The byelaws of the Library Association are an extension of this legal framework, which establishes the requirements for the admission to the Register of Chartered Members although the professional Council has ample discretion to change the criteria and procedures relevant to it. In fact, it is the Council that from time to time makes regulations for the purpose of testing the proficiency of members desiring to be elected to the Register of Chartered Members of the Association.

Although professions in Britain can be regulated directly or indirectly by the state, only some professional activities, yet none for certain professions are regulated by law. As far

[14] The number of occupations which can claim professional status through the regulation of qualifying associations is quite consistent in Great Britain, see: G. Millerson, *The Qualifying Professions*, London : Routledge, 1964. This system of regulation of the professions, which was almost unused by other European countries, has now become an issue of interest for the respective national parliaments. In Italy, for instance, the proposed reform of the 'Professioni intellettuali' (Disegno di Legge N. 5092, 9.07.1998) intends to introduce a general deregulation of professional activities also by giving the professional associations a mandate to exercise control over practitioners, in order to diminish state intervention in this field. (see e.g. A. Chiarenza. "Sul riconoscimento professionale dei sociologi", in *Sociologia del Lavoro*, N.70-71, 1998, pp. 294-320).

as protection is concerned, the British legal system provides two main forms: protection of the title - *indicative closure* - and protection of professional practice - *functional closure*. The first level of protection indicates protection of the title and not of the tasks as these may be practised with another or no title and means that the exercising of that activity is not exclusive. Therefore, as Abbott (1988) maintains, *"client differentiation is an officially legitimate jurisdictional settlement, and attacking groups have room to develop"* (1988 p. 95). However, only those in possession of a specific qualification, approved by the professional association and enrolled on the relevant register, may boast of the title. Protection of the mere title may, in turn, take a stronger form, when a generic title is protected, and a weaker form, when the title is accompanied by the expression *chartered* or *state registered* (E. Freidson, 1986, pp. 66-67; E. Fiorenza, 1999, pp. 175-241). [15] For librarians, therefore, the title of Chartered Librarian and not that of Librarian is protected, nor is the practice of the profession protected, thus anyone may carry out the work of librarian. Consequently, as N. Roberts and T. Konn (1991) observe *"possession of professional qualifications is not an invariable condition of the right to practice"* (1991 p. 66).

Library authorities have never been, therefore, under any real obligation to employ qualified librarians, yet, especially during the sixties and the seventies, the alliance between local government and the profession was well established. Until recently, in fact, many library authorities, particularly the larger ones, have allowed professional recommendations and guidelines to govern their criteria for recruitment, training and the organisation of their own staff. Local authorities recognised staff with qualifications approved by professional associations as the most suitable to manage library services, both at the stage of identifying problem areas and the needs of library users, as well as at the stage of defining strategies for solution. In exchange, librarians provided a double-edged guarantee of their own competence in the provision of services. The first and direct form of guarantee was provided by the fact that adherence to a professional code served as control and sanction within the occupational group and the second indirectly insofar as the quality of staff in library and information services was demonstrated through their obtaining professional status. Further guarantees were provided by the fact that under the Code of

[15] E. Freidson provides an exhaustive illustration of the American licensing system in his book *Professional Powers*, op. cit. 1986, pp.63-69. For a European panorama see also E. Fiorenza. "Professioni e Ordini Professionali in Inghilterra" in S. Cassese ed., *Professioni e Ordini Professionali in Europa*. Milano: il Sole 24 Ore, 1999. pp. 175-241.

Professional Conduct, librarians were required to keep themselves abreast of developments in librarianship.

At the beginning of the seventies, W.J. Murison (1971, p. 133) reports, "*British public library staff numbered more than 24,000, 14,300 of which members of the Library Association*", of these, 32% were Associates (A.L.A.) and 12% were Fellows (F.L.A.). The 1972 Census of Staff in Librarianship and Information Work made plain that of all those holding the 7,908 professional posts in Great Britain, only 19.7 % lacked a professional qualification. (T. Kelly, 1977 p.432) In those libraries where librarians, as well as non-librarians, were oriented towards occupational values and beliefs, work arrangements tended to conform to standards articulated by the professional associations. In the system of library administration prescribed by the Library Association, librarians attained authority before administrators and legitimation as the dominant occupation in the library worksetting. Consequently, it can be argued that those élite librarians who possessed the prerequisites set out by the Library Association, *de facto* obtained the recognised status of professional even in the absence of a form of the *de jure* recognition that can be found for the more established professions especially in other European countries, such as Italy, France and Germany.

2.5. Changing nature of professional librarianship

In the seventies and eighties, the stable relationship between the state and professions, which made the creation and expansion of the welfare state possible, slowly started to disintegrate under the pressure of new economic and social forces which were, in the following years, to become the dominant themes in British society. At this time there was a considerable increase in the number of users of public libraries, thanks to an increase in population and widespread education, the contents of which became gradually more and more middle-class. Therefore, public libraries lost once and for all the connotation of institutions meant for the working classes, widening their scope and becoming a resource for the whole community. All this meant increased emphasis on reference and information services in order to better respond to the needs of the entire community and with a view to better co-operation with other community services, particularly those concerned with culture and education. With the approval of the more recent Public Library Act (1964) public librarians affirmed their commitment to creating social and cultural opportunities for the community. They took on a more prominent role in the promotion of children's reading, promoted adult learning and

drew attention to matters of gender, race and poverty. The development of "Community librarianship" (W.J. Martin, 1989), as a professional specialisation, reflected the need to make public libraries relevant to people in disadvantaged areas of the country and city. Strong service orientation addressed to the community was emphasised by the National Mission Statement for public libraries published in 1977, which laid stress on the role of public libraries to serve individuals alone or in groups:

> *"The public library is a major community facility, whose purpose is to enable and encourage individuals or groups of individuals to gain unbiased access to books, information, knowledge and works of creative imagination, which will:*
>
> - *encourage their active participation in cultural, democratic and economic activities;*
> - *enable them to participate in educational development through formal or informal programmes;*
> - *assist them to make positive use of leisure time;*
> - *promote reading and literacy as basic skills necessary for active involvement in these activities;*
> - *encourage the use of information and an awareness of its value.*
>
> *The local and community nature of the service requires special emphasis to be placed on the needs and aspirations of the local community, and on the provision of services for particular groups within it, while also providing access to wider resources through regional and national networks."* (IFLA, National Mission Statement, 1977)

The economic boom, which had seemed unstoppable in the sixties, began to falter. From mid-seventies in Great Britain, as in almost every other European country, the government had to try and control the spiralling of inflation, which threatened the future development of the economy. Economic restrictions arrived in the moment of maximum development of public libraries. Despite the changing situation, the wave of expanding public services, fostered by the welfare policies of the previous decade, heightened the demand for library services which meant, for example, more emphasis on information services to respond to community needs; more books and other materials such as music records, tapes, microfilms; more cultural and entertainment activities and more attention to special provision for ethnic minority groups and the disabled. Once again, the profession of librarian was modified by the effect of the emergence of new social needs and political and structural changes. Public librarians, a review undertaken by The Library and Information Services Council (1986) pointed out, needed to have flexibility and great specialisation in educational provision, because of their role to respond to the social needs of the local community as a whole and, at the same time, to the needs of special user groups such as

ethnic minorities, the sick, the unemployed, the elderly, the disabled. Service management and the social responsibility of librarians in public libraries became the key characteristics of their professionalism and the very features, which distinguished them from their colleagues in other types of libraries.[16]

The years following the introduction of the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964 marked a period of considerable change for libraries. Firstly, there was a significant reduction in the number of library authorities as a consequence of the Local Government Act of 1972 which brought the number of library authorities from 506 at the close of 1965 to 460 at the close of 1973 and finally to only 161 in 1975 in Great Britain as a whole (166 today). The consequences for public libraries were twofold: on the one hand, it was possible to establish closer co-operation with other local authority services, on the other hand, the committee grouping of the new larger authorities made it necessary to introduce radical changes in the management structure. The majority of libraries became governed by committees concerned with leisure or recreation, a move greeted with disappointment by many librarians who had prided themselves on the educational value of their work. Furthermore, the growing size and complexity of the major library systems brought increasing concern with management problems to the forefront. For professionals employed in local government organisations this meant, according to T. Murray, R. Dingwall, J. Eekelaar (1983 p. 215), their retreat from the dominant position in the division of labour in favour of managers and administrators. In the rational organisation of local services, the possession of managerial skills became fundamental. Consequently, library professional practice was now filled with such issues as "organisation and management", "input and output", "decision-making", "planning objectives", "efficiency" and "cost-analysis", a trend, which was never to stop from then onwards.

2.5.1. Bureaucratisation of public librarianship

The public library, from this moment on, became a complex organisation whose functional and structural characteristics had to take into account its two-fold facets as an organisation of service and of system. In the organisation of library services, it became necessary to consider the general context of cultural policies and community services. It was no longer possible to determine the objectives of the public library without first identifying and

[16] LISC, *Professional education and training for library and information work: a review by the Library and Information Services Council*, London: Library Association, 1986. pp. 39-45

considering the characteristics of the particular socio-economic and cultural context in which the library was placed, a context which was increasingly characterised by accelerated processes of economic-structural transformations determined in part by the formidable growth of information and by the speed with which such information was circulated, thanks to the diffusion of new computer technology.

The modern library with its role of organising and managing important welfare services *efficiently* and *scientifically*, now tended to conform to the ideal-typical bureaucratic organisation, a service organisation, as defined by Weber (1968) whose prime beneficiary was the collectivity. In fact, because of its functional characteristics, the library, thus, became a structured system of co-ordinated and interwoven technical, intellectual and administrative procedures which had not only an internal relevance to the organisation but also, and more importantly, external relations with the public. In this context librarians, like social workers and teachers, provide a perfect example of an *organisational profession* depending to a very large extent on the organisation they work in. In fact they perform their tasks in an institutional setting where a secure demand for their services is guaranteed, which provides their entire income and where their authority depends on organisational power as much as professional power.

If Sarfatti Larson's (1977 pp.180-187) analysis is correct, then in the large heteronomous professional organisations generated by the expansion of the state's functions and attributions librarians can achieve an authoritative and prestigious position provided they are able to fill an *externally sanctioned* expertise with new bureaucratic content. With the expansion of the state to the management and provision of *efficient* welfare services, the librarians' endeavours to reinforce and maintain professional status and social recognition is linked to the process of bureaucratisation of the library. In the bureaucratic worksetting, librarians' quest for a secure and respected position depended now to a large extent on the introduction of scientific management ideology in the bureaucratised library. After bureaucratisation, professional librarians' ability to differentiate themselves from support and technical staff depended on creating distinctive programmes of training based on techniques, methods and knowledge sometimes borrowed from the business and economic world. That is to say that professional and manager librarians' authority over colleagues and before the library authority committee depended now much more on the bureaucratisation of the library rather than on the claim to possessing specific technical knowledge.

Nevertheless, librarians' body of knowledge, now based on managerial skills and theory, continued to be the most important means for maintaining control over work arrangements and status before library users and administrators. Wherever the claim of expertise rested, on the traditional skills of the subject or reference librarian or on the new organisational skills of the manager librarian, the librarian's status depended first and foremost on the bureaucratic organisation. However, within these general boundaries librarians had an active role in updating their status by creating and claiming new areas of expertise. To this purpose, librarians continued to look outside their bureaucratic contexts of work for qualifications and training in the pursuit of controlling the content of professional training and access. Symbols of professionalism continued to be used within service bureaucracies regulating work arrangements and assigning status. Even if it is clear that in the bureaucratic organisation of the library, professionals are generated by the organisation itself, tasks, organisational roles, rules and career patterns introduced into large libraries are often drawn from a kind of *externally sanctioned* expertise based on training programmes and qualifications that are administrated by the Library Association and accredited university departments. Once again it appears clearly that the body of knowledge of a profession, as stated by Sarfatti Larson (1977), is not only an important structural element of the profession but also a crucial resource in attaining external legitimation and authority in the everyday worksetting, provided it is recognised as a necessary means of legitimation by the general ideological system.

2.5.2. Automation of public librarianship

The explosion of information technology and the diffusion of means of telecommunication had, in the eighties emphasised the librarians' role of managing services. In this context, the modern public library served as a link within the wider information system, whose function was that of switching appropriately selected and treated information in and out. In these new circumstances, the librarian's role was not simply to put the individual in touch with the bibliographic universe, but rather to co-ordinate and integrate social dynamics and informational fluxes. The relationship with the user also changed from one addressed to the individual user, who needed to be guided through the library collections, to the 'universal' citizen, emphasising in this way, librarians' new expertise in managing the library services as a whole.

Despite the immediate advantages that automation brought into library work particularly for the tasks of selection, processing and distribution of information, the introduction of the use of firstly microfilm and then computers, was seen as a veritable threat to the profession of librarians, above all as far as the traditional tasks of cataloguing were concerned. If, on the one hand, these innovations did indeed necessitate the standardisation of cataloguing and indexing methods, thus invading a traditional part of the professional work of the librarian, on the other hand, A. Abbott (1988, 1991) argues, these technological innovations brought significant advantages for librarians. Firstly, the diffusion of new technology favoured an increase in information and therefore a greater demand for librarians and, secondly, the decentralisation of 'cultural capital' was made possible even to small libraries, which were thus able to recover those users who were turning to larger institutions for particular needs. Moreover, A. Abbott (1988) claims, automation favoured the development of cataloguing and research techniques, simplified circulation and access to information, releasing librarians from routine tasks of a low professional level. Delegation of routine work to support or technical staff with vocational or computer skills allowed professional librarians to gain supervisory functions since they required a broader view of the labour process.

The advantages were evident, for example, in the case of new methods for the acquisition and stocking of materials, which replaced the traditional tasks of selection hitherto carried out by single librarians. This role was now taken over by a new professional figure, *the collection manager,* who was also responsible for administrative tasks. The difference between selection and 'collection management' resided in the fact that whereas previously the librarian assessed, albeit with great care, one book at a time to be included in the library collection, now all forms of information had to be considered in the choice, that is, the collection had to be developed and not simply added to. (M. Pancake, 1984 pp.185-210) The professional librarian, characterised by the scarcity of economic resources, had now to be able to select the right acquisitions, discarding superfluous ones. As E. Freidson (1986) says, the librarian had to find "the best one way" to satisfy both service and administrative demands at the same time. To this purpose, new technology was also of help.

As automation increased the complexity of the division of labour, R. Hafter (1986) claims in her study of centralised cataloguing systems, training of specialised staff became necessary; consequently, many professional roles were redefined and entrusted to para-

professional or office staff. The fact that the task of cataloguing was no longer carried out in the workplace may be seen as a loss of competence and a sign of deprofessionalisation. In reality, R. Hafter (1986, p.125) asserts, given that certain functions had become simpler and more repetitive thanks to information technology, they no longer needed to be carried out by professional staff. The task of cataloguing, thus redefined, certainly did not require a scientific knowledge base nor particular skills, and may well be learnt in the workplace by para-professional staff, thus allowing the professional librarian to take care of *"the creation and maintenance of meaningful bibliographic records to meet the needs of the information seeker ... (and) ... to evaluate priorities, to make wise, long-range decisions and to acknowledge the importance of sometimes tedious details of quality cataloguing."* (P. Eskoz, 1989 p.391) Furthermore, A. Abbott (1988, 1991) observes that the fact that librarians relied on external centralised services such as OCLC, MEDLINE, DIALOG, BLAISE, ECHO, etc., did not constitute a threat for their jurisdiction insofar as bibliographic and reference instruments provided by these companies, often created by ex-librarians, did not weaken but increased the competence needed to use them and therefore reinforced and broadened the knowledge base of librarians.

New computer technology used in the libraries also brought about changes in the relationship between users and librarians. With new systems for bibliographic research *"on line"*, public access catalogues (OPACs), users had the possibility of directly accessing information, without, apparently, needing the mediation of the librarian. The loss of contact with the user was seen by some as a loss of control over the occupation and therefore as a tendency towards deprofessionalisation. This fear, although comprehensible, was rejected by several authors who saw in modern systems for *"information retrieval"* the chance to improve managing and access to the enormous flux of information that the old systems of indexing and cataloguing were not able to guarantee. Librarians, M. Holderness (1992 p.23) argues, were become *"theoreticians on ways of managing the wealth of information"* rather then mere custodians of books.

Technological innovations, in addition to improving the organisation and delivery of services, Nielsen (1980) affirms, produced positive effects towards greater professionalisation of librarians because they increased the quality of relations with users, allowed for broader specialisation and above all permitted librarians to assert their own competence even before expert users. In fact, reference librarians did not disappear with the arrival of on-line databases within the easy accessible World Wide Web, instead they

now advised library users on how to use them effectively. L. Estabrook (1989) more prudently notes that this development in the profession took place only in the presence of two conditions: firstly that users recognise the need for intermediation by the librarian during the complex operations of 'information retrieval' and secondly that the librarian's competence is employed to create and develop research systems.

Finally, as other authors stress (B. Cronin, 1991; N. Roberts and T. Konn, 1992), the introduction of new information technology seemed not only to affect the division of labour and the relationship with the users but also to put the professional unity of librarians at risk. Different interests developed increasingly within the professional group, information-oriented special librarians, for example, claimed to have little in common with school librarians or inner city community librarians. Yet, more dangerously, the issue of diversity and its consequences was not just an internal problem as new groups, like 'special librarians' or "information scientists" attempted to create their own professional jurisdiction in the information task area.[17] In the States, A. Abbott (1988) maintains, the special librarian movement was imposing itself in some important sectors of society, such as in legislative reference government bureaus, in industry and medical or law libraries.

M. Haug (1975) defines the same trend as a tendency towards *deprofessionalisation* and points to the computer as responsible for professionals' loss of control over their knowledge base and for the consequent introduction of a large number of computer experts within work organisations. It is argued that what professionals risk losing, by being employed in large-scale bureaucratic organisations or because of the effects of the use of information technology is, above all, control over professional knowledge, training and recruitment, professional autonomy and group identity.

These problems were particularly felt in libraries with the increasing involvement of new professional figures as a consequence of the massive introduction of computers in the organisation of the librarian's work.[18] A. Abbott (1988, 1991), however, points out that these transformations within the profession were often promoted by those belonging to the very group of librarians with the intention of improving their own performance at work. If,

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[17] Together with the Library Association, which is the largest librarian and information professionals' association with a membership of over 25,000, there are two other bodies: Aslib (The former Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux, from 1983 called The Association for Information Management) established in 1924 with more than 2,000 members and The Institute of Information Scientists founded in 1958 with approximately 2,500 members.

[18] Marie Haug, "The Deprofessionalization of Everyone?" *Sociological Focus,* 8, August 1975, pp. 197-231.

therefore, the introduction of information technology is seen, on the one hand, as an unbalancing element, on the other hand, it is also seen as a chance for growth and for achievement of professional status. The much-feared process of commodification of expertise, A. Abbott (1988, 1991) argues, that is the replacement of expert professionals with expert systems, failed to come about. The announced end of the very figure of librarian with the advent of the 'paperless society' announced by W. Lancaster (1978) simply did not happen. The arrival of the so-called digital or virtual library did not, in fact, mean the death of the librarian, rather as A. Abbott (1991) claims, it once again created new markets for librarians. The problem, A. Abbott argues, does not exist at all, organisational professionals have status, income and reasonably strong career prospects; *to call them proletarianized is simply to redefine the word* (1991, p.23). What has changed is the nature of professionalism itself, Abbott continues, therefore we should stop thinking of professionals as autonomous practitioners accountable only to their peers.

To keep abreast of these fundamental technological changes, briefly sketched above, the librarian's education now aimed to improve skills in information management, communication and computer technology, the original *library science* giving way to the more timely *information science*. Furthermore, in order to cope with fragmentation within the profession, the Library Association decided to sound the feasibility of merging into the second major professional body for information professionals in the country, The Institute of Information Scientists founded in 1958. The aim was to bring into being a single professional body and to create new accredited courses, at undergraduate and postgraduate level, which would cover all the topics needed to create the cognitive basis required by modern librarians who should be trained in the following areas of knowledge: information generation, communication and utilisation; information management and organisational context; information systems and information technologies; information environment and policy and management and transferable skills. Furthermore, faced with the threat of external technological and political changes, the Library Association then looked at widening its membership base in order to gain a stronger economic and political position. To this purpose the association introduced a new membership category open to Library Assistants who lacked professional status. Also in consideration of the fact that, given the scarcity of professional posts available, in fact those who held a professional qualification from accredited courses now accessed the profession at the library assistant grade (Library Association, 1990).

2.6. Conclusion

Although the profession of librarian in the nineties appears very different from that of the romantic librarians of Victorian times, the profession has maintained many of the characteristics acquired during the long process of institutionalisation. Their role and scope has grown enormously to include activities covering all four areas of their main commitments: culture, entertainment, education and information. At the outset of the nineties, after almost 150 years of historical and structural developments, the public library profession appeared to occupy a relatively stable social position. Despite technological and organisational changes the librarian managed, in fact, to maintain a considerable degree of control over work and organisational tasks at least in large bureaucracies. Therefore, it is possible to say that the profession of public librarians has enjoyed social recognition and discrete market status through realisation of externally sanctioned expertise. In summary, the characteristics of the public library profession could be listed as follows:

1. its institutional base is the public library governed by local authority which has the statutory duty to provide a "comprehensive and efficient service" (Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964); the overall control over public libraries belongs to The Minister for the Arts, therefore the power of central government in relation to public libraries is formidable but rarely used;
2. its worksetting is the bureaucratic heteronomous organisation whose objective is the administration of library service policy; its policy is based on the principle of free access to services;
3. the service is directed towards the community, individuals alone or groups;
4. management and execution of services is entrusted to professional and manager librarians who play a fundamental role in advising the decision-making process and implementing library service policies;
5. its authority depends on organisational power as much as professional power;
6. professional qualifications are generally needed for recruitment, although British librarians are not licensed as such by the state;
7. educational credentials are awarded by 16 'Library Schools' whose courses are accredited by the Library Association, although they can operate without its validation;

8. Chartership status is awarded by the professional association, it is in fact the Library Association that maintains the Official Register of professional librarians and provides the legal framework under which they operate;
9. education in information and library science, management and organisational theories together with computer science and business information technology form the cognitive base of the profession of librarianship;
10. initial formal education, qualifications and approved training have provided, so far, a secure indicator of competence.

In this chapter the process of institutionalisation of modern public librarianship has been presented through a historical analysis of social, technological, and normative changes which have determined the present administrative and legislative basis of the profession of librarian. It has been argued that the arrangements in which the profession of today's librarian is structured are the outcomes of socio-political settings, values, and norms that have dominated society for a long time. During the first part of the nineties these arrangements were shaken by financial and political pressures imposed by central government on local authorities and consequently also on public libraries. The effect of these forces seemed to undermine the established professional status and legitimacy sought by public librarians during the first half of the century. In order to understand the extent to which the changed situation for library authorities had the power to destabilise the previous situation in which librarians operated, the focus of analysis concentrates, in the following chapter, on the impact of economic and political change.

Chapter 3

THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FORCES ON PUBLIC LIBRARIANSHIP

3.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to give a clearer picture of the social phenomenon under investigation and to pinpoint the research objective in greater depth by highlighting the facts, figures, characteristics, knowledge and opinions relating to the period (1993-1995) of the empirical research, which made it possible to proceed from a broad area of interest to a more precise operational hypothesis and relevant research questions.

During the last decade the established division of labour and market position of library managers, librarians and information professionals, as well as other service professionals, have been dramatically destabilised by central government's proposals to expose many areas of public services to the rigour of market forces by introducing competition, consumer choice, accountability and cost-effectiveness. Initially, the main focus of attention of central government policy was directed at tightening its control over the financial resources available to local authorities and at urging them toward income generation activities. Later, during its third term, the Conservative government shifted emphasis to deregulation and privatisation of local authority services by either enabling the management and delivery of services by outsiders or by allowing them to compete.

The prime objective of central government policy was to develop a market culture in the public sector by creating the political and legislative conditions, on the one hand, to incite public libraries to generate income by managing certain activities as a commercial contractor and, on the other hand, to make library and information resources attractive for the private sector, with the aim of either establishing joint-ventures or contracting-out portions of the services to private enterprises. The second main government aim was to

improve public services in order to make them respond better to citizens' needs and demands, by expanding choice and competition, thus bringing the whole public library service into the marketplace. A fundamental element for evaluating service provision efficiency, the government stated, would be which supplier delivered the best value for money service and the government made no attempt to conceal that it had no dogmatic preference for either public or private sector suppliers. The third aim of government reforms policy was to improve quality in public services by asking local authorities to publish service standards to be expected by the public and by establishing a national system of monitoring performance against those standards. These government objectives developed into three major political initiatives known as "Competing for Quality", "Citizen's Charter", launched by the then Prime Minister during the second part of 1991, and the "Review of the Public Library Services" which was undertaken, after a year of preparation, during 1993-1994 to assess the scope and nature of the service itself. [1]

3.1 Financial pressure on public libraries

From the end of the seventies onwards, all public expenditure had been heavily conditioned by the economic recession. In this climate, public libraries, considered safe holds until then, had found themselves with budgets either greatly reduced or retained at existing levels. Like many other public services, libraries had been put under closer administrative scrutiny, controlling how and where public money was spent, measuring library work in terms of *value for money* and encouraging libraries to contribute to the economy. The changing situation is well described in the words of the economist S. Bailey (1989), as reported by B. Cronin (1991):

> *"Some aspect of library service may have public good characteristics, which means that they cannot be efficiently provided by the private sector and therefore subsidy is required (...) however this doesn't provide a rationale for the complete subsidisation of all library services."*

The consequence of this was to adversely affect library services, some being cut altogether, others being cut back, and planned expansions in services being held in abeyance. In fact, as levels of expenditure on public services continued to decline, this continued to impact on the level and scope of the library services provided. If we look at national figures

[1] *Competing for Quality: buying better public services.* (CM 1730). HMSO, 1991; *The Citizen's Charter: raising the standard.* (CM 1599). HMSO, 1991; *Review of the Public Library Service in England and Wales: for the Department of National Heritage: final report*, London: Aslib, 1995.

published in 1996 by LISU (Library and Information Statistics Unit based at Loughborough University), it can be noted that, while total expenditure per capita on public libraries continued to increase up to 1989, from 1991 it reached a plateau until 1994/5 when it started to decline substantially. This, finally, had an effect on the provision of libraries as a direct public service and thus on levels of user satisfaction. In fact, many libraries reacted to cuts in budget by reducing opening hours, sometimes in such a way as to suit the providers rather than the users of the service. From the same statistics (LISU, 1996) we learn that over a period of 10 years, between 1985 and 1995, the number of libraries open to the public for more that 45 hours per week dropped from 948 to 749,[2] with a decrease of 21%, and that those that stayed open for 60 or more hours dropped from 81 to 44, with a decrease of 46% (they were 197 in 1976!).

Financial pressure on public libraries had also been created by the level of inflation in book prices, which had outstripped general rates of inflation. The effect was an impact on libraries' ability to acquire new materials in order to meet the changing needs of the population. The number of books purchased by many library authorities declined by 4.2% over the same period and was set to fall further[3]. The whole picture was made even more dramatic by the results of an informal survey, conducted at that time, by the Library Association and covering two-thirds of the country's 108 (166 in total) public library authorities, which revealed that at least 234 librarians would lose their jobs and at least 42 branch libraries were also due to be closed (The Independent; 23.2.95). This trend confirmed the figures, given by LISU 1996, that staff members continued to decline, unlike the expenditure on staff. The number of people who worked in libraries had been reduced from a peak of 29,640 in 1984-85 to 27,281 in 1994-95, with a decrease of 8%. Of these, 6,999 were professionally trained (there were 8,076 in 1984-85) whereas 18,831 were library assistants (they were 17,793 in 1984-85). It is significant for the purpose of this research to note that while the number of professional librarians had declined by 13%, in the same period there had been an increase of 6% in library assistants with no professional qualifications.

The reduction in the number of staff, books and other materials, cuts in opening hours and the increase in the number and cost of library services were not, however, the only factors threatening the library profession, since even borrowing books, the public libraries main

[2] This trend is confirmed by the latest LISU Statistics 1999: the number of libraries open for more than 45 hours was reduced to 713.

service, had fallen from 643 million in 1985 to 535 million in 1995, a decline of 17% over 10 years, according to figures from the Public Lending Right Authority[4]. Libraries, the poll indicated, were becoming more a source of open learning, business information and information about the local community than a source of books. Whether the reason for the fall in borrowing books was the decline in the purchasing power of library funds or the diverted attention from the central purpose of public libraries by over diversifying their services for a broader user base, it was, nevertheless, worrying that this was happening when access to books and to information was becoming more and more important. (The Independent, 27.10.93).

While financial resources were declining, however, the use of libraries was increasing for information, study, cultural events, and community activities, making public libraries, the Comedia Report stated, the most popular public institutions in the country.[5] As reported by L. Greenhalgh, K. Worpole and C. Landry (1995), 58% of the population held a library card and a third of the whole population were active library users (MORI 1992, Book Marketing Limited 1992). Indeed, few services were as widespread as the public library: nearly 2,500 public libraries were open to the public for more than 30 hours a week and there were 709 mobile libraries serving rural or isolated communities. In 1995 the total number of individual points served by the library service, including hospitals, old people's homes and prisons was over 24,000, with an increase of nearly 30% over a period of 10 years. Whilst actual book issues were declining, other uses of libraries were continuing to increase, as has already been mentioned, such as information, study, events, and community activity. In addition to the lending of books, current public library activities included reference books and materials, business information, local history collections, local publishing, record, tape, CD and video lending, on-line work stations, inter-library loans, community information, open learning, reading newspapers, local archives, study areas, exhibition spaces etc. However, whereas, on the one hand the popularity of libraries and their central role in many people's lives, had made the library services *all things to all people*, at the same time tension had developed between quality and quantity due to financial constraints and reductions in budgets which had forced local library authorities to

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[3] From 1995 to 1998 the number of books acquired by public libraries declined by nearly 17% .

[4] Again this trend is confirmed by latest LISU figures, which state that in 1998 the total number of books issued by public libraries dropped to 485 million.

[5] It has been claimed that, each year, more than twenty-four million adults (aged 16 or older) use a public library once a fortnight on average (Comedia Report, *Borrowed Time?* Gloucester, Comedia, 1993).

introduce significant changes in financial management and reassessments of priorities of service.

3.2 Political pressure on public libraries

While demands for services continued to increase, the level of resources available to libraries did not match the scale of such activities. As B. Cronin (1991) pointed out, moves to improve on this general position had to be taken:

> *"The pressure to maintain existing levels of services for an increasingly demanding and discriminating public, while at the same time striving to introduce new services and facilities for minor groups (e.g. the housebound; the unemployed; the blind; the independent learner etc.) on existing budgetary levels, is creating unprecedented problems. The time is fast approaching when some form of radical reappraisal and prioritisation will be called for."*[6]

The answer of central government to the problem of incompatibility between the continuing reduction in economic resources and the growth in public expectation of public services was to return to the primacy of individual choice and the market. The policy environment in public libraries brought about irrevocable changes when the then Minister of the Arts' Green Paper (1988) called into question the validity of the 'free library service' and suggested that a distinction had to be made between the free *core* public library service and those value-added services for which the public might be charged (HMSO, 1988). The alarmed and shocked reaction of those in the profession, (The Guardian; 27.2.92) who saw in free access to information the central value of librarianship, was counteracted by some outsiders who suggested looking at pricing not as a punitive means but as a way of achieving more efficient and honest management of scarce resources. The economist S. Bailey (1989), as reported by B. Cronin (1991), stressed the fact that:

> *"A service which is free at the point of consumption will be over-utilised and consumption will increase until the benefit at the margin is zero. If all demand is met, production will be excessive. Pricing can be used to purposively direct service provision to particular groups, reorganise service and so on".*

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[6] Cronin, B., 'Disjointed incrementalism and 1990?' in Cronin B., ed., *Library orthodoxies: a decade of change*, London, Taylor Graham, 1991, 17-32. reprinted from *Aslib proceedings*, 37, (10), 1985, 421-36

Even though these suggestions were taken on board, if somewhat reluctantly, by a number of public librarians who started to charge for some 'non-core' services like genealogy services, marketing advice, education guidance, patent advice, reservation charges etc. (The Guardian; 24.2.92), the government nevertheless introduced more pressure toward privatisation through legislative action. With the Local Government and Housing Act, 1989 (Section 154) a number of amendments to the Public Libraries and Museums Act were brought in, in order to permit *charging* for some services, to enable *contracting out* of certain services and to facilitate joint ventures with the private sector.

With these actions the government argued that it wanted to ensure that services were efficient and provided *value for money* by promoting *competition*. Consequently, a number of local authorities began to identify and develop new arrangements for the provision of library services, moving ever closer to a position in which such provision would be undertaken by agencies other then the local authority itself (DNH, 1994). During the course of 1992/3 and following consultation on the Paper "*Competing for quality*", the Secretary of State for National Heritage announced before Parliament that there was, in his opinion, scope for extending the contracting out of support services (selection, acquisition, processing and cataloguing of library materials) to other services in the library field, if necessary on a compulsory basis. With this conviction he launched a major study known as 'Contracting out in public libraries', under the direct responsibility of the DNH with the aim of investigating the feasibility of managing by contract all or various parts of the library service, with market testing of one or more of them. With this proposal the government argued that it wanted to ensure that services were efficient and provided value for money by promoting competition.

Yet, other decisive steps towards deregulation of public services had to be taken by the ruling Conservative government, addressing its attention this time to the *standard of quality* of public services and claiming the need to establish a system of control of performance in order to put library services under government and public scrutiny. With regard to this purpose, the 'Citizen's Charter' was launched in 1991 with the aim of improving quality, choice and value in public services by publishing standards which the public should expect and by establishing a system of redress where standards were not met. Where *"choice and market cannot fully operate"*, the former Prime Minister John Major argued in his speech to the Adam Smith Institute on 16.6.1992, there would be *"rigorous independent inspection"*. Shortly afterwards, an audit commission was established to set

up a list of *performance indicators*[7] for public library services defining a set of standards against which services could be measured (Library Association, October 1992).

Finally, in July 1993, Peter Brook, Secretary of the Department of National Heritage, undertook a comprehensive manoeuvre aiming to redefine the very role of public libraries in society by launching a national review, the purpose of which was to assess the scope and value of public library services provided by local authorities in England and Wales. Half a century after the McColvin review[8], the Secretary of State for the Department of National Heritage gave the go ahead for a general revision of public libraries: 'The National Review of the Public Library Service'. From the results of this initiative, the government expected to derive a strategic approach for the definition and distribution of library services, in other words, a model for reference and a series of indications to which local authorities could, or rather should, refer for the definition and planning of their services and delivery to the public. The general objective of the research project was, therefore, to reach a new and more precise definition of the range of services provided by public libraries and of the standards of delivery that the public could reasonably expect. However, the fundamental tasks of the review were to address the very role of libraries in tomorrow's society, their management and control and their funding. The key issues regarded who should run public libraries; the services they should offer in the future; how they should be funded; and how they might meet the opportunities and challenges of developments in information technology. In short, the review appeared as an attempt to bring into question the legislation under which libraries operate as a statutory local authority service, the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act.

This attempt was connected to the emphasis that central government placed on the need for changes to be made in the range of services provided by public libraries and the ways in which they are delivered. A point that had already been raised by the Library and Information Services Council (1982) which pointed out that "*since they [public libraries] cannot literally provide the 'comprehensive service' which is asked of them by the Public*

[7] In December 1992 the Audit Commission published the first list of performance indicators for public library services. The areas against which performance was to be measured were as follows: 1) the number of items issued by the authority's libraries. 2) The number of public libraries: a. Open 45 hours per week or more; b. Open 30-44 hours per week; c. Open 10-29 hours per week; d. Mobile libraries. 3) The number of visits by members of the public to public libraries. 4) The amount spent per head of population on books and other materials. 5) The net expenditure per head of population on libraries. See John W. Sumsion. *Practical Performance Indicators 1992*. Loughborough, LISU, 1993

[8] McColvin, L.R. *The public library system in Great Britain: a report on its present condition with proposals for post-war reorganisation*, London: The Library Association, 1942 (McColvin's Report has been discussed in the chapter two)

Libraries and Museums Act 1964, they must in practice select the client groups to whose needs they will give priority in allocating their resources".[9] While it was recognised that 'comprehensiveness' was a major strength of the public library, the government maintained that it was not possible for a library authority to be comprehensive in the sense of providing an exhaustive service within the inevitable limits of available resources. Therefore, the emphasis had to be placed on 'choice', thus setting priorities within an efficient management system organised around a plurality of mechanisms for service delivery and which could guarantee quality by embracing value for money, customer care and a correct use of resources.

In this new context local governments found themselves in a position where they were required not simply to be responsible for the provision of a service but also for its efficient co-ordination and management and for which they were accountable to central government. This implied that public library services could no longer be considered as a 'self-evident good' whose provision is best if entrusted to local authority. On the contrary, other forms of service organisation and delivery had to be looked for by involving partnerships with the private sector as well as other sections of the authority.

3.3 External dynamics: the decline of the welfare system and the legitimation crisis

In evaluating the unbalancing effects of these forces, those long-term processes, which created the socio-cultural conditions that had made certain political discourses and actions possible, should be kept well in sight. Although financial pressure, increasing emphasis on accountability and central government reforms may have conditioned the delivery of public library services, it would be nonetheless reductive to attribute the future direction of the library profession entirely and mechanically to these pressures. It must be borne in mind that the new socio-economic situation had been brought about by the erosion of the previous welfare model of public service provision (R. Mishra, 1984; R. Morris, 1988).

A model, D. Bell (1976) maintains, that was characterised by the increasing intervention of the political realm of the state in order to compensate the positions and rewards generated by the socio-economic system. As claims to equal social and economic rights had been translated into entitlements, the welfare apparatus of the state for securing wealth for all

[9] Office of Arts and Libraries, *The future development of libraries and information services. 2. Working together within a national framework.* Library Information Series no. 12. HMSO, 1982. Quoted in Office of Arts and Libraries, *Setting objectives for public library services.* Library Information Series no. 12. HMSO, 1992. p. 4.

individuals in society finally showed evident signs of malfunction. The consequential accusations of inefficiency and ineffectiveness against welfare service policy, C. Hay (1996) points out, were enabled by the irreversible process of decline of citizens' consensus. Two factors in particular spring to mind: one is the discrepancy between the continuous heightening of citizens' expectations of better living conditions and the state's inability to respond to them adequately with public services; the second is a dissatisfaction with the quality of services sometimes provided according to paternalistic and inefficient models. The unstoppable march of society towards global equality, prophesied by Tocqueville, observes A. Minc (1987), had finally started to retreat. The *egalitarian machine* had been sentenced to reverse direction: pharaonic institutions of assistance and solidarity, complicated procedures, collective consensus had become the obsolete tools of a political system which was now unable to guarantee a balance between the society, the market and the state.

These factors, among others, determined an endemic crisis in the welfare system which, as J. Habermas (1975) points out, was, and still is, not only an economic one but also one of legitimacy. The reasons for this crisis should be looked for, according to J. Habermas, in the mechanisms by which the capitalist system itself functions. It is the very capitalist system on which the whole system rests, which has caused the decline in the models of individual motivation. Citizens' lack of interest in politics and the exacerbation of privacy with the withdrawal into the family and personal career were more evident signs of the detachment of individuals from society. The crisis of legitimation of the welfare system can only be overcome, according to J. Habermas (1984), by recovering the relationship between citizen and society. This integration is possible if the products of the communicative actions between individual subjects become fully legitimated norms and values. Communicative actions, that is social interaction between individuals, although initially driven by subjective interest would allow individuals, J. Habermas (1992) explains, to discover the means to a morally and rationally based consensus.

The solution to this problem suggested by N. Luhmann (1982, 1989), is diametrically opposed to that of J. Habermas. N. Luhmann claims that the crisis cannot be overcome by consensus legitimated by processes of social integration, but rather by increasingly abstract procedures of selection and by excluding individual subjects who are then relegated to the condition of 'environment' outside the system. Legitimation of political choices, Luhmann explains, cannot depend on citizens' consensus of the validity of principles and shared

values upon which those decisions are founded, because the system can only function by reducing complexity through the adaptation of individual aspirations to its own ends. In these circumstances, governability means applying administrative procedures that *"make individuals want what the system needs in order to perform well"*.[10] In complex societies legitimation does not mean conscious consensus, but rather a mere predisposition to accepting political decisions. In Luhmann's view, consensus is, in fact, a component of the system, which is manipulated in order to maintain and improve the performance of the system, thus legitimating its power.

Likewise for M. Foucault (1977), it is neither conscious consensus nor dominion, but rather the obedience of the 'normalised' citizen-subject that enforces and reproduces the legitimacy of political power in the modern state. To explain his idea of non-coercive power, which is in some way related to A. Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony', Foucault focuses attention on the role of those disciplines utilised for the formation of citizen-subjects such as the various forms of mass surveillance including clinics, schools and penitentiaries. In studying the relationship between state and professions, T. Johnson (1993, 1995), drawing on Foucault's theory, sees the involvement of the modern personal service professions in the process of normalisation of the individual and collective subjects as an integral part of the governing apparatus of the state. According to Johnson, the knowledge, procedures and techniques of mental health experts, doctors and social workers have been used for the very definition of what constitutes a governable aspect of social reality, thus becoming indispensable for the reproduction of legitimate power in the modern liberal-democratic state. The moral and legal obligation to consult the 'neutral' judgement of the experts is intended by Johnson as part of the mechanisms used to conform personal and collective behaviour to government programmes and policies. Within this conceptual framework, it is argued in this study that the use of expert knowledge seems, however, in the present situation, to be changing its role as part of government plans for the adaptation and 'normalisation' of individuals to system strategy. Professional rhetoric has been dispossessed from the sphere of command, as legitimacy of political actions is increasingly based on achieving maximum performance (the value of efficiency), rather than on equal social and economic rights (the value of equality). In order to further clarify this point, Johnson (1993) stresses that political actions aiming at a new regulation of professional services have not meant de-regulation of the professions, in the

[10] J.F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Mineapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984 extract printed in J.C. Alexander and S. Seidman (eds.) *Culture and Society*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 1990, p. 336.

sense that they have been left free to operate in the market, but rather that *"the state has been rolled back only to be reconstructed in another, equally pervasive form"* (1993 p. 140).

Looking at Conservative government 'deregulation' policies, from the end of seventies up to mid-nineties, changes can be explained not only as a product of neo-liberal ideology, but also by referring them to the processes of system selectivity theorised by Luhmann. The processes of governability and system selectivity, Luhmann argues, are to be exonerated from all previous ties to norms and values, thus political decisions are detached from the democratic prerequisites of legitimation through popular participation. This explains the demand that public service delivery be regulated, no longer on the basis of criteria of justice and equal access, typical of the welfare state, but on the basis of market principles and competition. The reduction in the scope and volume of assistance policies, the cutbacks in funding, the emphasis on consumer "choice" and the proposal that public services be delegated to private external agencies more in keeping with the system's control mechanisms can all be placed within this same political-theoretical framework.

Within this ideologically changed environment the traditional notion of 'universal provision' in public services no longer seemed practicable in the political and economic circumstances of the time, nor did it seem able to gather consensus for social policies from a population which had changed its living conditions and its needs. The assumption that the provision of public services through public taxation is the best way to meet public requirements was being increasingly questioned and challenged. At the same time, greater emphasis was being gradually put on allowing the market to determine the allocation of public wealth. The relationship between what is appropriately public and held by public institutions and what is private, and held according to different principles, underwent fundamental changes (Audit Commission, 1988; Comedia Report; 1993).

According to J.F. Lyotard (1984), neither Habermas' concept of conscious consensus nor Luhmann's idea of manipulated consensus, can be used as legitimating criteria in the post-modern condition, as both are mere variations of the apparatus of legitimation typical of the modern age: *"the speculative narrative and the narrative of emancipation"*. In order to understand the condition of crisis in which advanced societies now find themselves, it is necessary, Lyotard claims, to turn our attention to *"The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism"* (D. Bell, 1976) which links these phenomena to the fracture between culture and society. The *"post-modern condition"*, according to Lyotard, is characterised by the

crisis in the legitimating mechanisms, which in the modern age preside in the socialisation of knowledge. Scientific knowledge has always been legitimated through another type of knowledge, *narrative knowledge*, which does not need legitimating insofar as it is based on social interaction and weaves the fabric of our experience. Scientific knowledge in the modern age, Lyotard argues, has established itself through two legitimating *grand narratives*: the 'narrative of enlightenment' according to which knowledge is legitimate if it promotes emancipation and the 'narrative of idealism' according to which knowledge is legitimate insofar as it is as an end in itself.

With the advent of post-modernism the idea of knowledge as *use-value* and thus as a means of legitimating the modern project of socialisation of scientific knowledge is in evident decline. The concept of knowledge as *exchange-value*, which can be legitimated only according to performativity, or usefulness, emerges in its place. Thus, both Habermas' project of human emancipation and Luhmann's project of speculation lose ground, indeed Lyotard claims *"consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value"* (Lyotard 1984).[11] The cause of this decline of narrative can be identified both in the flourish of new technologies and techniques which characterised the post-war period, shifting the focus onto the means rather than the ends of action, and in the dwindling of the welfare state with the redeployment of advanced liberal capitalism, emphasising individual gratification through consumerism in place of the socialist alternative. With the rise of the computerised society, Lyotard sees a nullification of all criteria for legitimation which precede or go beyond mere performativity and technical power, thus legitimation is now based solely on *paralogy*, an 'anti-rational' way of reasoning.

Post-modernity states the end of the dominance of an extreme belief in scientific rationality and progress, and the replacement of the unidirectional research for truth with an emphasis on the multiplicity of free-floating ideas and plurality of view points. The rational or technical-scientific type of knowledge envisaged by D. Bell (1974) for the post-industrial society seems to be inadequate to cope with a reality, which is ambiguous in nature and ever mutable. The new type of knowledge includes other components such as creativity, problem solving, the ability to understand local contexts, communication and interpretation of problems deriving from interaction between human beings and computer machines. It can be seen as a sum of knowledge, which finds its production, application and reproduction in this interaction. As a solution, Lyotard suggests a type of *information*

[11] Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*. Op.cit. p..340

science equality, detached from the notion of consensus as metanarrative, but rather as dissension, that is a momentary localised adherence to the rules of the game of knowledge. The zero-sum of this equality is, in practical terms, simply free access to computers and databases.

The decline of the welfare system, the separation between citizen and society, the triumph of consumerism, the disappearance of collective movements, the incapacity of the traditional means of legitimation to validate political actions have all left the field wide open to the neo-liberal ideology where individualism, performance, efficiency, competition and market laws are a premium. In this changed political climate, it is evident that public libraries and librarians find themselves in an extremely delicate position where, on the one hand, they are required to establish an efficient and individualised market-type relationship with library users and, on the other hand, they have to guarantee access for all to a type of knowledge, whose legitimation, which Lyotard (1984) explains, depends exclusively on its exchange-value, risks becoming a mere commodity and nothing more. It is, therefore, evident that the pressures that libraries, like other public services, have to face, assume implications not only at structural and administrative, but also normative and institutional levels. New socio-political and economic circumstances might demand not only a general restructuring of the organisation of the delivery of services, but also a redefinition of the very role of public libraries in society.

3.4 Internal dynamics: digital information and post-bureaucratic organisation

Stress from economic restrictions, the decline of the welfare state and its legitimate means of consensus, and the changing relationship between central and local government were exacerbated by further internal pressures due to the widespread introduction of information technology and the adoption of new forms of organisation within the library profession. Libraries were now facing the challenge caused by the advent of digital information available through networked computer systems, which demanded far reaching internal reorganisation in order to manage the transition from the traditional to the electronic library. Computerisation seemed to have two major effects: it complicated the organisational structure of the library by bringing in new competitive occupational groups and it dramatically altered the nature of the labour process. As a result libraries were in some cases forced to make do with fewer professionals and/or distribute previously acknowledged professional tasks among non-professional or clerical staff. As a consequence, certain professional grades risked being abolished and the value of

professional qualifications was not always acknowledged. However, information technology should not be seen as a mere threat to professional control, through loss of income and status for qualified librarians, if librarians demonstrate they are able to adapt to new organisational patterns of work structure. Routine work might, in fact, be delegated to support staff or para-professionals with vocational and computer skills while librarians gain supervisory functions since such tasks require a broader view of the labour process.

However, changes in organisational structures also represented a threat in that they unbalanced the previously established situation in the librarian's worksetting. Competitive pressure which had already characterised the manufacturing sector and then affected to a similar extent the public sector, forced organisations to adopt new managerial systems and more flexible structures aiming at speedier responses to market-type demands. In the educational sector, for example, secondary schools were asked by central government to gradually leave Local Education Authority control, by either becoming locally managed schools or totally independent companies, if they decided to opt out (J. McGinty and J. Fish, 1993).[12] Similar initiatives towards privatisation were taken in the National Health Service where General Practitioners constituted themselves as budget centres (R. Whittington et al., 1994) and in social work where the creation of a quasi-market was accompanied by organisational restructuring and alterations in job procedures (T. Butcher, 1995).

As the traditional hierarchical structure seemed no longer suitable to respond to the challenges of a very rapidly changing environment, a more effective post-bureaucratic organisational structure, *adhocracy*, was proposed, which had a network type structure aimed at facilitating the creation, communication and flow of new ideas. The 'adhocracy', as described by J. Watkins, et al. (1992, p.30) is based on networked *teams of experts* that are formed to work out a solution to specific problems and are then dismantled when the task is completed. Within this flexible structure, jobs are continually redefined through interactive self-management. It is the traditional notion of the job itself that is disappearing, W. Bridges (1995) argues, the one, which delineates a well-defined area of responsibility, formalised in one's job description and indicates the employee's place in the organisation. In short, changes in organisational structure seem to be characterised by four key developments, which have a direct impact on occupational patterns:

[12] The Guardian, 19.02.1992, "Pattern promises the last White Paper on schools will serve 25 years"; J. McGinty, J. Fish. *Further Education in the Market Place*, London: Routledge, 1993

- decision making is devolved and the number of layers of command are reduced;
- parallel organisations such as profit-units and project teams are set up;
- service delivery contracts are arranged between departments of the same organisation;
- services, once provided by an internal pseudo-market, are outsourced or sub-contracted.

The spread of the new organisational approach marked the rise in public library service of the so called 'Team librarianship' which meant the adoption of flexible structures where librarians had to work in units functional to the overall system and to problem-solving tasks. Whereas the introduction of teams seemed to provide a more structural approach to better respond to new user needs and to changes in the communities by 'creatively' rationalising and maximising librarians' professional work. However it was generally counterproductive in that, for example, it made such teams being relatively powerless when faced with unforeseen external political change. As R. Barlow (1989) so aptly described in his research, many chief librarians who had successfully implemented team structures, found themselves caught up in the middle of a harsh conflicting relationship between the political management structure and the professional management structure, when central government imposed radical changes in the management practice of local authorities. In fact, the emphasis placed by central government on good management practice and the need to demonstrate that resources have been spent wisely and in the interest of the 'customer' led to accountability and 'value for money' becoming the guiding principles for local government. Consequently, many local authorities restructured their departments into broad-based directorates around recreation, leisure, cultural and community services. Thus, the difficult relationship between professional librarians and the management team structure, although based on professional skills, was exacerbated by the shift in power and control over library services toward a purely based management structure, which had wider inter-departmental responsibilities. In this new environment, professional librarians were not only required to function in a purely managerial capacity, but they also had to submit to the power and control of the political management. These developments, in some cases, led to a situation where individual librarians, like many other organisational professionals, were required to possess 'marketable skills' which could be 'measured', 'costed', 'bought' and 'sold' within the wider organisation, which meant that

professional expertise would no longer be seen as a guarantee of a job for life. Therefore, future occupational standing was likely to depend upon the perceived relevance of individual professional librarians' contributions to, rather than their position in, the organisation. In certain cases, organisational change in public libraries had, indeed, determined a shift away from *trust* in professional librarians, because they are professionally qualified, to *accountability* and to some kind of monitoring of their effectiveness.

3.5 The changing nature of the organisational professions

In the flattened hierarchies of the post-bureaucratic organisation, occupational roles seemed to change in response to competitive pressure and the traditional distinction between occupational groups (e.g. managers, professionals, technical staff) have become blurred. The traditional image of the solo practitioner, specialised in one field of expertise and responsible mainly for his/her individual contribution to the organisation, no longer seemed suited to the new situation. Likewise, it no longer sufficed that the quality of professional practice and concern towards the customer were guaranteed by professional status and adherence to a self-regulated code of conduct. Professionals were now regarded as people who had to demonstrate their value to the organisation in each successive situation in which they found themselves and where rewards were based on measures of performance, levels of contribution and attainment of objectives. They were expected to spend more time working in management teams where they shared responsibilities for business decisions, quality management and project management and acted in an advisory role. For this reason, professionals were required to develop an approach to their work and a way of managing their own careers that was more like that of an external supplier than that of a traditional employee. They also had to expect that they would have to move, much more frequently than in the past, from one project unit to another within the same organisation but without a clear job description.

This trend is the sign of a split in the traditional notion of professionalism, which, G. Hanlon (1994, 1998) maintains, could be replaced by a new commercialised version, where success will be guaranteed to professionals, not by rapidly downgrading technical functions, but rather by managerial and entrepreneurial skills. Other authors (C. Pollit, 1990; N. Flynn, 1993; D. Farnham and S. Horton, 1993) have labelled this trend, common to much of the public sector, 'new managerialism', a way of delivering public services by responding to the three imperatives or 'three Es': economy, efficiency and effectiveness as

the only way to ensure value for money and eliminate waste. The move from the traditional notion of professionalism, S. Brint (1994) maintains, toward a rival idea of professionalism has existed since the early nineties but has become dominant in our time. This rival form of professionalism, which Brint names 'expert professionalism' or 'marketable expertise', in contrast to 'social trustee professionalism' is disconnected from the principle of public good and accepts the idea of pursuing trade for a profit. T. Johnson (1993, 1995) describes this trend as a process of deprofessionalisation where professions increasingly lose authority over clients and control over work, knowledge and training to state agencies and corporate organisations each, in turn, influenced by consumerism and market pressures.

3.5.1 The changing image of professionalism

Technological and organisational changes were not the only factors, which threatened to destabilise the status of professionals in society. The growth in social awareness and the general increase in education levels, together with ever more frequent cases of professional negligence resulted in an increasingly insistent demand for reform of the rules, norms and structures which govern the professionals, for a review of their professional privileges. It is assumed that the state grants the professions forms of protection and the privilege of self-regulation in exchange for the guarantee that professional bodies take on the role of controlling their members' standards of competence and professional conduct in order to ensure that the interests of the public and of the client are put before personal interest. What was being brought into discussion was that the often monopolistic powers, which come with this, serve not only to solve the conflict between public and private interest, but even more so to establish forms of protection and control of the market thus restricting competition, raising fees and lowering the quality of the services offered. [13]

Those who maintained, on the one hand, that the removal of these forms of protection would lead to excessive pressure of competition and would consequently erode the professional's traditional sense of responsibility and thus the quality of service, were contrasted, on the other hand, by those who, from a diametrically opposed perspective, affirmed that it is precisely the very restriction of competition that leads to a lowering of the standards of quality and to forms of protection for those less competent and less scrupulous. The latter, quoting, in support of their views, the numerous cases of

[13] Many critics of professionalism have argued that professionals' claim to representing public interest has in many cases led to abuse of power for personal interest. See for example: R. Collins, The *Credential Society*. New York, Academic press, 1979.

professional negligence and fraud that had reached the courts, demanded with some insistence that there be a review of the rules by which professional organisations control and regulate the activities of their members[14]. Professional bodies, it was argued, must aim less at protecting the professional and more at protecting the consumer and client.

Deregulation of professional activities finally succeeded in capturing government attention and various legislative changes were suggested with the aim of creating 'level playing fields' by removing restrictive practices in the belief that the pursuit of public interest is not at all incompatible with the subjugation of professional activities to the law of the market and competition. H. Perkins observes that, although the government's initiative was directed against the power and privileges of the organised professions of all kinds, *"the state-supported professions, including the Civil service, the university academics, school teachers and social workers, came in for particular attack, since they came to be seen as unproductive occupations parasitic upon the wealth-creating private sector"* (H. Perkin, 1989 p. 473). The Conservative government was convinced that these occupations were inefficient and not fully competent as long as they continued to operate protected by the state and outside market forces. To change this situation, government initiative took the form of a series of legislative acts, which aimed at reorganising and re-regulating professional services by introducing external control. The initiatives of the Lord Chancellor concerning professional services in education, health, justice, broadcasting and advertising, provoked obvious resistance on the part of the professionals for whom they represented the threat of erosion of their own exclusive powers and privileges. In the legal field, for example, although, on the one hand, the monopoly over conveyancing was dismantled and the rules governing the right of audience for non-barristers were reformed with the introduction of the Legal Services Act 1990, on the other hand, the two professional categories maintained control over admission, professional training and the code of ethics of the legal profession (Sherr, 1994 pp.3-12). The key developments of these reforms had been to make professionals accountable and to enforce financial and managerial discipline upon them. The ability to resist government reforms appeared more problematic for those professions, which operated mainly in the public sector. This was the case for the Association of University Teachers, forced to submit to the introduction of a system of assessment of professional performance and of forms of interference in professional choices.

[14] H. Lacey. "Call Yourself a Professional?" *Independent on Saturday*, 05.12.1993, p. 23.

British professionals had to face not only a domestic tendency towards the deregulation of their services determined by government reforms and by criticism of public opinion nation-wide, but they also had to face pressure from the European Community and from the WTO (World Trade Organisation). Two aspects are of particular significance for the professions at a European level: the free establishment and circulation of professionals within any of the member states and European legislation governing competition. The initial aim of the European Community was to eliminate all obstacles to the right of autonomous workers, including therefore professionals, to circulate and establish themselves freely within member states. In order to facilitate access to the professions in member states, the European Community brought out two important directives, CEE 89/48 and CEE 92/51, delineating a general system for the reciprocal recognition of professional qualifications. Alongside the principle of freedom of circulation, European community legislation governing competition assumes particular significance, this is to be applied when agreements and abuse of dominant positions may be detrimental to commerce between member states. Art. 86 of the Treaty states expressly that the abusive exploitation by one or more companies who occupy a dominant position on the common market is incompatible with the common market and is prohibited insofar as this may be prejudicial to member states. Once professional activities are assimilated to enterprises, this means that the professions are likewise subject to laws governing competition and therefore they cannot benefit from dominant positions or monopolies and have to be subject to external control.

3.6 Conclusion

All these external factors primed by financial pressure and political change, together with the problems that the profession of librarianship faced internally as a consequence of the widespread introduction of information technology and new forms of division of labour where professional judgement seemed to be losing ground to administrative or bureaucratic orientations, suggested that the professional status of librarians so far established had been seriously brought into question. In the new organisation of public service provision, technical matters, normally left to the work activities of recognised professionals, became issues of government policy and administrative efficiency through the introduction of external audits and the constitution of profit units. As a consequence, those areas of decision-making, which previously belonged to the judgement of professional librarians and manager librarians, also became the realm of administrative market-driven criteria.

Furthermore, the changes seemed to have brought into question the very function of occupational specialisations and how they are organised and regulated, to the extent that the notion of professionalism which had long been considered a guarantee of competence, quality of service and ethical conduct, and this had been the case in libraries too, was no longer able to cope with a decidedly competitive reality dominated by economic concerns. Both government plans and public opinion appeared to manifest an increasing conviction that, although professional services were undoubtedly of considerable public interest, this did not justify their remaining largely independent of the dynamics of the market and competition in the context of which they are delivered, whether they belong to the private or public sector.

The traditional image of a profession as a highly respected, specialised, independent and privileged occupation, seemed to be losing power and credibility in society but what was more striking, as Johnson points out (1995, p. 7), was although professional ideology had resisted for so long to the changing realities of the division of labour, it then underwent fundamental change under the pressure of deregulation policies. What had hitherto seemed impossible, such as the rise of large-scale, technological organisations where the majority of professionals now practised, had become feasible thanks to government policy changes. In the neo-liberal state many occupations were subject to the redefinition of their own boundaries one to another, constituting new arrangements in response to external pressure, and to the redefinition of their boundaries with the state, establishing new rules and values, in response to political pressure.

How expertise was institutionalised in society seemed to be undergoing fundamental change. In analysing what has been happening to professional librarians working in public institutions, it is suggested that the internal and external forces described in this chapter may have affected the way in which librarianship is institutionalised in society as professional expertise. What seemed to be undergoing a fundamental change was the set of rules for handling the skills to accomplish professional tasks, the set of roles the librarians play in the library and the arrangements of those norms and roles in the work setting for the delivery of library services. Government actions and discourses which characterised the political debate on public services in Britain during the eighties and the first half of the nineties, such as the role of local government in managing public services, the 'fee or free' debate, the definition of public as opposed to private, the validity of universal provision, the deregulation of professional services, and the emphasis on accountability, competition,

consumer choice and market values represented factors influencing developments in public librarianship. The effects of these very forces, that were stressed by the Library Association (1992) and by alarmed professional librarians who saw their power to control library work gradually eroded, became the focus of analysis in this research and can be grouped into the following areas of investigation:

- the organisational context in which librarians operate and where the boundaries between the profession of librarianship and political management are negotiated. The extent to which public librarians today might be able to secure their position and maintain their authority in a political environment increasingly conditioned by economic concerns, is examined through the analysis of structural changes in the case study object of investigation;

- the working context in which librarians operate and where professional standards, roles and rules are arranged for the delivery of library services. The analysis of librarians' tasks and functions within the organisational structure of the library and of their group cohesion and attitude to work is used to describe changes in the division of labour and to evaluate professional librarians' ability to negotiate the implementation of new working strategies and procedures;

- the institutional context in which librarians operate and where the external judgement and perception of the validity of the librarian's profession is a means to achieve recognition of the librarian as legitimate provider of a valued service. Perceptions of librarians' image, work and competence on the part of decision-makers and influencers, are examined in order to evaluate the effectiveness of external judgement in public librarianship as a means to negotiate margins of control and autonomy over work;

Many are the questions embraced by the research project in gathering information relevant to the three areas of investigation and these concerned librarians' ability to respond to pressure for change with regard to their personal and professional characteristics, their professional competence and knowledge and their role and functions in society. It is of particular interest that a firmer understanding be achieved as to whether external forces affected librarians' professional authority in the worksetting and in their relations with local administrators and politicians, their systems of delivering an efficient library service, the skills and knowledge needed to carry out those services, their cohesion as an

occupational group and the way the professional body has responded to government pressure. The next chapter moves on to explain the methods and techniques used for collecting data related to these three areas.

PART 2
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Chapter 4

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR ANALYSING THE PROFESSION OF PUBLIC LIBRARIANSHIP

4.0 Introduction

In the course of the previous chapters, we have looked at the development of the profession of public librarian and examined the processes that led this profession to take on the institutional form it has today. This analysis conducted on both a historical and a theoretical dimension, has made it possible to define, with greater accuracy, the nature of the profession of librarian, its structural and normative foundations, its status and social prestige. Having clarified the structural and normative elements on which the profession of librarian is founded and having examined the processes, which determined these foundations, it is now possible to analyse the impact of the changes, highlighted in the previous chapter, on public librarians' professional status and practice. The profession of librarian has been facing situations of change brought about by technological innovation and organisational transformation for over 30 years and in fact this profession is amongst those, which have been most subject to change. However, the political nature of these most recent changes, accompanied by a strong attack upon the very concept of professionalism itself, one of the longest standing social-economic constructs in western society, raised the question as to whether, for librarianship, the changes undergone meant no longer merely adapting to new circumstances, but actually giving up the main foundations of the profession itself. Indeed, certain leading experts in the field feared that librarians risked losing their professional identity altogether. The aim of the research, as mentioned in the introduction, was not, however, to make hypotheses about future scenarios, nor to endeavour to provide a cause-effect type explanation of the phenomenon observed, but rather to describe and understand how the new situation affected the work and status of public librarians. This general purpose consequently orientated the research design and the methods chosen for data collection and analysis.

Considering the complexity of the arguments dealt with, before proceeding with the presentation of the methods and techniques adopted for the collection of data, it is perhaps opportune to focus attention on the main concepts and theoretical tools discussed during the historical-theoretical literature review in order to formulate a theoretical framework which can be of support and clarification for data analysis. In the field of sociology of the professions, the definition of a theoretical model represents, however, a controversial point, which has rarely been successful in drawing together a convergency of ideas and views. This made the choice of methodology extremely problematic (M. Saks, 1995, 33-34). The absence of a commonly acceptable theoretical framework for the study of the professions, E. Freidson (1996) pointed out at a recent international conference, is the main obstacle to the development of specialised sociological knowledge that *"will employ formal concepts as heuristic tools to fix our knowledge in a form that can be grasped and manipulated"* (1996, p.2). Freidson appeals to the opportuneness of creating a theoretical model, which overcomes the limits of pure historicism and empiricism and finds its basis in an "*abstract theoretical rationale*". Although it is considered scientifically unfruitful to disembody theoretical concepts from the socio-historical context in which they are developed, as some attempt has been made to demonstrate in the previous chapters, it is, nevertheless, generally agreed that fundamental topics and theoretical issues can be used as operational concepts to analyse the position of public librarianship in the particular spatial and temporal context of the investigation.

4.1 Heuristic devices for the analysis of public librarians' professional status

It is, therefore, necessary to devise an adequate theoretical framework to empirically examine the extent to which the profession of public librarianship was able to maintain and defend the position it had established over time in the division of labour and in society. A theoretical concept to which all recent studies of occupations seem to universally refer is the assumption that the ability of a profession to achieve or maintain recognised status and prestige stands on its capacity to gain a high degree of control over work. Considering that in most cases experts exercise their work within large bureaucratic organisations, and this is certainly the case for public librarianship, professions have to combine their power to control work standards with other forms of powers: that of other occupations, that of managers and that of clients. Within the bureaucratic organisation where control over work is the product of a combination of different forms of authority, the more a profession succeeds in making institutionalised forms of occupational control prevail, the greater is its

chance of ensuring recognised authority for individual professionals in the worksetting and of gaining social esteem and economic rewards for the occupational group in society. The first important theoretical assumption, which can be used as a heuristic tool, is that librarians' success in maintaining an established position and prestige depends on their ability to negotiate control over the division of labour.

What makes occupational authority prevail over others forms of authority is the profession's capacity to enforce occupational standards in the worksetting. This is an important issue because it means that the division of labour, task assignment, role definition, entry qualifications and the very professional career patterns within the workplace are modelled on the basis of the policies and guidelines developed by professional associations and schools, rather than, for example, on the basis of purely bureaucratic and administrative orientations. Within this situation, individual professionals are safe from alternative and competitive occupations, they follow recruitment procedures in conformity with their qualifications, are placed in a career structure based on professional principles, take on tasks and roles consistent with their professional education and training and are accountable to professional standards of competence and behaviour. The second important theoretical assumption, another useful heuristic device, is that the more occupational standards and procedures developed by professional associations and information and library schools continue to govern work arrangements in the library, the more public librarians will be able to gain the upper hand over other forms of control and authority in the division of labour.

Making forms of occupational control prevail over the division of labour is linked to the power of that occupation to organise and control the market of its services. Control over the professional market is achieved by gaining 'labour market shelter', a position from which a profession can claim that only those in possession of certain credentials indicated by the profession itself can access and exercise given professional activities. Therefore, a secure position in the market is achieved through the organisation and control of professional training and qualifications from which forms of credentials derive. For the most established professions, a sheltered position is based on legal recognition of professional credentials, that is on a direct form of protection by the state that ensures, for those professions, a monopoly over learning structures and professional practice. Unlike for the less established professions, like librarianship which lack direct protection by the state, a secure position in the market, when achieved, is based on social recognition of

professional credentials, that is on an indirect form of regulation by the state through the concession of the Royal Charter to the professional association. The state enables the Library Association to award Charter status to those of its members who fulfil the requirements set out by the association itself, thus giving a potent mark of favour to the qualifications generated by the association or by accredited university courses. Whatever the form of state regulation, the collective efforts of every profession, aimed at gaining control over the division of labour and the market, are directed toward the creation and control of a specific body of knowledge, because this assures, on the one hand, the achievement of authority in the worksetting for individual professionals and, on the other hand, official recognition and social prestige for the profession as a whole. The third important theoretical assumption, which can be used in the analysis of concrete cases, is that the possession and control of an externally sanctioned body of knowledge and skills gives librarians a measure of countervailing power vis-à-vis the bureaucratic hierarchy of the organisation in which they are employed and cultural authority in the market of their services.

The creation and control of a body of professional knowledge (Sarfatti Larson, 1977) is realised through the organisation and control of the process of formal education, qualification and training and assumes a central role in the 'professional project', both in pursuing market control and status recognition. According to E. Freidson (1986, 1996) an occupationally controlled labour market based on training credentials is only possible through the protection of the state; consequently the establishment of a secure sheltered position in the market of professional services depends ultimately on the economic orientation and political organisation of the state. Within a socio-economic environment, regulated by a less interventionist state, professions can autonomously define their occupational task area, directly negotiating the division of labour with other occupations, can create forms of protection in the labour market and establish training programmes which generate forms of credentialing controlled by the professions themselves. However, for public library professionals, who lack state licensed authority, their power to control the division of labour and to achieve a stable market niche derives from non-librarians', as well as librarians', adoption of work arrangements and technical procedures developed by professional associations and educational institutions and from library administrators and authorities' acceptance of librarians externally recognised qualifications and training. The fourth important concept particularly useful for the analysis of public librarianship, is that librarians' negotiated control of the division of labour and their position in the market rest

on a form of occupational authority derived from collective orientation towards professional association policies and guidelines regarding initial education, qualifications and approved training.

In summary, four main theoretical issues have been delineated in order to confront them with the impact of political and economic forces:

- the prevailing degree of librarians' occupational authority in establishing control over the division of labour in public library service provision;
- the enforcement of occupational standards, as opposed to bureaucratic ones, in the efficient management of public library service provision;
- the legitimated use of librarians' specialised body of knowledge and skills, as opposed to other countervailing bodies of knowledge, in the definition of library service policy and functions;
- the legitimation of librarians' specific qualifications and training, as opposed to other forms of professional training, in determining career advancement and recruitment.

Before describing the research methods selected to evaluate the impact of change on the sample chosen, it is useful to recall the main characteristics of change underlined in the third chapter in order to link them operationally to the theoretical concepts identified for the analysis of collected data of the research.

4.2 Characteristics of changes affecting public librarianship

From their inception, public librarians learnt to cohabit with change. Technological, social, cultural and political changes gradually moulded their profession into the form know today. Of all the changes, those that have determined profound shifts from previously established situations have always been political ones; political change, more so than any technological change, has brought not just new structural but also new normative foundations to the profession of librarian. Indeed the very rise of public librarianship was due to a wider project of political reforms of which public libraries were part. Throughout librarians' history the effective impact of political changes have been such as to modify norms and values as well as occupational skills and knowledge of public librarians. This process culminated in the incorporation of the library profession itself into the state's project for the organisation and implementation of social policies during the welfare years. Cultural, social, and

technological changes alone have never seemed able to accomplish such significant and profound transformations in the library profession, unless paralleled by political forces. Even computerisation and bureaucratisation of public librarianship, that seemed able to open the profession to the risk of deprofessionalisation and fragmentation, had slowly been assimilated into librarians' body of knowledge and skills through a process of adaptation which was still underway. Professional content and image have undoubtedly changed enormously thanks to the introduction of computer systems and management techniques in the library, yet professional identity survived by incorporating new knowledge and practices within the same jurisdictional domain of the library and information professionals, although with different specialisations and internal stratification. What made the changes introduced by political actions distinctive from all the others that librarians had faced, was that these changes did not simply require that the profession to adapt its cognitive, normative and structural tools to a new situation, but rather it needed to get rid of those tools and become a non-specialisation, a mere sum of tradable skills and aptitudes that could be brought out or put away according to the needs of a market-led new management philosophy. In the following paragraphs attention is focused on the relevant properties and characteristics of political and economic changes in order to evaluate their impact on professional librarians' occupational conditions.

4.2.1 Income generation in public librarianship

In considering the traditional relationship between the private and the public sector in the field of information, the first as supplier of books, journals and library equipment and the latter as provider of catalogues, directories and on-line databases, the government raised the matter that time had become ripe for a shift from a phase of simple collaboration to one of more fruitful interaction and economic joint venture. The increasing financial constraints, cutbacks in purchasing power and need to reduce costs could only be solved, central government continued, by limiting the dependence on public funding and by acquiring greater awareness of service provision costs and by autonomously generating income to support public library activities. To this purpose, public librarians were required to become attuned to economic values and gain an entrepreneurial culture in order to run services cost-effectively and to better exploit library and information resources. The government indicated a wide range of potential joint ventures between libraries and the private sector, which had

resulted from intense research activity by specialised advisory bodies such as PUPLIS, LISC and BLRDD, during the second part of the eighties.[1]

Public libraries could decide either to establish partnerships with private enterprises or to act as commercial contractors for other bodies. Publishing, organising local databases and developing business information services were regarded as areas for possible exploitation by setting up joint ventures with private partners or even by contracting them out. Whereas renting space to bookshops, hosting specialised information points, exploiting property assets and attracting sponsorships were indicated as ways for developing independent businesslike activities, what was considered important by central government was that libraries should become an attractive market for the private sector and that libraries should equip themselves in order to join the information industry and participate in its development. Public libraries own a vast amount of resources of data and information, which, the government argued, should be better exploited with the potential contribution of the private sector.

Concerns about safeguarding the long-standing principle of free and equitable access to information were solved by central government's bold statement that the potential risk in the establishment of a monopoly of information was to be rewarded by the benefit of making available information, which was not previously available. Private/public interaction in managing library service delivery would allow further and more efficient exploitation of information resources, by providing specialised services for particular user groups such as industry, retailers, property developers and small businesses which demanded business information and thus were prepared to pay. Therefore a distinction had to be made between basic social services, which had to continue to be provided at public expense, and those added-value services, which could be provided on a fee-basis. Finally, political pressure brought about legislative changes in the Public Library and Museums Act 1964, which as amended by Section 154 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, now specified that the basic service should be free of charge and set out the terms and conditions under which library authorities had the discretion to levy charges for some of their services.

It is evident that this trend towards privatisation in public library service demanded changes in the organisation and practice of library work. It was necessary for many authorities to

[1] The debate on public/private sector partnership and on income generation in public libraries spread throughout all conservative government legislature and became increasingly intense towards the end of the eighties. A comprehensive bibliography on this topic is contained in: *Joint Enterprise Roles and Relationships of the Public and Private Sectors in the Provision of Library and Information Services*. Library Information Series No. 16. London: HMSO, 1987.

appoint and replace staff and to establish new responsibilities within the worksetting. What was now required of library personnel was that they should equip themselves with businesslike attitudes and commercial opportunism and the ability to relate to private partners, from whom they could learn a series of new skills like fund raising, generating income, attracting sponsors and managing contracts. Librarians' education and training was also due to change, not only by including commercial and entrepreneurial skills in library school courses, but also by emphasising the idea of learning from experience and contact within the organisation itself. The link between the profession and higher education might then be underestimated by the new entrepreneurial culture within public librarianship, thus weakening one of the main institutions of professionalism. A market-led approach is fundamental, a working party report (1987) stated, to better appreciate the needs and demands of consumers therefore *"services should be geared to satisfying an existing or latent demand, rather than providing what is perceived by librarians as being for users."*[2]

4.2.2 Competition in public librarianship

Librarians faced the major impact of economic and political pressure when central government proposed to extend compulsory competitive tendering to white-collar areas of work in local government, including support services in public libraries. In the period between 1993-1994, the Secretary of National Heritage proposed to examine the scope for contracting out the delivery of all, or some, elements of the public library service, with the intention of setting out a range of competitive options for library authorities to choose between internal or external service providers. The aim of central government was to discover what would be the differences between the way in which the current public library service was being delivered and the way it might be delivered by those local authorities which were required, on a compulsory or voluntary basis, to test the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery through exposure to competition from alternative providers. In this way the government intended to re-define existing service management and working practices by contracting-out, in whole or in part, public library service delivery to potential contractors of the private sector.

The market for library and information service had been, in reality, segmented into two potential contractors: book suppliers, which could take on support services, and facilities

[2] *Joint Enterprise Roles and Relationships of the Public and Private Sectors in the Provision of Library and Information Services: Report of Library and Information Services Council and British Library Research and Development Working Party.* Library Information series No. 16, London: HMSO, 1987. p. 17.

management suppliers, which could take responsibility for all aspects of operational management. For central government, all activities undertaken within public libraries could be contracted out, from lending services to reference services, from the staging of events and exhibitions to access to study and meeting facilities. In fact, one of the library authorities, which took part in the project, decided for management by contract of the whole library service, operating through business units; another opted for the contracting out of cultural services in the library and a third for the establishment of a trust for the whole service. Various were the contracting options indicated by the government to give rise to opportunities for a commercially based service delivery: compulsory or voluntary tendering; management or employee buy-out; sale of existing services; setting up local authority companies; hosting; setting up trusts; partnerships; franchising and internal business units. The whole manoeuvre was aimed at moving the delivery of public library services into the market by either selling all, or part, of them to external agencies or organising them in a businesslike way in order to allow comparison and competition with private suppliers. Despite the government thrust towards market testing services, R. Williams (1994) argued, to those who had experimented it, contracting out had resulted difficult to put it into practice. The preparation process took an enormous amount of effort and time, at a professional and legal level, to create watertight specifications; high costs were involved for consultants and solicitors fees and, in many cases, the final result was uninteresting for potential bidders.[3]

There can be little doubt that contracting out options, once adopted by a library authority, had a major impact on the organisation of public library service provision at the workforce and structural level. This research was not, however, interested in evaluating whether the contracting out of public library service was preferable, in terms of cost-effectiveness, to the traditional ways in which services were delivered, rather its intention was to understand whether the implementation of contracting out options would have a destabilising effect on the library profession. To this purpose, research work focused its attention on the potential effects of the following issues involved in the contracting out process. Firstly, increasing attention to a whole range of service delivery mechanisms which allowed mixed or contracted out options; secondly increasing use of formal mechanisms for delivering and procuring services, through the use of specifications and service standards agreements; and thirdly, and perhaps more significantly, the increasing separation of responsibilities between

[3] R. Williams. "A Local Government Precursor: the attempted tendering out of Westminster Libraries' stock services", in L. Foreman (ed.). *Market Testing and After: effective library and information services in the '90s.* London: HMSO, 1994 pp.15-22.

those responsible for policy formulation and monitoring achievements and those responsible for actual service delivery at the operational level.

It appeared that one consequence of these changes was that library authorities had, voluntarily or on a compulsory basis, to choose between two opposing management "philosophies" in the delivery of an efficient public library service: one based on promoting internal and external competition and the other based on co-operation and development of agreed occupational standards and procedures. In the first case bureaucratic modes of control in the library worksetting can be traced to orientations and strategies articulated by economic and political decisions; in the second case library administration conforms to practice, management techniques and, where appropriate, standardisation recommended by professional bodies and schools. Consequently the balance between occupational authority and management authority in controlling work arrangements in public service delivery could shift in favour of the latter. According to Reeves' model (1980) the more service delivery is based on bureaucratic and administrative criteria, the more individual positions are organised by management, which, in the absence of occupational authority, can reconstitute or eliminate individual positions at will. With no occupational authority in the workplace these positions are called jobs rather then occupations, therefore library professionals could find themselves in a position where they would have to compete for their own job.

Moreover, the creation of business units, the client/contractor split and the establishment of an in-house market would probably alter the actual division of labour, emphasising the separation between library managers, information and library professionals, and support and technical staff. Professional unity in public libraries had so far been laboriously maintained through a process of adaptation to bureaucratisation and computerisation of librarianship by incorporating management and information theories into library and information science, as well as through standardisation of parts of professional knowledge by passing on routinised portions of librarians' tasks to para-professionals. For many years the library profession had committed itself to experimenting new management structures and methods of service delivery, management techniques and theories, once borrowed from other cultural domains, and finally integrated into Library and Information Studies curricula. Also forms of partnerships with the private sector had already been experimented by many public libraries, in fact much of book and other non-book materials acquisition had often been contracted out to library supply companies, a number of information business centres had been opened and most book-processing requirements had been standardised or centralised in a number of

share cataloguing schemes. However, the whole system of management and delivery of public library service had so far been shaped according to qualifications, training, work arrangements, technical procedures and standards formulated and recommended by professional associations and library and information schools. Once the management and the monitoring of the service was separated from the operational side of service delivery, the link between library administration and professional orientations and values risked being weakened, if not vanishing altogether. In some cases manager and professional librarians were forced to either decide to take on a purely managerial role or to stick with their technical role, thus accepting to be moved or even sold from one unit to another, indifferently private or public. Library managers' "professional" knowledge would consequently refer more to economic and business studies and librarians' technical knowledge would regress to forms of apprenticeship or be subject to greater standardisation.

4.2.3 Privatisation of choice in public librarianship

As stressed by the Head of the Government Efficiency Unit, Competing for Quality was just one element of a wider project in which the development of the Citizen's Charter was the next major step forward. (J. Oughton, 1994 p.11) When, in fact, in 1991 the then Minister for the Arts required that public libraries produce their own model of Charter, the Library Association (1992), expressed concern that this challenge was not a *"passing fashion"* but that it would have had a major impact on the future of public library service organisation and provision[4]. The importance assigned by central government to this initiative became clear a year later when the then Prime Minister stated *"of all the privatisations that this Conservative government conducts, the greatest and most far reaching and the one to which I am most committed is the privatisation of choice"*[5]. Indeed the concept of *"customer choice"* was central to the charter approach through which the government intended to improve quality and value in the public service by demanding that local authorities identify explicit standards which customers were entitled to expect and to make them known at the point of delivery. The emphasis placed on the term 'customer' implied a meaningful transformation of the concept of library user into that of library customer, which disclosed once again the government's main intention to link the functioning of public services to market rules and values. Within this framework public library activities were seen as

[4] The Charter Approach: Library Association guidelines for public librarians, The Library Association, October 1992. p.1

[5] From John Major's speech to the Adam Smith Institute, 16 June 1992. Quoted in The Charter Approach. 1992

commercial operations where occasional relationships were established between the purchaser and the provider, with no involvement whatsoever on the part of the customer. The concept of privatisation of choice, the Library Association (1992) stressed, with its emphasis on the private citizen was difficult to apply to public libraries where services were provided by the community for the members of that community, where people used their local library on a long term basis and in which library users as citizens and through their elected representative on the council, had a vested interest. However, customer consultation was recognised as important in the definition of explicit service standards provided that it was combined with librarians' professional judgement and the political priorities of elected members.

The idea of deriving service standards from customer consultation in order to offer services which people actually need and want was linked to a second key element of the charter approach, which was the development, at national level, of an independent system of validation of performance against service standards. The Audit Commission was then entrusted to prepare a set of key performance indicators for public libraries, which were later introduced in 1993. Nevertheless, the definition of a set of quality standards at national level left many issues unsolved: firstly they seemed to be based on a quantitative rather than qualitative logic, secondly it was felt that they could not guarantee a quality service if they did not relate to the local community and, lastly, it was not clear who had to monitor performance. With regard to locally produced standards, the government suggested that they had to be defined by referring to a consultation procedure of customers' needs and demands, therefore sustaining its idea of consumer choice, whereas the responsibility for the validation of performance standards should be assigned to an independent national inspectorate, therefore maintaining its idea of external scrutiny of local service standards.

The introduction of the Citizen's Charter in public service was a further piece fitted into the jigsaw prepared by central government to introduce more privatisation, to create a customer service culture, to improve quality through competition and operations governed by the market. Once again it appeared likely that political reforms would have repercussions on the control of the organisation and practice of public librarianship. In fact for these government initiatives to be implemented it would be necessary to assess and possibly reform structures, systems and procedures, introducing new management requirements as well as the processes needed for each activity. Once the government achieved the objectives of ensuring a clear set of specifications and standards; of introducing a national independent inspection system, and

of defining a process of direct customer consultation, the public library service would be in a position to respond to the challenge of adopting any new structures for the delivery of local government services. Therefore structural reorganisation would be possible not just at service unit level but also at departmental level; to this purpose the words of a librarian belonging to one of the first library authorities to decide to join the market sounded like a worried warning: *"At that time the library service was part of the Directorate of Leisure Services, which no longer exists, not least because each substantial component was tendered out until there was nothing left but libraries and a few bits and pieces."* (R.Williams, 1994 p.16)

Furthermore, it was to be expected that within the new structures for library service delivery the balance between the forms of legitimised authority which exercise control over work may well have been destabilised by the increasing relevance of the client authority as had already happened in education, housing and social services. It seemed that whatever the work environment, private, public or mixed, the public library professionals found themselves selling their competence, they would likely lose power in the control over work to manager authority as well as client authority. Moreover, in the changing situation librarians' competence and commitment to a high quality service seemed no longer provable by the possession of professional qualifications and the adherence to a code of ethics, rather the quality of performance standards were increasingly subject to external monitoring and evaluation.

If, it appeared inevitable that librarians' initial education, professional status and approved training would no longer be accepted as the sole guarantee of competence and quality, it was unclear whether continual professional development, as suggested by N. Roberts and T, Konn (1991), would be sufficient to provide librarians with the necessary skills. Perhaps in the reorganised public library service where structures, systems and procedures were re-defined to respond to the market imperatives of competition and choice, the whole librarians' body of knowledge had to be reconsidered in its content and its functions, calling for a radical reorganisation of education for librarianship. Trends towards deprofessionalisation, de-skilling, fragmentation and even the idea that librarians no longer required a distinctive form of education represented serious threats in the new circumstances.

4.2.4 Changing the role of public libraries?

The National Review of Public Libraries launched in 1993, was the third fundamental government move aimed at introducing significant changes in the organisation and provision of library and information services. The whole project wanted to examine a) the changing social political and economic circumstances within which public libraries had to operate; b) the services commonly provided by the public library service and expected by the public, but not expressly required under the 1964 Act; c) the changing and emerging needs of the public; d) feasible partnerships and links with other library sectors, and with related sectors, including the voluntary and private sector; e) the relationships between library services and other local authority services.

The central issue of the review was to test the desirability of any changes in legislative requirements under which public libraries operate. In particular government's aim was to review public libraries' remit expressed as "*to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service*" and to give greater definition to and thereby possibly limit, the range of services, which had been traditionally provided or recently developed. In fact, one of the objectives that the Department of National Heritage had set itself since its inception was to have local library authorities provide a clear and detailed account of their 'statutory duties'.

The legislation, government maintained, provided a definition of the duties of local authorities for the delivery of library services that was too broad, therefore vague and unable to respond to the need for clarity that today's citizens evidently expected from administrators. The Libraries and Museums Act 1964 states, in fact, only that local authorities, responsible for public libraries, have the statutory duty to provide a "*comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof*". This legislation had, until then, given local authorities a free rein to decide the most appropriate services for their citizens according to their own scale of values and priorities defined in agreement with their own managers, professionals and clients.

The Secretary of State, representing central government and promoter of the initiative, to whom the 1964 Act assigns the duty "*to superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities in England ... and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions conferred on them as library authorities by or under this Act*" has the faculty, if the Secretary deems it necessary, to intervene whenever a local authority does not fulfil its statutory duties. Section 10 of the same act

states, in fact, that the Secretary of State can order any local authority, who fails to respect its own duties, to rectify this situation. Should the local authority in question continue to fail to satisfy this request, the Secretary of State can decide to divest the authority of its powers over the libraries and these would pass directly to the Secretary himself.

In the political climate of the time, these powers, although they had never been used until then, nevertheless allowed the Secretary of State to assume a central role in the administration of public libraries and to claim the right to regulate and control their activities. Through the National Public Libraries Review the government proposed to gather information which, given its authority, it could have demanded but which it preferred to obtain without creating a situation of open conflict with local government. Section 1 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 states in fact that *"Every library authority is required to furnish such information and provide such facilities for the inspection of library premises, stocks and records as the Secretary of State may need to enable him to carry out his duties under the Act"*

As soon as local library authorities accepted to compile a detailed report on the planning of services and to send it 'voluntarily' to the Department for National Heritage, the Secretary of State intended to develop a system for the evaluation of library services; a system with the characteristics of measurability and comparability which would make it possible to redress where standards were not met. The Local Public Library Service Planning Statement appeared to be the starting point, not only for the self appraisal of every local authority with regard to the provision of services, but would provide the Secretary of State with the opportunity to examine, on a national scale, the services provided by every single library.

The Secretary of State naturally reassured local administrators that in doing this, the varying social and economic realities in which the public libraries operated together with the various objectives and priorities that the single authorities assume in relation to their own public and to the resources at their disposal would be kept in mind. The Department of National Heritage appointed an expert to draw up a project with the aim of defining a methodological model of evaluation which would make it possible for the variety of local situations to measure their own performance over a period of some years and for the development of a means of gathering, analysing and evaluating statistical information the

validity of which was to be recognised nation-wide. The project was to lead to the publication of a practical guide for the evaluation of public library services.

The final report of the national review[6] showed that the people interviewed and consulted wanted the public library service to remain under the direct control and responsibility of local government. The research outcomes also showed that most people wanted public libraries to continue to be paid for out of public funds and that very few were in favour of charging users. Suggestions for alternative methods for funding libraries were identified in the use of National Lottery money, European Union funding and in the provision of specialist services such as business information. It was also reported that the 'core' essential services that every public library should provide regarded: services to children and young people; provision of reading material to borrow; the library as a community asset; areas to undertake study and lifelong learning; sources of information and for access to knowledge from all parts of the world. To this last purpose, it was suggested that public libraries should be connected to the information 'superhighways' or Internet and that access to this should be given to the public. The report also recommended that, in order to improve access to public libraries, opening hours should be increased outside working time, and mini libraries in shopping centres, rural areas and tourist centres should be established. Finally, on the crucial matter of the need to change the law, the report confirmed that support for the continuing democratic control of public libraries by the local council was *pervasive and solid.* Furthermore, both users and non-users of public libraries expressed the view that they were against businesses taking responsibility for running libraries, even in areas where service was inadequate.

As a consequence of the report findings, the Department of National Heritage decided to set a new comprehensive framework for public library services that would allow *considerable flexibility* in local choice. This objective, stressed the DNH, could be accomplished without amending the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, however, it was pointed out that a new statutory instrument should be identified to simplify the collecting of fines and charges. It was also decided to prepare Public Library Policy and Planning Guidance Notes that would have, the DNH emphasised, "*a persuasive, not a coercive effect, but nevertheless carry weight*". (DNH, 1995 p. 23) The objective of these

[6] The final report of the *Review of the public library service in England and Wales* was published by ASLIB in July 1995

Guidance Notes was to explain the main purposes and core functions and guide each authority in the preparation of its local strategy plan for library services.

For example, the Guidance Notes suggested an integrated approach to the development of standards, so that the views of elected members and professional librarians would be influenced by users' expectations and experience. It was stressed that library authorities should retain the option to charge for the loan of 'non-book' materials and to levy charges for new added value services. The establishment of partnerships between public libraries and community business groups and other organisations was also advocated in order to generate income and develop entrepreneurial skills, as well as the diversification of funding resources by developing co-operation between library authorities at a regional and national level in order to access European funding, sponsorships and revenue funding. At the same time, public libraries were advised to review their marketing approach, to carry out regular market research, to broaden the scope for competition and to develop strategies that would encompass all elements of the 'marketing mix'. It was, finally, recommended that, in order to further develop local services, each library authority, should take up a 'proactive' approach to meeting the needs of special groups of users and niche markets in partnership with the private sector or other local authorities or other services of the same authority.

If all this is observed from the wider perspective of Conservative government policy in the UK from the eighties to the mid-nineties, it becomes evident that these particular political actions regarding libraries and librarians were perfectly in line with a much vaster manoeuvre aimed at an attempt to control and restructure local government. To achieve this, central government adopted three strategies: the setting of limits and restrictions on the power of local government to collect and spend public money; the privatisation and deregulation of many public services previously assigned to local government by either selling them directly to private enterprises or by allowing them to compete; the imposition of external scrutiny on the activities of local government.

4.3 Public librarianship as part of a governing strategy

The links highlighted between the characteristics and properties of the social phenomenon under investigation and the features of public librarians' professional status emphasise the relevance and scope of economic changes and political pressures for present and future developments in public librarianship. Evidence of the possible consequences for librarians'

professional practice, authority, knowledge and prestige are described and discussed by relating the actions, experiences and perceptions of individuals to the context of changed circumstances. Furthermore, some attempt is made to give an account of the significance of the changes observed by placing the state/profession relationship within a conceptual framework, which is derived from Johnson's theory of the professions.

The fundamental role of the state in establishing the status of professions is stressed by many sociologists, who almost unanimously see the state as the ultimate and irreplaceable regulatory body in determining professional autonomy in the division of labour and control over the market through licensing and educational credentials. On this matter a number of theorists (E. Freidson, 1986; Sarfatti Larson, 1977; T. Halliday, 1987; etc.) are very clear when they state that a profession is in a position to achieve recognition and status by making right use of both its practical and esoteric body of knowledge provided that economic and political shelter is awarded by the state. Therefore, the state plays an essential role in establishing and maintaining professional status in the labour force; however, this sheltered position can only be achieved through the fundamental role of knowledge. It could, then, be argued that, according to this logic, the guarantee of professional success is only possible through state enforced licence, but the pre-condition to achieve that success is to create and control a body of specialised knowledge.

Whereas Freidson and other sociologists see the role of the state as an external regulatory body, which, according to its political orientation and administrative organisation, decides to give more or less power to the professions, for Johnson (1982, 1993, 1995) state and professions have developed as an integrally related structure. Therefore, the creation and control of a body of knowledge and its validation as a legitimate institutional instrument to exercise occupational control can only be seen as an integral strategy of state governing plans. Within this theoretical framework the impact of the political changes described above had the power to not only redefine the role of the professions and to re-regulate how they are organised, but transform areas of professional competence into areas of a political and administrative domain. Political actions may not only condition the process of professionalisation of occupational groups but may also directly influence a profession's body of knowledge and skills to the extent that it becomes useless for the solution of problems which normally belong to its area of competence. When political changes determine the circumstances in which a profession happens to operate, they can bring about variations in both the legitimation of a profession's technical and cognitive tools and in the

actual tasks, roles and rules on which professional practice has been founded. According to Johnson (1993), these variations are internal to the political system of the state, therefore the impact of political reforms affecting the professions since 1979 have involved *"neither a 'deregulation' nor increasing intervention, but a re-articulation of the state-profession relationship; a shift in the focus of government concerns regarding expertise."* (1993 p.145) In fact, in Johnson's view to some extent *"the profession is the state."* (1995 p. 13)

Certainly, these changes have a major impact on those less powerful professions, like librarianship, which base their occupational authority on normative rather then on structural foundations. As stressed by Freidson (1986 pp. 59-60), when an occupation is not firmly based on a state enforced licence, and is based, at best, only on certification by the occupation itself, or on an educational credential unsupported by state mandates, it is very vulnerable to change in its status when either the state or the employer, representing capital, finds it convenient to do so. However, observing these changes in a profession, which had fruitfully used professional rhetoric and the professional model to achieve status and recognition, it is possible to highlight that the means for institutionalising expertise through professionalism was in crisis. What was losing consensus was thus the model for establishing control over work and the labour market through the use of a body of professional knowledge more or less supported by the state. Moreover, the decline in the legitimacy of professionalism was paralleled by a perceived collapse in colleague-based guarantees of competence and ethical responsibility.

What has happened to the profession of librarian can only possibly be understood if we get rid of the meta-theories of the professions, i.e. professionalisation, bureaucratisation, etc., and place it in the context of the shifting relationship between expert labour and the state. As stressed by Johnson (1993, 1995), this relationship is the joint product of government programmes and policies, the creation of new forms of expertise, occupational strategies to seek and maintain control over work and associated shifts in the division of labour conditions. Within this theoretical context, public librarians' professional status is to be read as the outcome of the changing relationship between librarians' occupational practice and government's official definition of problems related to library service organisation and delivery. Looking at the history of the specialised occupations, and librarianship is no exception, it is possible to note, as Johnson (1972) has emphasised since his early works, that there is not one single process of professionalisation which has ended in the state of professionalism, involving official recognition and license of exclusive practice; rather there

have been progressive variations of institutionalised forms of control, for example, corporate patronage of public or private bureaucracies, state heteronomy or expert commodities. Each of these forms of institutionalising expertise has often involved shifts in the relationship between the state and the professions, placing professionals in different authority positions. Where the ideological and political processes sustaining professionalism have coincided with requirements of government policy and programmes, it has been possible to establish a colleague form of control over work.

The case of librarianship is that of an organisational profession which has developed a different degree of occupational authority according to the type of worksetting. When librarians have been employed in a large bureaucratic organisation, representing a state agency for the delivery of public service, they have become the dominant profession and have been largely responsible for the definition of user needs and the way in which these are catered for. However, occupational control over work and occupational definitions of solutions to problems of service organisation and delivery have been possible as long as they have been supported by government definitions of service needs and way of provision. During the dominion of the welfare system, librarians' occupational authority, based on an externally sanctioned expertise, prevailed over possible external forms of authority. Despite internal professional stratification, élite librarians have been involved in framing systems of organisation and control in the library and in supervising their implementation. These "librarian managers" have stood very high in the organisational hierarchy with a large percentage of their work activity relating to the creation and implementation of public library service policy. Privatisation, deregulation, promotion of new managerialism and emphasis on consumer choice and market principles changed the social steering of public library service provision and created new organisational contexts. It was, consequently, possible to see changes in the type of control over work and in the methods used to execute it and to establish legitimacy because of the shifting balance in the public library service organisation between the relevant weight of political decisions, bureaucratic rules, professional knowledge and direct influence by the users.

According to this theoretical perspective, occupational groups with professional aspirations, like public librarians, seemed to be losing ground in the following areas of control:

- specialised knowledge. Knowledge could no longer be either esoteric or monopolised;

- recruitment and training. Entries to organisational professions were controlled more and more by local authorities;
- professional qualifications bought less status and authority. Professional education was spread among university courses;
- Professional associations were losing power as a consequence of the emphasis on consumer choice;
- professionals became increasingly subject to external evaluation.

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter, which aimed at constructing a conceptual model for the analysis of research findings, it is important to focus on the two main objectives of this study. Firstly, to analyse the existence of interaction between variations in economic and political conditions and variations in the degree to which librarians exercise occupational control over library work, not simply by ascertaining a general erosion of librarians' authority and autonomy, as this may well be considered as too easy or obvious a task, but rather by evaluating the erosion of professionalism as a model for establishing that particular form of control. Secondly, this study aimed at describing and understanding the characteristics and patterns of variations in the degree of authority, practice and organisational role of public library professionals and their connections with political and administrative changes. The research project itself focused upon the effects of economic and political pressure on professional status and practice of public librarians. It thus sought, on the one hand, to discover external perceptions of the librarian's roles and authority and, on the other hand, librarians' own perceptions of their role and status, their understanding of policy changes and how these have affected their working practices.

In order to achieve these aims, the research project sought to confront the new reality with the strategies and rhetorical tools adopted by librarians to obtain respectability and acknowledged competence. Two areas needed to be explored in order to achieve this goal. Firstly, the degree of control over work arrangements and procedures in the library by librarians in the workplace, and secondly the degree of consensus on the part of authorities and decision makers with regard to the profession of librarian, as the legitimate provider of a valued service.

Chapter 5

THE RESEARCH STRATEGY: A CASE STUDY

5.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the methodological approach adopted in the study: the nature of the method, the reasons for its choice and the practical aspects of its application. Many are the factors that dictate the choice of research method. Firstly, as stressed by R. Boudon (1969, 1992), the choice of an appropriate methodology depends on the *matter of research purposes*, that is whether the research has a cognitive, a predictive or a practical aim; secondly, it depends on a heuristic approach, that is whether it needs to be based solely on fact (inductive explanation) or on empirical falsification (deductive explanation) and thirdly, it depends on practical considerations, that is time, money and access to information and people.

5.1 Choice and nature of research method

The cognitive aim of social research embraces the fundamental questions relevant to the research problem: *What* is the object of investigation? *How* is it manifest? *Why* does it manifest itself in that particular way? It is, therefore, possible to single out three different levels of knowledge: description, understanding, and explanation. When the research aim is to investigate new social phenomena or behaviours, yet to be studied in depth, then the fundamental question may concern how a particular phenomenon becomes manifest in certain patterns, characteristics and factors. When, on the contrary, characteristics and patterns of the social phenomenon are well known, then the fundamental question may be why it becomes manifest in different ways in relation to different times, contexts and subjects. The first type of question steers the research toward a descriptive aim, whereas the second toward an explicative aim. Thus the general aims of the research project dictate the choice of methods for collecting evidence that give rise to qualitative or quantitative data. The use of qualitative methods makes it possible to analyse social phenomena and behaviour from perceptions, experiences, meanings and descriptions, whereas the quantitative approach means categorising and measuring facts and behaviours on a

numerical basis. In the first case, raw data comprise exactly what people say in interviews, or recorded conversations, or a description of what has been observed; in the second case, data derive from measurement of social phenomena, that is from their break down into numerical quantities which allow for statistical calculations.

Given the multi-dimensional variables of the social phenomenon under investigation and the conceptual controversies that characterise the study of occupations, concerning both theoretical perspectives and choice of methodology, the aim set out for this research was to describe in as disciplined a fashion as possible the processes underway rather than to prove (or disprove) preconceived hypotheses about causal relationships between variables. Therefore preference had to fall on a method of information collection that would prove useful in reaching an understanding of the significance of social facts and behaviours and their links with concepts and ideas, rather than proving their causal effects on public librarianship. Analyses of the professions found in literature, as pointed out by M. Saks (1983 pp.16-18), are mostly confined to non-empirical statements of the problems regarding issues such as the establishment and maintenance of professional status, authority and control over work. Furthermore, as emphasised by E. Freidson (1996 p.3), studies within purely theoretical approaches, have until now been based mainly on national and historical comparisons and provide no acceptable model that can be used for this study. An original model was, therefore, used drawing in some, although slight part, on W. Reeves' (1980) research project on North American librarians, even though this had been based on a quantitative method. Consequently, unlike the majority of the studies on the professions, this investigation is empirical and based on a case study. It would, perhaps, be inappropriate to talk of the methodological approach adopted for this research. In fact, as stressed by R. Stake (1995; 1998), no one single method exists for the analysis of case studies, insofar as a variety of techniques, suitable for the context under investigation, are employed for data collection and analysis. The following sections will explicate, therefore, not the *method* of research but the *research strategy*.

5.3 Why a case study was chosen

The choice of a case to be studied made it possible to limit the research to a sub-group, that of public librarians, within the broader occupational group of information and library professionals, in the context of a large metropolitan library authority during a period of fundamental changes.

This choice was also based on the conviction that developments in librarianship under the effects of political and economic forces assume different forms from one type of library to another, which would have made it difficult to gain comparable, thus reliable, results from research conducted through surveys or other methods. The public library represented an ideal case because it is a bureaucratic institution where the "organisational" profession of librarianship can achieve, under favourable circumstances, an authoritative and prestigious position, thus making it possible to identify those "heuristic devices" as general concepts of professional status, which can be used in the analysis of the characteristics and issues of change observed in the chosen subjects. One of these favourable conditions is the large size of a professional organisation where librarians are the dominant occupational group and which normally requires a rationalisation of arrangements and procedures underpinned by principles and guidelines developed by the profession itself. In fact, as stressed in the second chapter, within a work setting where occupational standards and status are enforced by collective occupational orientation, library professionals are in a position to control work arrangements and enjoy social recognition.

Although the analysis of a single case does not allow for generalisations, it can, nevertheless, certainly provide a valid understanding of the phenomenon observed within the confines of the chosen context and the results can be tested against similar cases or future analyses of the same case. Furthermore, it was considered that the units of analysis chosen for the case study would have reflected the characteristics of a broader phenomenon, thus giving them an emblematic value for similar situations. Lastly, it was hoped that new conceptual relations and hypotheses could be generated from the outcomes of a case study, to be proved or disproved by other studies. Therefore, the challenging task of analysing a complex social phenomenon, such as the impact of political changes on the normative and structural foundations of librarianship, was undertaken by choosing a qualitative method that would focus on a well defined period of time and geographical context where facts and behaviours could be directly observed and interpreted by gathering individuals' perceptions, opinions and experiences. A metropolitan public library system - Birmingham libraries - during two years - 1994/1995 - of major government pressure for the adoption of market values in public services seemed to provide the ideal context in which qualitative data collected could be more easily grouped and compared as like information sources would produce well integrated material for the study.

5.4 Research design

The design project was then defined taking into account the aims of the investigation, the choice of method, and the context of analysis within which it was decided to undertake the research. Although the whole process consisted of a set of operations interwoven one with the other, the research programme was divided into three main stages: the pilot study and actual data collection from both key players for the public library system and from qualified librarians themselves. In addition, observation of management meetings and seminars organised for library staff were undertaken, as was an analysis of documentary material (strategy plans, local research, etc.) in relation to changes in policy and organisational structure.

The object of this research was an emerging phenomenon, not empirically studied in depth to date, therefore a pilot research was set up in order to better focus and pinpoint the characteristics of interaction between political-economic change and both the profession of librarianship as a whole and the professional workforce chosen for the case study. First of all, it was important to establish a co-operative relationship with a key figure in the library authority chosen for the investigation who could act as liaison and give assistance throughout the research process. This person was identified in the Policy and Research officer, who helped the researcher to access relevant people, local sources of information and to permit participation at staff meetings during the two years of the research. Moreover, in order to undertake participant observation of relevant activities within the library service, for the entire two-year period of the research, 2 days every week were spent at Birmingham libraries, getting to know staff and practices, through informal conversations, events and meetings.

5.4.1 Pilot study

The pilot study had two main purposes: on the one hand, it aimed at reaching a better awareness of what was going on in librarianship as a profession at a national level under the effects of change and, on the other hand, at acquiring a better knowledge of the social-political context and the organisational changes chosen for examination of the research problem. Within a period of six months (the first half of 1994) a number of informal interviews were held with key players and experts in the world of British public libraries. Two library directors in Leicester, a University Senior Lecturer in Sheffield, the Professional officer of the Library Association and the Head of the Libraries Division of the Department

of National Heritage in London were involved in informal conversations aimed at drawing a clearer picture of the processes underway at a national level. The information collected in this phase was both theoretical and empirical. Official publications and other relevant documents were identified through library based research and these were essential in order to identify with some precision the more relevant trends and major concerns in this area. In particular, as the general aim of this study was to analyse how economic and political power might influence developments in librarianship *as a profession*, relevant literature on issues affecting public library service provision, such as the themes of political reforms, financial constraints, privatisation and the deregulation of professional services were examined.

The collection of empirical information was based on a qualitative analysis of media reports, statistical data, official publications and other research studies. Through the reading of various articles which appeared in the national press during a period of more than two years, such as The Guardian, The Independent and The Times and specialised literature, such as Library Association and DHN publications and LISU reports, it was possible to evaluate the relevance of new and unforeseen economic restrictions and government initiatives for the organisation and delivery of public services, to identify more precisely the pressure for change and to describe how and why change was taking place and to understand its implications for public librarians, in order to formulate hypotheses on the existence of some kind of relationship between the research problem and the development of the profession of librarianship.

Over a much longer period, up to the end of 1994 and overlapping with the actual data collection, a number of local authority documents, strategy plans, reports and local statistical data were gathered and examined; meetings, seminars and focus groups were attended at the library system chosen as case study. The collection of local documentary material served to reconstruct a clearer picture of the economic, political and social context of Birmingham and its libraries, within which the phenomenon under study was located. Furthermore, direct observation, on formal and informal occasions, of particular events specifically organised by library managers to discuss and exchange opinions with staff and user groups on political initiatives affecting library services proved invaluable in giving the right direction to the research and in achieving a better definition of the structure to be used and issues to be addressed in the actual collection of data. A combination of methods made it possible to gain a crosscheck of information and a better understanding of phenomena through an examination of a variety of situations, sources and perspectives. (Byrman, 1988; May, 1997)

5.4.2 Unit of analysis

For the actual collection of data it was decided to conduct two sets of semi-structured interviews to be addressed to two different groups of respondents. The first was a group of non-librarian key figures who occupied important positions both within and outside the city council. The second was a group of professionally qualified librarians employed with different responsibilities and roles within the 41 libraries of the metropolitan system. From the first group of interviewees the intention was to elicit perceptions and opinions on librarians' work and the validity of the service they provide; from the second to gather experiences, views and attitudes about library work, tasks, rules and organisation.

5.4.2.1 The sample of key players

The respondents were chosen according to the important position they occupied either at a decision making level of the management structure of the local authority or in other organisations of particular relevance to library services. Ten people in total finally accepted to take part in the in-depth interviews, the Chairman and a Councillor of the Library Committee; the Director of the new Leisure and Community Department representing the "employers", the Head of Information Studies of the University of Central England, representing the "educators"; the Head of Adult Learning, the Head of Arts Museum and Arts Gallery, the Assistant Director of the Economic and Development Department, the Head of Strategy and Planning and the Head of Youth and Community Services, all representing the non-librarian component of a new senior management structure, and finally the Principal Officer of the Education Department, a person, at the time, of national relevance, who figured frequently in the media on educational and related issues.

5.4.2.2 The sample of professional librarians

The professional librarians interviewed in depth, 30 out of a total of 111 professional librarians employed at that time by Birmingham libraries, were chosen as representative of the broad ramifications of roles occupied by qualified librarians at varying levels within the structure of the library hierarchy. The sample was not chosen directly on the basis of their demographic reflection of the general population, but as representative of the same experience and knowledge and was nevertheless sufficient to cover all categories. It should, perhaps, be noted that the interviewees proved exemplary in that they not only

provided characteristics of interest, but were truly "information rich", demonstrating the ability to reflect and be articulate. In fact, the important element for the research was that the sample should represent the full range of librarians according to their date of entry into the profession in general and to Birmingham in particular. This range ensured that the information collected through the extensive interviews revealed changes over the years in educational patterns, models of recruitment and career development. It was interesting to note from the sample selected by the above criteria, how the variables of age and gender had in time changed significance, as emerged from the comments on librarians' own first hand experiences. The accounts, in fact, revealed differing experiences according to the period of entry to the profession and these mirrored the varying weight of professional qualifications, which emerged through the changes mentioned above.

The following table N. 5.1, listing the interviewees by their date of recruitment by Birmingham libraries, clearly illustrates the broad range of the sample chosen and how this covered the various organisational strata at which qualified librarians were employed, from the basic professional level, to lower, middle and senior management, as exemplified by the relevant pay grades. In sum, the rationale for the selection of the sampling ensured that informants were included, not at random, but representing all functional positions and grades, as well as the full range of number of years experience in the profession and at Birmingham.

In 1994 Birmingham public library system had 111 professional librarians in total, 45 were working for the community library services, 44 for the central library, 14 for the children services and 8 for the bibliographic services.

Table N. 5.1 Sample of professional librarians

POSITION	GRADE	DATE OF RECRUITMENT AT BIRMINGHAM	DATE OF ENTRY TO PROFESSION	AGE	GENDER
Community Librarian	PO2	1961	1961	50-54	F
Head of Service	PO1	1964	1964	50-54	M
Community Librarian	PO1	1964	1964	45-49	F
Community Librarian	SO1	1964	1964	45-49	M
Head of Service	PO1	1968	1968	50-54	M
P.O. Children, Youth, Education	PO6	1970	1970	40-44	F
Head of Central Library	PO9/10	1970	1970	40-44	M
Regional Library Manager	PO4/5	1970	1966	50-54	M
Head of Service (music librarian)	PO1	1971	1966	50-54	M
Regional librarian	PO2	1972	1969	40-44	M
Team Leader	SO2	1972	1972	40-44	F
Regional Library Manager	PO4/5	1974	1974	40-44	F
Head of Prison Library Services	PO1	1974	1974	40-44	F
Faculty Manager	PO5	1975	1975	35-39	M
Snr Library Assistant	Scale 4	1975	1975	40-44	M
Ass. Director Libraries & Learning	JNC	1977	1970	40-44	F
Community Librarian	SO1	1977	1977	40-44	M
Business information Librarian	Scale 6	1977	1977	40-44	F
Faculty Manager	PO3/4	1978	1969	50-54	F
Community Librarian	SO2	1978	1978	35-39	M
Director of Regional Library System	PO5	1980	1972	40-44	M
Snr Information Officer	SO2	1980	1980	35-39	F
Ethnic Minority Librarian	PO1	1983	1978	40-44	F
Head of Bibliographic Services	PO6	1986	1980	40-44	M
Team Leader	SO1	1987	1970	40-44	F
Assistant Community Librarian	Scale 6	1987	1983	30-34	F
Bibliographic Services Manager	PO3/4	1989	1974	40-44	F
Head of Service	PO1	1989	1976	40-44	F
Snr. Assistant Librarian	Scale 6	1990	1988	25-29	F
Assistant Librarian	Scale 4	1990	1971	45-49	F

5.4.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used with both groups mentioned above to collect data, although greater flexibility was left to interviews with the group of key players. The questions used with the first group of key players were selected and organised with the aim of drawing out the necessary information on the main strands of the research. The most important issues to be covered in these 10 interviews were the respondents' perceptions, ideas and suggestions on librarians' work and their services. The objective was to be able to evaluate the variations in legitimating principles of librarians' professional status through the comments provided. To achieve this the interview schedule was divided into three main areas: the area of librarians' image and status, the area of librarians' competence and expertise and the area of librarians' functions and policy objectives.

The focus of the interview schedule used with the professional group shifted to describe professional practice, what exactly librarians' work involved apart from the differences in position and grade. The schedule was divided into 5 sections: the worksetting, roles and tasks, perceptions of change in professional practice, professional cohesion, personal profiles and finally position in the organisation and attitudes to and perceptions of professional work. In order to ensure that the information elicited was sufficiently precise and detailed to identify the functions effectively performed by the interviewees, the schedule included a list of tasks, previously identified. This also made it possible to evaluate the degree of control enjoyed by librarians' over their work, in relation to the type of tasks carried out. Both interview schedules are provided in appendix, illustrating the range of issues covered and the list of tasks on which the professional group were asked to comment.

All 40 interviews were held during 1995. The interviewees were contacted, with the direct assistance of the liaison contact within Birmingham libraries, by letter explaining the general objectives of the research and the specific objectives of the interviews. The key players were all interviewed at their own place of work, whereas all the professional librarians were interviewed at the Central Library, for reasons of practicality, considering that the interviewees were spread over 41 libraries throughout the district of Birmingham. This meant that the timetable for interviews had to be strictly coordinated and agreed with all participants. The interviews lasted from between 40 minutes to one and a half hours and were all recorded on tape. Moreover, at the time of the interviews, the majority of interviewees provided written factual data on their work unit.

5.5 Data analysis

As with any qualitative study, the transcription of all forty interviews generated an enormous amount of data. In general terms, both groups of interviewees spoke at length on most of the issues involved and described their impressions and experiences exhaustively. The transcripts, in fact, resulted in a massive collection of over 600 pages of typewritten comments and a great deal of selection had to be made to narrow down this wealth of material to the remarks most relevant to the central aims of the research. Indeed, it was impossible, within the scope of this thesis, to do greater justice to the amount of work involved by fully exploiting the vast amount of interesting and stimulating information gathered. However, within the confines of this research, it was necessary to narrow the field and concentrate specifically on those comments directly relevant to the theoretical needs of the study set out in the conceptual model.

The danger faced in the data analysis was, indeed, that of drowning in the ocean of data collected and data management methods were essential to cut a path through the forest of information transcribed. With diligent and persevering work, the pieces of the research puzzle were gradually fitted together as the various patterns became apparent. The data analysis was, in fact, organised into three stages:

a) Preliminary and primary analysis
b) Category and concept identification
c) Linking concepts to theories

In the first stage interview transcripts were made, highlighting certain parts of the text and annotating them and relevant field notes and documents were assembled and ordered. In this phase, it was already possible to identify important points and the emerging common themes, to make references to related literature and make comparisons with other data collected. This preliminary phase served for reflection and interaction with the material gathered and to lead up to the second phase of analysis. In this second phase, the mass of data was ordered in a more systematic way. The lengthy task of regrouping comments across the whole group of interviews was systematically carried out by literally cutting and pasting on the computer answers from all respondents to the same interview question. This made it possible to identify, classify and categorize the various concepts and themes in a more integrated and exhaustive way. A number of summary tables were drawn up to order certain data more logically and succinctly and some of these have been included in this

thesis. It was then possible, thanks to this groundwork, to identify convergent ideas, attitudes and experiences and have a more global, overall view of the issues, trends and concerns stressed by the interviewees. The final stage involved linking the theoretical issues highlighted in the conceptual model to the research findings. Thus, the initial research questions were tested against the outcomes of the empirical research, in order to be able to evince if the theoretical claims were well grounded in the emerging concepts and to arrive at an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, bringing us full circle to the research aim.

The rigour of this qualitative work is ensured by the criteria of adequacy and appropriateness of data. As N.K. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (1998) point out "*adequacy refers to the amount of data collected, rather than to the number of subjects (...) Appropriateness refers to selection of information according to the theoretical needs of the study*". The validity of the qualitative research, on the other hand, is guaranteed by the relative unobstrusiveness of the participant observation over such a long period and the validation of the perspectives represented in the data analysis through a 'triangulation' or confirmation of perceptions between the two groups of subjects interviewed and within each group, as well as through observation.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the research strategy has been presented and the research method justified. The sample has been described and the techniques of data collection, together with the organisation of data analysis have been explained. The innovative aspects of the choice of case study and the significance of the period in which the research has been conducted have been highlighted. The following chapters now turn their attention to the research findings. The analysis of the data is presented in three separate stages: chapter six dealing with analysis of the organisational context, chapter seven the working context and chapter eight the institutional context. The presentation of findings, given the wealth of material mentioned, was necessarily equally selective and rigorous. Findings were thus summarised and conclusions supported by exemplary quotations to illustrate interpretations of the data.

PART 3
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Chapter 6

FROM PROFESSIONAL-MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION TO CORPORATE-MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION: THE CASE OF THE BIRMINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM

6.0 Introduction

The public library system chosen for investigation is one of the largest in the country; it encompasses one of the most prominent Central Libraries and Information services in Europe and provides services from 41 Community Libraries and 3 Mobile Libraries. It also runs, amongst many other facilities, specialists services such as the Schools Library Service, services to house bound people and a Prison Library Service. The system provides a specialised children's library service based in the Central Library, a computerised customer information key point-service which provides access to information about City Council Services, events and activities more generally across the City. Other major services include a Business information centre and an information service on Europe. The Central Library holds various important collections at regional, national and international levels, including rare, valuable and interesting books, manuscripts, and photographic collections. It is a library service, which has always been acknowledged as seeking a high level of quality and playing a prominent role in promoting reading and literacy, aiming particularly at children and people with learning difficulties. The system offers the provision of open learning resource centres for adult learners and it runs a house bound learners project. It also provides specific projects addressed to ethnic minorities, elderly people and to the disadvantaged strata of the community in general. Thanks to the scope of the services provided and the importance of the information material and initiatives undertaken, the services are used not only by people from the city but also by visitors on a regional, national and international basis. In fact, as the library service mission statement stresses, city libraries are involved in, and committed to, providing, promoting and encouraging access to reading, information, creative arts, leisure and learning through a number of services and activities.

6.1 Re-structuring of the public library service

Since April 1994 the library services have been part of the Leisure and Community Services Committee, which, together with a further 12 committees, form one of the largest metropolitan districts in the country. The city council has been governed without interruption since 1984 by the Labour Party, allowing the local authority to work steadily and to plan a homogeneous policy strategy. City policy culminated, during the first part of the nineties, with the revival of the city centre, and the implementation of a culture-led strategy to reanimate new spaces and places. However, during the period late 1993 to June 1995, when this investigation was undertaken, the city council was facing a challenging situation due to a number of changes that had taken place at national level. Economic recession, fluctuations in the housing market, increases in unemployment, poverty and demographic changes had progressively had an impact at regional and local level. The effects of national trends locally could be seen, as highlighted in The City Strategy Report 1994, in the increased number of job losses and business failures and the rising number of homeless and mortgage applications.

These economic changes together with demographic changes - an increased number of children, elderly people and ethnic minorities - created major pressure on the organisation of city services. Furthermore, in addition to dealing with a changed social and economic environment, the local government, like many others in the country, had to face the pressure of the significant amount of legislation implemented by central government regarding local authorities' ability to raise and allocate resources for education and social services. Legislative changes progressively affected the size, and skills required, of the city council workforce, in addition to working and management practices. In particular, compulsory competitive tendering required the separation of client and contractor roles. Commercial skills were emphasised and improved productivity became a necessity. As a consequence, central government proposals led to exposing more services to competition and in some cases legislative changes led to employees requiring new skills, as for example, with The Children Act and Local Management of Schools. The whole situation brought the city council to seriously consider the possibility of a general restructuring of the internal management of local authority. These intentions were put into action when the city council decided on a major restructuring at the centre of the organisation and a reduction in the number of chief officers.

In this climate the new Chair of the leisure services committee, following the example of other large local authorities[1], set up a team of people to look at the potential for merging three departments: Recreation and Community Services, Library Services and The Museums and Art Gallery. In May 1993 a working party was established to consider in detail the structures of the three departments and, as was stated in the official report, to consider whether any revised organisational requirements might: promote greater efficiency; develop a more corporate approach to service delivery within Leisure Services; provide more co-ordinated services to customers; enable more coherent policy making; achieve a strategic focus for the Committee; exploit the existing strengths within the three Departments to the full; and raise the profile, locally and nationally, of all leisure services within the city. Gradually over a period of time it became clear that the agenda was not whether but when the departments could be merged and by April 1994 the three departments were all in one. The new gigantic department consisted of four new divisions: Museums and Arts; Libraries and Learning; Sport, Youth, Community and Play; and Parks and Nature, along with the two direct service organisations, Leisure Point and Ground Care Contracting. With a total revenue budget in excess of £90m the Department became the largest local authority department providing leisure and community services and facilities in the UK. The whole process was very quick and, despite the fact that it was presented as a move aimed at better coordinating and rationalising services, it barely concealed its prime intention of making savings. The report estimated that the senior management structure of the new department would result in a saving of approximately £500.000.

6.2 The creation of a professional-management organisation

The organisational structure of the library service under investigation has undergone a number of major restructurings over the last decade. However, whereas previous restructurings tended to be directed within the Library Services and aimed at improving the quality and efficiency of service provision and at establishing a different approach to the user/customer, the latest, and most dramatic due to the resulting job losses, was driven above all by the necessity to react to severe budget cuts and to adapt to central government's policy of privatisation and deregulation of public services. Looking at Table N. 6.1 it is possible to

[1] The Draft Report by KPMG and CPI for public consultation "DNH Study: Contracting-Out in Public Libraries, published among the principal preliminary findings that: "*a large number of library service points share accommodation with other local authority services, reinforcing links between local authority leisure, education and social service provision*", 30th September 1994 p. 7.

estimate the sensible changes that the library system had undergone over the period of four years, leading up to the empirical research.

Table N. 6.1	The Birmingham Public Library System			
Activity costs and employees	**1990/1991**	**1991/1992**	**1992/1993**	**1993/1994**
Activities (million pounds)	14.0	15.7	15.5	15.5
Employees (FTE)	755	642	639	583
Service Delivery	**1990/1991**	**1991/1992**	**1992/1993**	**1993/1994**
Net cost per citizen	14.09	15.73	15.39	15.38
Number of registered library users	551,000	690,000	690,000	690,000
Average number of books borrowed per user per year	7.9	8.2	7.9	6.7
Total number of books	2,961,000	3,025,000	3,095,000	2,765,000
Total number of issues per year	9,096,307	9,560,551	8,604,733	7,334,197
Number of services points	46	41	41	41
Mobile libraries	2	3	3	3

Until 1989, prior to the wave of restructurings, this library system was rather a traditional one:

> *"what was important to the library service was maintaining the status of the Central Library, the research collections, the status that it had as a regional and national resource. Community libraries, that were 'branch libraries' at that time, were seen as second class offshoots of the main Central Library and all librarians within the library service, including senior managers, viewed themselves as librarians and not managers".* (Ass. Director, Libraries and Learning)

Each branch library (now Community Library) was run by a qualified librarian responsible for the building, the collections, stock management, and the day-to-day running of the library. Professional practice was based on a set of theoretical and practical issues related to selection, acquisition, processing and cataloguing of books and other library material and information services. The relationship with the public was mediated by professional judgement, in the sense that librarians mostly decided what was needed by users and how

to deliver it. During this period, professional librarians enjoyed a certain autonomy in defining service policy, regulations and work standards. When they worked in a large library they had a specialised role in a given subject area, when they worked in a small branch library they were responsible for the whole unit. In both cases professional librarians were responsible for their individual contribution to the service, which had a direct impact on its performance. Managers worked mainly at the centre of the organisation and were responsible for the daily co-ordination and control of the activities of other people: non-professional support staff, technicians and clerks. Assistant librarians were regarded as subordinates and supported both managers and professionals in their work.

The first new organisational restructuring took place with the arrival of a new Director of the Library Services Department in 1989 and concentrated on raising librarians' awareness of two issues: changing attitudes to library users and adopting a managerial culture. Professional librarians were asked:

> *"to take a more open view of the fact they are there to manage a service and, although their professional expertise is very important, they have to also see themselves as managers of people; they have also to see themselves as services providers to a demanding clientele who now have an expectation. Users have a right to be informed of how decisions are being taken about how library service develops; they have a right to access services, whoever they are and whatever their problems, in the sense of equality."* (Assistant Director of Libraries and Learning)

In this new situation the user became the focus of the reorganisation of library service provision. It was felt that library users had to be informed about how librarians make decisions, allocate resources, and select stock. A whole new philosophy was created in order to promote a service-centred, rather than a library-centred, organisation aiming to remove territorial boundaries, to support better exploitation of resources, to enable more flexible and efficient use of staff resources and all this, above all, with the aim of solving budget problems. To achieve these objectives a more articulated managerial structure was set up and at the same time a regional management structure was created. All 41 branch libraries, now called Community Libraries, were grouped, initially into 4 regions (1985), then into 3 (1989), then 2 (1993) large regions including portions of the metropolitan area. The Department of Library Services was led by one Director who had four Assistant

Directors administrating the four main areas of service: Community Services, Information Services, Children, Youth and Education Services and Support Services.

One Senior Assistant Director was responsible for the whole Community Library System, which was organised on a regional basis. A Regional Library Manager was placed at the head of each region with a strategic role and below each of them, four Regional Librarians with responsibility for a group of five Community Libraries normally run by three Community librarians and also with specific responsibility for stock management, service development, service marketing. All of the community libraries were, then, grouped into eight 'Community Teams', each one usually consisting of one Regional Librarian, three Community Librarians and some support staff, who had to manage five libraries. A Community Librarian was responsible for one, or sometimes two libraries with managerial responsibilities too. They had to work in teams, as policy makers, led by a Regional Library Manager who had line management responsibility for his/her particular group of libraries and support staff. The Prison Library, the House Bound Library, Sutton Coalfield and the three Mobile Libraries also depended on the regional structure.

Table N: 6.2 Community Library Services Regional Structure in 1993

1 Regional Library Manager		*1 Regional Library Manager*	
Team 1	1 Regional Librarian 3 Community Librarians 5 Community Libraries	1 Regional Librarian 3 Community Librarians 4 Community Libraries	Team 4
Team 2	1 Regional Librarian 3 Community Librarians 5 Community Libraries	1 Regional Librarian 3 Community Librarians 5 Community Libraries	Team 6
Team 3	1 Regional Librarian 3 Community Librarians 5 Community Libraries	1 Regional Librarian 3 Community Librarians 6 Community Libraries	Team 7
Team 4	1 Regional Librarian 4 Community Librarians 5 Community Libraries	1 Regional Librarian 3 Community Librarians 5 Community Libraries	Team 8
1 Library Service at Home 1 Prison Library		3 Mobile Libraries Sutton Coalfield Library	

A second Senior Assistant Director was responsible for Information Services, the Music Library and the Archives, which were, and still are, based in the Central Library. From the end of 1990 the information services structure, with the move from the librarian's single

area of specialisation, was organised into three Faculty Departments covering several disciplines, each of which was headed by a Faculty Manager who had equivalent status to Regional Librarians. Each faculty created a unit with approximately 40 staff, based on two service points. All staff at each service point formed a team, an Information Services Team, with four Senior Librarians (Head of Services), 5-9 librarians (sometimes Senior Assistant Librarians) and 10-16 support staff. In addition to managing their own areas, these faculty managers had to work together to establish an integrated service with a clear identity.

Table N. 6.3 Information Services Faculty Structure in 1993

Arts and Humanities		*Social Sciences and Music*		*Business and Science*	
1 Faculty Manager		1 Faculty Manager		1 Faculty Manager	
Service Point	Service Point	Service Point	Service Point	Service Point	Service Point
Local Studies History and Geography	*Language and Literature/ Fine Arts*	*Social Sciences*	*Music*	*Science and Technology*	*Business Information*
2 Heads of service 5 Assistant Librarians 15 Support Staff	2 Heads of service 4 Assistant Librarians 9 Support Staff	4 Heads of service 9 Assistant Librarians 11 Support Staff	1 Heads of service 2 Team leaders 4 Assistant Librarians 9 Support Staff	3 Heads of service 5 Assistant Librarians 10 Support Staff	1 Heads of service 2 Team leaders 5 Assistant Librarians 16 Support Staff

A third Assistant Director was responsible for Children, Youth, and Educational Services which encompassed four main services: Open Learning, The Central Children's library, The Visual Resources Centre and Adult Learning. A fourth Assistant Director became Head of Support Services, which were organised into five main areas: Finance, Security, Procedures, Safety and Premises. Furthermore, four Principal officers, who took care of Policy and Research, Bibliographic Services, Personnel and Training and Arts Development, depended directly on the Library Services Director.

By the end of 1992, the Birmingham public library system had perfected its project to equip the library services with a more dynamic and modern professional-management organisation. It adopted, what Barlow (1989 p. 6) had called, a 'matrix team' structure, where staff are organised into teams both on a geographical and on a functional basis.

Professional librarians were heavily involved in this new structure, creating a team management structure which operated according to a line management hierarchy, a longitudinal team structure, and according to specifically established task projects, lateral teams, in which librarians participated indifferently of their organisational position. Professional librarians took on managerial responsibilities at different levels in the line management team structure: those working in the community library system were assigned the roles of Regional Manager Librarian, Regional Librarian and Community Librarian, those working as subject experts in the Central Library became Faculty Manager, Head of Service and Team Leader, whereas the day-to-day management of service points was delegated to non-professional staff. In the line management team structure the professional librarians occupied different positions according to their career developments, however, they had the possibility to work in project teams on a non-hierarchical basis where individual skills and contributions were essential. In fact, as stressed by the Assistant Director, the main objective of this first great re-organisation of the library service was to provide for maximum use of professional staff by ensuring that their contribution was dedicated exclusively to carrying out professional tasks. However, if one of the main reasons for the reorganisation was certainly the desire of the committee and senior management to make more effective use of their professional staff, it is undeniable that another important objective was to achieve a more secure saving in the staffing budget, as financial constraints and political pressure were, at that time, already quite acute.

> *"we always changed in response to budget cuts, I can't remember a time when we've changed our structure, or to a large extent the way we work, that hasn't been in response to budget reductions; as part of the budget cuts we lost a number of community librarian posts ... I should explain as well that because of budget cuts we've also reduced and expanded the number of regions, we started out with 4 then went to 3 because of budget reductions, then because of further reductions in budget went to 2, but last year because we were restructured into a new department that had 3 regions we re-emerged as 3 regions again."* (Regional Library Manager)

What, in theory, could have been accepted by professional staff as an opportunity to develop their careers and to improve their skills and expertise, was frustrated by the sudden increase in financial cuts which led the library authority to sensibly reduce the number of staff, perhaps in an extreme attempt to avoid the graver measures which the local government did, nevertheless, eventually take with the decision to merge the Library

Service Department with two other departments. A sign that the precipitous evolution of events had, to a certain extent, caught the library service management unprepared, was the clash between the newly introduced team structure and the implementation of a new pay-grade structure.

6.3 Changing career structure

Before the general restructure which led, in 1993, to the definitive set up of the team management structure, the Department of Library Services had gone through another internal change which is quite significant and needs to be explained: the implementation of a new pay-grade structure in 1992. These two internal administrative and structural changes were implemented over a period of 12 months and, for certain aspects, seem to be in contrast to each other. The new career structure defined individual grades and career patterns very precisely: scales 4-6 were introduced as the basic grade for professional posts, a qualified librarian would now access the profession at scale 5/6 with the title of Librarian or Senior Assistant Librarian; scales 1-3 were assigned to Support Staff, scale 1 was a one year probationary grade and scale 4 become available to support staff who occupied posts with special administrative importance or experience in a valuable field. Above these were the professional grades: SO1 and SO2 designated the posts of Senior Librarian, Community Librarian, and Team Leader; PO1 for Principal Librarians, Heads of Service or Community Librarians with responsibility for more then one library and PO2 for Regional Librarians; PO3/4 for Faculty Managers and other middle managers; PO 4/5 for Regional Library Managers; at the top there were grades PO6 and PO9/10 for senior managers (Head of Central Library, Adult Learning); finally there were JNC grades which identified the executive management who were appointed on a 5 year contract, the Department Director, the Senior Assistant Director who received 66% of the Director's salary and the Assistant Director who received 40% of the Director's salary. Promotion to these new management posts was accompanied by the introduction of performance related short-term contracts. Renewal of these contracts was, at first, linked only to performance but was later linked to whether the post itself was still considered 'functional' within the organisation as a whole.

Table N. 6.4 New Career Grade Structure since 1992		
Career	*Grades*	*Role*
Manager Executive	JNC	Director of Department
Senior Manager	JNC 66%	Snr. Assistant Director
Senior Manager	JNC 40%	Assistant Director
Senior Manager	PO9/10	Head of Central Library
Senior Manager	PO6	Head of Major Services
Manager Librarian	PO4/5	Regional Library Manager
Manager Librarian	PO3/4	Faculty Manager
Manager Librarian	PO2	Regional Librarian
Librarian Manager	PO1	Head of Services / Community Librarian
Librarian Manager	SO2	Team Leader / Community Librarian
Librarian Manager	SO1	Community Librarian
Basic Professional	Scale 6	Community Librarian / Senior Assistant Librarian
Basic Professional	Scale 5	Librarian / Deputy Community Librarian
Basic Professional	Scale 4	Assistant Librarian
Support Staff	Scale 2/3	2 years probation
Support Staff	Scale 1	1 year probation

The new career structure introduced pay-grades linked to groups of community libraries, or service units, according to their size in terms of number of issues and staff. At community service level 5 groups of libraries were identified and a pay-grade was assigned to each group. Community librarians were then divided into 4 categories, scale 5/6, SO1, SO2 and PO1, and the libraries were assigned to those groups. The intention at that time was to create a career structure, where a librarian could start off in a small library, at a lower pay grade and then move up when a post eventually became vacant in a large library with a lot of issues and a lot of stock. Similarly, if a librarian moved from one group of libraries to another, then their salary changed accordingly. When community teams were introduced 12 months later, the principle on which the implementation of the restructured career pattern had been based, seemed to change completely. Librarians' pay grades were no longer linked to the libraries they ran, but rather to the team to which they belonged. From this moment onwards, librarians were appointed to a team and not to a library, or service unit. Each team had three Community Librarians (grade SO1 and 2) and a Regional librarian (grade PO2), who had responsibility for a group of libraries regardless of the size of the libraries. It was at that point, early 1994, that the actual number of community librarian posts was sensibly reduced so as to conform to this model. Most of the existing community librarians took voluntary redundancy and vacant posts were simply eliminated instead of recruiting to fill the posts. It appeared a relatively complicated procedure on paper but one which worked in practise; thanks to vacancies at regional management level, some of the librarians on higher pay grades moved up to become regional librarians,

whereas others simply took voluntary redundancy. A number of librarians who had been employed in the library service for quite some time, faced with this last in the wave of restructurings, "*decided that the moment was opportune to take what was a fairly reasonable voluntary redundancy package*".

6.4 The library system becomes part of a large-scale corporate organisation

When in April 1994 the Library Service Department was amalgamated with Recreation and Community Services and Museums it seemed the last of a vast manoeuvre aimed at reducing costs and at adapting to Central Government policy for privatisation and deregulation of public services. The Library Services now formed one of the six Divisions of the large Department of Leisure and Community Services: the Division of Libraries and Learning which combined the library services plus a huge Language Centre and 70 Leisure and Learning centres. One of the former four Assistant Directors was appointed as the sole Assistant Director of the new department and now had responsibility for the newly named Division of Libraries and Learning. Below the Assistant Director, two Senior Officers were appointed to manage the Central Library and The Adult Education Service. In October 1994 the whole Regional structure was also reorganised yet again, going this time from two to three regions, managed by three Regional Library Managers with two Regional librarians each. Regional teams were, however, reduced from 8 to 6. As the boundaries between regions were now altered to conform to the 39 political constituencies adopted by the Recreation and Community Service, some librarians suddenly found themselves operating in libraries belonging to different regions.

Table N: 6.5 Community Library Services Regional Structure since October 1994

West Region	North Region	East Region
1 Regional Library Manager	1 Regional Library Manager	1 Regional Library Manager
1 Regional Librarian 4 Community Librarians 7 Community Libraries	1 Regional Librarian 4 Community Librarians 7 Community Libraries	1 Regional Librarian 4 Community Librarians 6 Community Libraries
1 Regional Librarian 6 Community Librarians 8 Community Libraries	1 Regional Librarian 4 Community Librarians 6 Community Libraries	1 Regional Librarian 4 Community Librarians 6 Community Libraries
1 Library Service at home 1 Prison Library	Sutton Coalfield Library	3 Mobile Libraries

The more striking consequence of the restructuring was the change of status of the whole organisation of library services, which turned from being an autonomous professional organisation into a large-scale corporate organisation. Now, the interface between professionals and politicians would no longer be at professional-manager level but at a purely administrative and managerial level, both within its own structure and regionally. One Executive Manager, who previously held the post of Director of Strategic Management of the council organisation, now deleted from the structure, took the place of the three former directors of the single departments and became the Director of Leisure and Community Services. Within the library service itself, with the disappearance of the post of Director of Library Services, the four former posts of Assistant Directors were replaced by one Assistant Director, responsible for Libraries plus Adult Learning, and Regional Library Managers found themselves having to answer both to the Regional Managers of the new three in one Department as well as to the Assistant Director of Libraries and Learning with direct line management. The structure of the Department of Library Services 1989-1994 and the general structure of the new Department of Leisure and Community Services (since April 1994) are illustrated in the charts N. 6.6 and N. 6.7.

Fig. 6.6 Organisational structure of the Department of Library Services 1989-1994

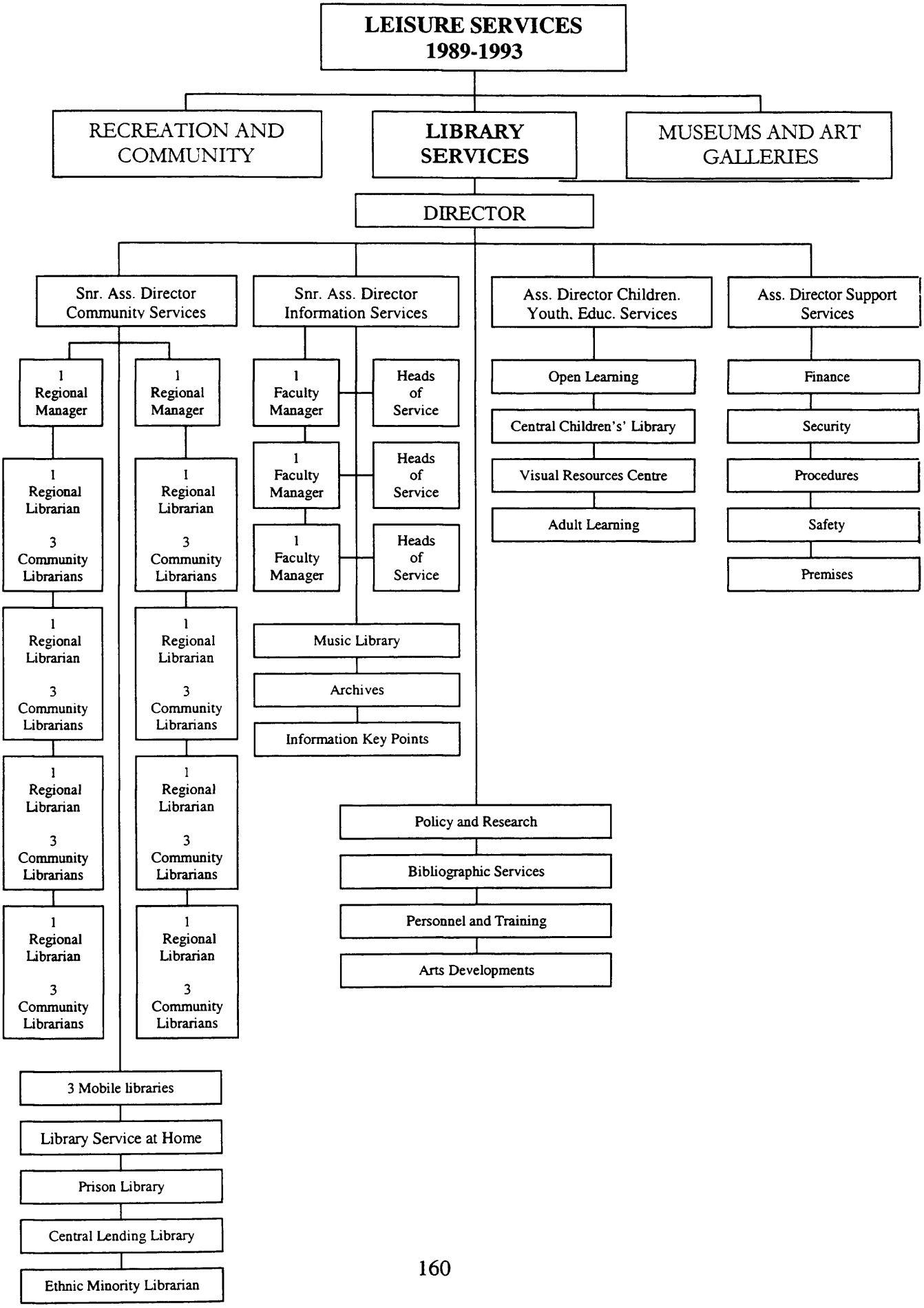
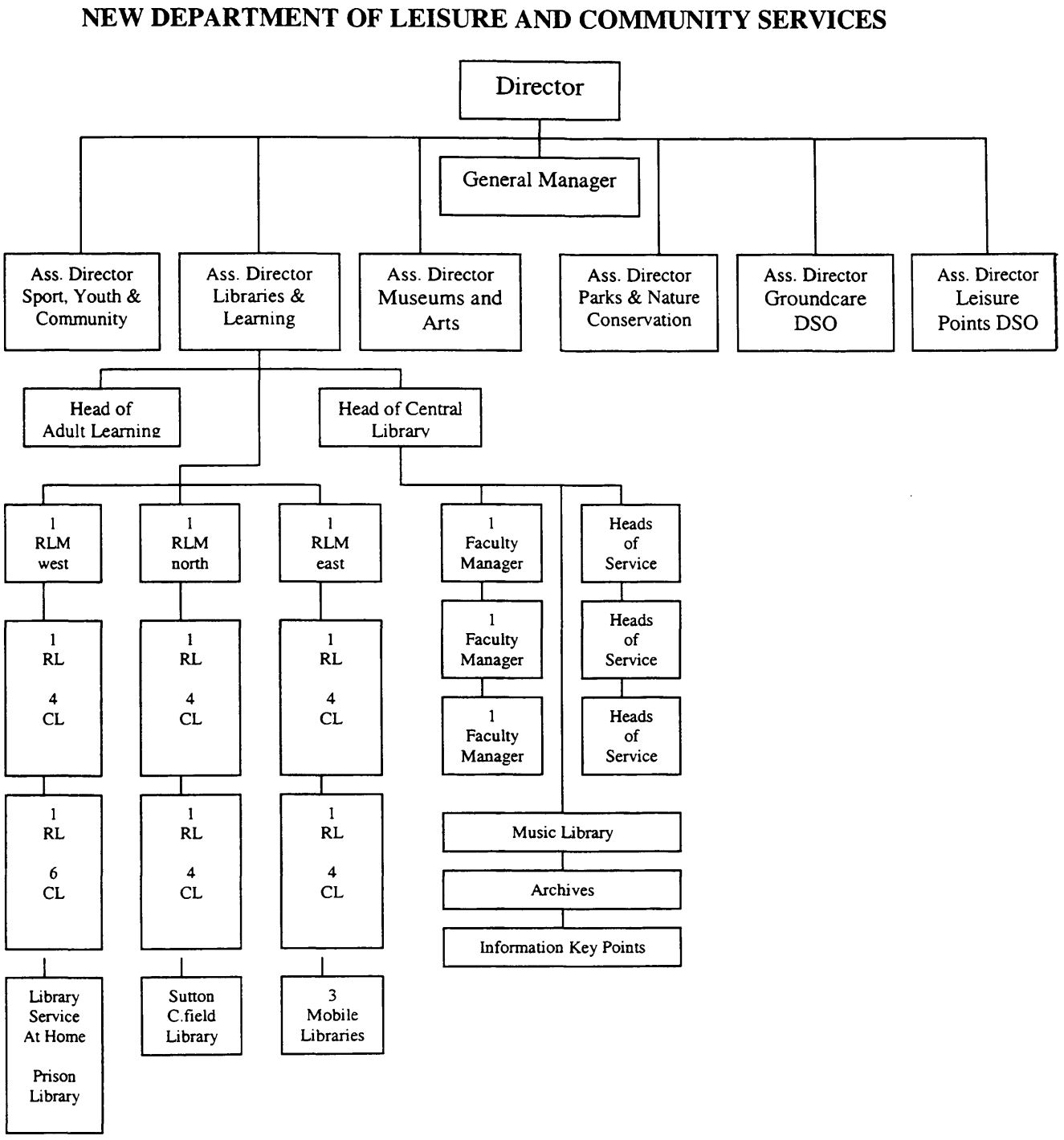


Fig. 6.7 Structure of the new Department of Leisure and Community Services (since April 1994)



6.5 Reactions to the departmental merger

The amalgamation of the library service with other council departments unbalanced the previous internal organisation, which had not had enough time to consolidate. Neither the lines of communication nor the necessary individual commitment to the team structure, whose implementation had been completed, only few months before, had had time to develop and to function at its best. Increasing tension between professional librarians and managers started to grow as the feeling of uncertainty pervaded those librarians who had abandoned the old professional skills for the new managerial ones. The very senior management found itself in an equally difficult position having been deprived of its leadership and autonomy since the centre of power and control was now moved to a more pyramidal structure where they became one component of the new divisional management structure led by a 'non-librarian', the general Director of Leisure and Community Services. Indeed both professional librarians and senior managers of the former Library Service Department, at a distance of one year from the amalgamation, expressed their more or less explicit dissension from the new departmental structure which had destabilised the organisational structure both at a divisional and regional level:

> *"Over the last 12 months we've been testing out a little bit in the context of the new department trying to move from being a department in our own right to being a division of a larger department and I don't think we've got it right yet, the pattern of information dissemination and the decision making process are imperfect at the moment, but the best we were able to do in interim partly because as well as our divisional structure which is vertical we have a regional structure for all services managed by this department in regions and that structure was never fully implemented and that has caused a lot of problems because the divisional structure was based on assumptions of how the regional structure would work and it hasn't worked in that way".* (Ass. Director Libraries and Learning)

At a divisional level the whole process of decision-making and the process of setting priorities and objectives was affected by the restructure. Whereas previously this process, given the political inputs, had started at senior management level with what was then called the 'strategy team', this important phase now took place higher up in the hierarchy with departmental management teams and political senior management teams. As was pointed out by one component of the former library service senior management team:

"The merger of the library services into the wider Leisure Services Department has had an almost entirely negative effect on the ability of the library service to manage its own affairs not only in ways that suit the library service, but in ways that actually meet customer needs, we're being shaped by forces that are larger than us and that don't actually understand the priorities that we're endeavouring to address, I still think there is work to be done on the structure within the library service, who does what and the decision taking there, rather too many decisions are taken elsewhere altogether at the moment. We've lost control and the ability to manage too many of the personnel, budget, IT things ourselves". (Senior Library Manager)

The problem of the overlapping of the two management structures was also felt at regional level where decisions and information were passed down to Regional Library Managers and then to Regional Librarians and finally to Community Librarians. At a geographical level, the interlock between the two structures occurred through the three Regional Library Managers as is well explained by one of them:

"*Once every month I meet with the Regional Manager and all these other officers so it's me, 3 adult Education Managers, 3 Community Development Officers, 4 Youth Officers, a play officer, a Sports Development Officer, 2 Parks' people, about 20 of us all together, the tasks are a complete and utter mess, it tries to do absolutely everything*". (Regional Library Manager)

It was stressed, for example, how the same topics were frequently presented and discussed both in library service regional management teams as well as with youth and community officers and education managers during departmental management team meetings. Both library managers and community librarians complained about the way instructions and information were given:

"I find it confusing because I actually work in the community library structure where I have 2 people to report to. What I find is that I'm not clear who I report to about what and where the instructions I get are coming from, because I'm asked to do things by my regional manager and then I'm also asked to do the same things through the contacts I have with the assistant director and there are pressures for the

division to act as a division and there are pressures for the region to act as a region and the 2 don't fit together very well". (Regional Library Manager)

The whole structure was described as too "heavy" and over bureaucratised, inadequate to functionally co-ordinate the three service departments, which were actually based on different philosophies and cultures for achieving their service aims; overall, it was felt that the three departments had been forced together. The goal of better integration of council services was not recognised as a good enough reason for the merge, which was felt to have been introduced as a means of cutting costs and saving money, whereas, integration, it was pointed out, had always existed between library, youth, community and education services, on a more informal yet productive base. It was observed that the situation was rendered even more complicated by the fact that the same dual nature of the organisational structure that was perceived within the library service probably existed within the other two former departments. The image of a kind of Chinese puzzle structure was effectively drawn by a Community Librarian:

"What we have because of this regional structure which we have in libraries is duplicated in every part of the department, it's duplicated in museums, it's duplicated in adult education, youth work, there are two chains of command. I report to my Regional Librarian but she'll talk to her Regional Area Manager as well as to her Regional Library Manager, the Regional Library Manager talks to the Regional Area Manager and to the Regional Manager as well as to her Division Head, which is the Ass. Director Libraries and Learning ... now, the Libraries and Learning Division is one of a number of divisions of the Leisure and Community Services, these are all division lines, they of course report to the Director, the main director of the department ...The Director has acting for him a regional director or something and his job is to basically be the top manager for the service provision as it happens within the three regions, this person who is directly in line from the director, he has a structure where there is a Regional Manager and each Regional Manager has 2 Regional Area Managers. There are 3 of them for each of the regions. There are 4 constituencies in the region. Each of the Regional Area Managers manages 2 constituencies and that's the direct provision of the service". (Community Librarian)

The effects of the organisational change were perceived less negatively by those working in the Central Library, where the particular nature of the service as one unit more isolated

from the rest of the territorial management allowed the internal structure to continue to function without any dramatic shifts. It appeared that the process of sedimentation of the team culture within library procedures and librarians' behaviours had reached a deeper effect with a consequently wider acceptance of the internal structure of authority and a resulting ability to better resist the destabilising effects of the service restructure. This impression was supported by the words of some interviewees who took a less pessimistic approach towards the adverse contingencies:

> "*I'm hopeful that that will create an improvement, everybody working together giving common messages throughout the building, common standards, we have a long way to go but I'm optimistic*". (Faculty Manager)

It was felt by many respondents that, although with the new restructure professional staff were dragged to "*oppressive committee after committee, where all sit down to discuss the same things*", the information team structure of Central Library on the whole:

> "*is better than it used to be, it's actually improved a lot, the system is being actively managed now rather than just drifting along, there are some problems with communication which is quite a recent development, last year we had quite a few cuts in senior managers and we were joined to Leisure services and the result of that has been there was a forum where heads of service could meet and discuss issues of common concern and encourage consistency of service throughout the building but that doesn't take place anymore, the method of communicating now is a briefing system, it's been pushed upwards so that the decision making process is at higher level whereas before there was an opportunity for input from service level, that now happens directly with faculty manager*". (Team Leader)

The impression that the amalgamation of the library service with the two other council services had a minor impact on the internal organisational structure of the Central Library was induced by the fact that any opinion expressed by the interviewees as to whether organisational changes had affected the current management structure referred to comparison to the situation previous to the implementation of the team structure rather than to the merger into a wider management structure. For instance one respondent, evaluating changes only internally to the Central Library, argued that the organisational structure:

"It's reasonably clear cut and straightforward, it's changed a lot more in recent years than a long time prior to that. For many years you had a dictatorial figure in charge of the reference library, and made a lot of edicts, now you've got this structure with faculty managers and the [senior officer] as Central Library manager, which is a new post for which the subject departments are only one part of its responsibility and you can see the logic of that because in the past the subject departments, the reference library has been quite divorced from the rest of the library even in the rest of the building, other people might think it as a bit elitist, whereas now it should be, once the system is established, a bit more integrated with the rest of the library".(Head of Service)

However optimistic these last comments may appear, what emerges from professional librarians' views on the effects of organisational restructure is a feeling of uncertainty toward their future and a shift from what had been perceived as a stable profession toward one, which is looking for a new identity but has not found it yet. Too many changes in the space of a few years had created the idea that individual fortunes depended on political changes and shifts in the leadership:

"It depends very much on who we have in management, we've had quite a lot of changes in management in the last few years, we went from a very book oriented librarian to a very dynamic lady from Sheffield who wanted to change everything and now we're not quite sure where we are, I'm not terribly sure what the leadership is, we've got a Head of the Central Library now which we never used to have and there's so much shifting around, and voluntary redundancies every year, it's not settled and you don't really know what the policy is .. lack of funds, the city is constantly cutting funds, balance between trying to keep the service running as long as possible, the hours in the central library are not being reduced although the staff are being reduced, so that means if we are running the same services we don't have time to do everything behind the scenes". (Head of Service)

The restructure of the public library service was then perceived as the outcome of severe financial restrictions imposed by the Conservative government, which had had an impact on local government's attitude to council service management practice. Whereas local

politicians, previously tended to trust the officers they appointed, to respect their opinion and to leave to them to do their job, now:

> *"(they) are much more hands on and they will often interfere and they often want to be much more involved in how services are delivered and how decisions are made and that complicates things and I think also the way politicians operate has probably changed over a period of time as well, I do think as generally the environments in which we work have become slightly tougher, more market oriented, I think politicians are beginning to think more and more that way, even socialist politicians".* (Ass. Director of Libraries and Learning)

The combination of internal and external pressures had produced a general restructure which was in favour of a more traditional and authoritarian style where power was closer to the political leadership and the administration and delivery of services was under the control of a managerial structure directly connected to political power. The consequences for the library service were the loss of autonomy and the invasion of purely administrative and bureaucratic criteria in the decision-making process with a consequent loss of control over resources and the setting of service priorities. The previous managerial structure had, in some way, lost its head with an unbalancing effect, which had repercussions along the line management team structure, and perhaps an even more negative effect on the horizontal structure of the 'Projects Team' structure. As these teams worked mainly on task projects set out according to library service priorities and objectives, they found themselves suddenly without clear direction since the objectives of the new structure were, in turn, determined by the objectives of each of the other organisations of the new department. All this had an effect on individual professionals who were in the delicate situation of taking on new skills and tasks according to a vision of organisation, which was based on a professional-management team structure. The inevitable tensions arising from resistance to accepting the new managerial culture were exacerbated by the new, more vigorous shift towards managerialism, this time as part of a large-scale corporate organisation where professional values gave way definitively to bureaucratic ones. In the next chapter individual experiences in the worksetting are presented in order to give a realistic picture of the impact of changes on professional tasks, roles, and behaviours and the perceived consequences of change in relation to the general aim of the library service and the future direction of the library and information profession.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the impact of change on the organisational structure of the public library service chosen for investigation has been presented and analysed. Two different organisational changes have been identified, an internal one aimed at introducing a managerial culture within the library system, but nevertheless keeping a grip on professional principles, the second, external one aimed at centralising control and power and at establishing a more direct connection with politicians by implementing a new overriding managerial structure which insinuated itself into the three former separate service organisations. Whereas the first change seemed to be implemented with the aim of maximising the effective use of professional staff, although sensibly reducing their number, through the establishment of a flattened team structure, the second appeared to be led by the desire to reduce costs and introduce accountability and 'value for money' principles, through the establishment of a more hierarchical managerial structure to whom the administration of leisure and community services were entrusted. The two processes seemed to overlap and sometimes to clash, also because of the speed with which events had unfolded, creating a situation of instability and uncertainty in the professional workforce. This topic is dealt with in the following chapter.

Chapter 7

CHANGES IN PUBLIC LIBRARIANS' PROFESSIONAL WORK: ROLES, TASKS AND OCCUPATIONAL CONTROL

7.0 Introdution

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the impact of economic and political pressure on librarians' professional work. As has just been discussed in the previous chapter, these forces led Birmingham library authority to a sharper focus on corporate planning and management in order to introduce an efficient planning process into the budget cycle. The amalgamation of the library services with the Recreation and Community Services and Museums was the most explicit sign of the growing involvement of politicians in the operational management of library services. Financial constraints and local authority's adoption of cash-limited budgets required changes in the financial management and consequently in the process for the setting out of service objectives and priorities. All aspects of professional and management practice were obviously affected by these changes leading to a revised use of the professional workforce and to a re-arrangement of individual roles and tasks. In the following paragraphs, professional roles and tasks are illustrated and analysed through the experiences, comments and perceptions of the librarians interviewed.

7.1 Internal stratification of the public library professional workforce

The professional workforce in public libraries is traditionally divided into two broad categories, the practitioners and the managers. The first category regards those professionally qualified librarians who have responsibility for the day-to-day management of a service point. Whatever their worksetting, an information service in a reference library or a small branch library, these librarians in carrying out their tasks apply specific skills and knowledge based on library and information science. They are considered the 'experts' by library users who refer to them directly for a response to their particular needs and requests. The second category encompasses those professionals, likewise qualified librarians, who perform supervisory and managerial functions within the organisation. Library managers, although they apply managerial theories and techniques in their work, have usually also been

members of the profession, as some basic professional credentials were normally requested by the employer in order to fill such positions. Generally, library managers needed, in fact, to have had some experience working as library 'practitioners'. As part of their duties library managers exercise a supervisory role over 'practitioner-librarians' and have the power to decide how and where resources are allocated. In public libraries, managers serve as the agents for the library authority, which has the legitimate power to set policy objectives. It is library management's main task to set out the strategies through which those policy objectives are to be achieved. Differently, practitioner-librarians are not directly involved in the formulation of the operational objectives aimed at fulfilling library policy. However the decisions they make in the course of their day-to-day work contribute both to defining user and community needs and to developing library service strategic and operational goals.

This traditional division of library professional staff into these two main categories is no longer adequate to describe the division of labour in the flattened organisational structure of the library system object of the research: an organisation, which had adopted a flexible 'team' structure both at line management level and at special task-project level. It has been explained that this type of service organisation structure required the almost full deployment of professional staff to whom a number of managerial tasks had been devolved and who, in turn, devolved their traditional professional tasks to non-professional library personnel. The philosophy underlying this devolution was based on the principle that the division of tasks in libraries should not refer to the traditional division between managerial, professional and non-professional duties, but rather to those activities acknowledged as 'abstract' (which required professional judgement) and 'concrete' (which were routine, thus not requiring a professional judgement). Within this framework both the day-to-day management of library service points and the supervision of staff and assigned work were considered routine, therefore devolved to non-professional staff insofar as they did not require the professional expertise of a librarian.

A different subdivision of the professional workforce is, therefore, needed to include two other intermediate categories, which permit a more detailed mapping of the library service organisation. These four 'unofficial' occupational sub-groups of librarians are identified as follows: managers, manager-librarians, librarian-managers and practitioner-librarians. The first group refers to senior management staff, the second to middle-management staff, the third to those librarians who have abandoned traditional tasks to take on managerial ones, and the fourth to those librarians who carry out the day-to-day work and who now

encompass those who previously occupied non-professional posts although possessing professional qualifications. However, this distribution of professional roles and tasks in the library service, although implemented only a short time earlier, needed to be placed within a changing organisational structure in which the library services represented but one of the six divisions of the Department of Leisure and Community Services. At the time of this investigation, this final organisational arrangement was only a year old, therefore individual roles, and tasks had not reached a stable form but rather revealed elements of both the most recent and less recent new structures.

7.2 Professional-management practice

In order to better identify individual professional tasks and roles and to place them within the overall organisational structure of the library system, it is necessary to briefly sketch out the whole process of setting out service objectives and the mechanisms devised to achieve them, that is the librarians' professional-management practice. The process adopted by the Birmingham public library system was a structured and integrated one, which involved professional staff both along the line management structure and the various task project groups and study groups. It broadly comprehended the three linked-up phases in the formulation of policy objectives, operational goals and self-appraisal. It was a fairly complicated process, which required individual, cultural commitment to the structure and perfect integration and communication between the various working teams in order to function. It had a two-way system: instructions, targets and resources were passed down whereas information, proposals and requests for resources were passed up.

Service policy objectives were determined, at senior management level, according to Council policy, the resources available and the identified needs of the communities to be served. The main roles of senior managers were, then, to formulate operational strategies, to establish budgets and to allocate resources. Middle managers had to ensure that those directives and resources reached the community librarians (or Heads of Service for the Central Library), who also had managerial responsibilities, and who represented the final link in the management chain, having to overview the implementation and promotion of services. It was then the duty of those in charge of the day-to-day management of libraries and service points to actually provide and promote the service and get feedback from users. Important aspects of library management like, for example, book stock management were treated at system level by a special team, the Stock Management Team, who centrally controlled the book

fund and monitored book spending. An other aspect, which was considered of fundamental importance, was the exact identification of community needs in order to draw up relevant action plans to meet those needs, and, given the budget cuts, to enable the objective and precise determination of priorities and effective targeting of financial resources.

The actual tool used to acquire information and requests from the service point basis up to senior management level was the 'Forward Plan': an annual process of mapping out proposed activities and priorities geared to meeting user needs which had to be prepared by Community Librarians (and Heads of Information Service) together with their support staff and passed on through Regional Managers. On this occasion staff were assessed within the performance review scheme against what they had achieved in comparison to the previous year's proposed activities. Similarly, the 'Stock Plan', a proposal as to how budgets should be spent, was annually prepared at service point level and passed up to line managers. In fact, the process of forward planning and stock planning involved the whole team structure at different levels: the Forward Plans of the Community Librarians contributed to forming the Forward Plan of Regional Management which finally provided the necessary information and inputs for the senior management team to set out the annual Strategy Plan. At this point the process could start back over again with the definition of the new operational objectives and priorities, obviously in accordance with available resources and council policy. Within this broad structure it should now be easier to place the individual professional librarians tasks and roles as they were illustrated by the people interviewed, bearing in mind that the picture drawn above, although experienced only briefly by librarians, was already in a phase of further change due to the amalgamation of the library service with two other council departments.

7.2.1. The role of senior library managers

The senior management team was very much a decision making body and formed what was then called the Management Strategy Team, a team consisting basically of all the senior managers in the library services whose task was to examine and discuss all strategic decisions. It was up to the senior management team to define what the library system wanted to do and where it wanted to go in pursuit of service objectives.

> "*It is about trying to give some strategic focus to where we're going and then looking at the resources we need to make those things happen whether it's in terms of the kinds of skills we need among the workforce and how we achieve that*" (Ass. Director)

Service policy in operational objectives and priorities and decisions in the allocation of resources regarding all 41 community libraries and the various services provided by the Central Library were defined by senior managers who led specific strategy and working groups which looked at essential aspects of the service, like material, equipment and promotional work budgets, community care policy, school's library policy, community needs, research and service development, human resources, quality programmes and performance reviews. Those topics were tackled within 'task project' teams, which had a citywide role and involved middle-manager staff. For example, one team took care of stock management across the city by defining a common strategy on how to handle, acquire and select books in ways that were designated to match the needs of the community most effectively and which were, above all, in keeping with the resources available. Thus, these particular professional tasks, which had been typically left to individual librarians, were now removed collectively to managerial level.

Two kinds of pressures affected the work of senior managers in setting out service operational policy: the increasing political constraints in defining priorities and the decreasing availability of resources for the management of the library service. Indeed financial control, in the sense of monitoring spending, was the major concern for the senior management team. Among the senior managers, the sole interface between the library service and politicians was the Assistant Director who played the important role of raising issues relevant to the library service and of raising its profile and, at the same time, bringing back information about political directions, where the dominant party wanted to go. For example, at the time this investigation was underway, the Council had decided on an 'Anti-poverty' strategy which involved all council services and had to be taken on board in order to define strategic and operational service objectives. The other important role of the Assistant Director was to *fight* for adequate financial resources to develop services and to achieve objectives and priorities, a task increasingly difficult to fulfil since there was now competition to access funding between the various divisions of the new Leisure and Community Department.

> *"At a corporate level I regard my role as representing the library services to the rest of the organisation in terms of projecting an image of what the library service is all about, and participating in corporate activity which would either benefit from the input of someone who comes from the library service discipline or which might bring benefits back to the library service whether it's in terms of funding or high profile; or*

it might just be networking, there's all sorts of paybacks in terms of corporate activity and I would regard that as a major role". (Ass. Director)

Indeed the Assistant Director's role was to ensure external visibility, to deal effectively with the elected members, but also to acquire entrepreneurial skills in order to raise funds from grants, contracts and sponsorships.

"*Increasingly the part of the role of any person in charge of a service is not so much about the budget that comes through from city council but also looking for alternative sources of funding because that budget is increasingly inadequate to do what we want to do, particularly to do service development things, it very often does not maintain the status quo*". (Ass. Director)

The Head of Central Library emphasised the fact that now every senior manager was expected to take a corporate role and play a part in opportunities for inter-departmental work because the city council and the elected members wanted, much more than in the past, that departments should work closely together in order to economise on resources or put them to best use, but also because it offered an opportunity for "*greater creativity and innovation*". Externalisation had become a fundamental aspect of the role of senior library managers, the Head of Central Library underlined, arguing that since libraries were now part of a larger department, they were expected to be relevant not just to libraries, but also to the larger organisation and to raise city council profile, because that would lead to some benefit for the library service itself:

"*It's important that when you play a part in an external body or agency, that it has some feedback to the benefit of the council, it's invidious really to go in work time so to speak, in the time that you are paid to be working for Birmingham and be working for other agencies, but the point of it, is to bring the interests of the city council to bear on that organisation and to influence it so that it has a benefit to the city in the longer term.*" (Head of Central Library)

Controlling budgets and resources, fund raising, making plans and policy, establishing user needs were some of the duties under the direct responsibility of the senior managers, however, in order to transform their strategic activities into action, they needed the support of the lower level of the line management team structure, which included those professional librarians defined as the manager-librarians.

7.2.2. The role of manager-librarians

Regional Library Managers, Regional Librarians, Faculty Managers, and Managers of major services formed the middle management team structure. They were responsible for management planning, performance review and the allocation of resources for all library services in the three regions of Birmingham and in the three sections of the reference services in the Central Library. They also had an input into the overall strategy insofar as they were part of both the departmental management teams as well as the divisional management teams. In this latter role they made their contribution to the definition of specific departmental and divisional strategies. One regional library manager explained, for example, that she was responsible "*for producing a community care strategy for library services and for the city*". The manager-librarians managed large portions of the library service with quite a significant number of staff, lower managers and practitioners, divided into Community Teams and Information Service Teams, which they tried to keep going in the same direction. These Manager-librarians had considerable power in establishing budgets and allocating resources once they were made available, although they had no control at all over the staffing budget.

The three in one department merger made the position of the three Regional Library Managers in the organisation particularly complicated. With the new arrangement, Regional Library Managers now had to report to two different line managers, as explained by one of the respondents:

> "*I relate to other people in the department who are outside our division and I'm responsible to the Regional Manager who's nothing to do with libraries but I'm responsible to him as well as to our Assistant Director so, I've got two people directing me and then with their direction I'm managing the library services for the north of Birmingham.*" (Regional Library Manager)

As explained earlier, Regional Managers now formed part of Regional Management teams, which played a role in strategic planning and development of services. Their tasks also included specific projects with citywide scope, as in the case of one interviewee who specified that one of his roles meant:

"that in common with colleagues of the other two regions, we come together to form a kind of forum for discussion and development of services across community services as a whole within Birmingham." (Regional Librarian)

The counterparts of the Regional Library Managers and Regional Librarians in the Central Library were the Faculty Managers who had similar line management responsibility and were also involved in strategy teams. One Faculty Manager described the duties he carried out in the Central Library and the general purpose they served as follows:

"I have a section of the library with about forty staff that's divided into two main sections, Arts, Language and Literature and Local Studies and History so there is day to day management of those sections, problems that arise, staffing problems, recruitment, things that break down, sorting them out, sorting out finance for that, looking at training, helping and encouraging staff to set up training sessions and looking for funding for staff to go on appropriate training courses, looking at systems, procedures, dealing with complaints from members of the public. That's one side of things, the other thing is having responsibility for certain issues right across the library, so I'm responsible for our liaison with publicity and promotions sections, I take responsibility for equipment throughout the building, contracts for lease of equipment, contracts for repair of equipment purchasing new equipment, signing and guiding in the building ..." (Faculty Manager)

The role of the manager-librarians was still very much of a managerial kind and it served as trait d'union between the senior managers and the librarian-managers who formed the last layer in the line management structure before the actual providers of the service. The manager-librarians still played a strategic role insofar as they participated in the drawing up service plans and objectives and allocating resources.

7.2.3. The role of librarian-managers

Heads of Service and Community Librarians form the main body of this third group of professional librarians who had abandoned the traditional duties of the subject librarian and the branch librarian to take on managerial tasks since the restructuring which led to the implementation of the team structure in the late 80s. This was the category of librarians most heavily affected by organisational changes for they not only experienced the pressure of the widening gap between their traditional skills and those that they were then required to

perform, but they also had to leave the stable environment of the library, or of the reference section, to enter the mutable environment of the management structure. This change, and a drastic one for some librarians, is well described in the words of one respondent:

> "*Once we were assigned to community teams, our managerial resource management administrative role increased, it has been increasing over the past few years but that was the point at which it suddenly became the dominant part of our job, instead of just being part of it, as well as us doing some direct service provision, standing on the counter, talking to people, using our professional library expertise to get the information we wanted, because we're not in a single library for say 4/5 of a week, and some of us have to divide our time between two separate sites and have to do two sets of work, you find that you are becoming more of an administrator and this direct supervision of the people at the sharp end often falls now to the layer below, the people who were known as assistant community librarians*". (Community Librarian)

Unlike the manager-librarians to whom they had to respond, librarian-managers were not involved in the process of defining strategies for the implementation of service policy, rather they had to overview that implementation and to make sure that the fruition of service policy was efficient at the point of delivery. They were '*service provider managers*'. Like their line manager colleagues, the librarian-managers had both line management responsibilities for more than one service point as well as an involvement in developing services as part of a team. It was mainly their task to annually compile the forward plan and stock plan which illustrated their proposals regarding service objectives and priorities and materials budget, what, for example, they would have done about 'children's work', 'creative reading' or 'anti-poverty strategy' and what resources they would have needed. They also exercised a fundamental role in assessing library and information needs by collecting information and statistics according to the guidelines and directives of senior management, who were responsible for the research design and objectives. For this reason, although they had no direct involvement at the strategic level of service policy formation, they provided that precious information which made it possible to set out service activities and priorities. Being so close to the service provision they were in a position to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken, to monitor the correct implementation of services and to gather users' reactions. When asked to describe her job, one Community Librarian said:

"I manage two community libraries which means that I'm responsible for the buildings, the stock and the staff in an overall way but not maybe in a day-to-day way, I don't run the libraries on a day-to-day basis, as a manager I'm responsible for the overall stock selection, policy within the policies of the city". (Community Librarian)

It was pointed out that apart from the fact that they no longer had responsibility for the daily management of the library, their role was:

"pretty much what a traditional librarian in charge of a library building used to be, but with devolution, with more detailed legislation and more concern and emphasis on resources that are declining that is the main change, it has made it more of an office job than it used to be, bit less of a directly meeting the public job than it used to be". (Community Librarian)

One of the comments that emerged quite often from respondents was that they missed the contact with the public, which they considered very important for their professional development.

"I do very little these days of the day to day management, that is devolved down to other people, I spend something like 5 hours a week on the counter, I wish it was more, because I still have this old fashioned idea that that's what a library service is about." (Head of Service)

In regard of financial control, librarian-managers seemed to have very little power in deciding how and where resources could be allocated, on the contrary they appeared to be the ones who were subject to control over spending, as emerged from the words of a community librarian who pointed out that:

"... we have to put down justifications for how much we're spending and put down a stock plan which will go to a stock strategy group for approval, the stock strategy group is regional managers, the manager of bibliographic services, the head of service, and they're submitted to give them an idea of how we're allocating the money and monthly I check the figures". (Community Librarian)

Librarian-managers were the ones who felt most uncomfortable in their new role as managers; they had to give up their librarianship skills and take on the skills of service managers. Their feeling of uncertainty was partly due to the recent staff cuts, which had hit

mainly their category, and to the fact that their job was no longer tied to a library or service point but to a management structure which was continuously subject to revision and reorganisation and where they occupied the lower rank. Nevertheless, they had the fundamental role of superintending the final stage of policy directions and priority implementation having to line manage the practitioner-librarians who, to a large extent, now exercised the role the librarian-managers had previously occupied.

7.2.4. The role of practitioner-librarians

This final group encompassed those members of staff who occupied the basic professional posts, these were Senior Assistant Librarians, Deputy Community Librarians and Assistant Librarians, but might also include Community Librarians as long as they decided to maintain their old duties. Although they usually possessed the educational credentials of any other member of the profession, some of the practitioner-librarians were not professionally qualified. They had responsibility for the actual running of the community library or single service point; they had no wider functions, nor contributed to any team and had no role in book selection. As described by one of the interviewees the work of the practitioner-librarian:

> "*It's really just keeping on top of the day to day things that happen in the library, doing all the paperwork, making sure the library building is safe.*" (Ass. Community Librarian)

This group of librarians reflected the traditional image of the profession, they applied technical knowledge to the management of service points, they took care of stock, although they were not involved in the processes of selection and cataloguing which were centralised, helped the public with information enquires on the enquiry desk and supported their line managers with information needs by producing statistics; in short, they provided for the basic every day work which underpinned the running of the service. Practitioner-librarians were also responsible for the supervision of non-professional personnel, support and clerical staff; they had a role in educating the public, in promoting the service in the community and an advisory role in the realisation of the forward plan, providing Community Librarians and Heads of Service with the primary data as they were the persons most in contact with the public.

The fundamental role of the practitioner-librarian was, in Birmingham, still entrusted to qualified librarians although in many other authorities non-professional librarians were already running community libraries. A change in this direction was, however, in the wind, as can be easily deduced from the Ass. Director's words:

> *"In terms of the day-to-day stuff, which is actually routine administration, do you really need a qualified librarian who spends a lot of time counting up figures, cashing money to the bank? In the new role they could dedicate more time to work in teams, where they really take a professional focus and support one another in helping a group of libraries in providing high quality service and that could be around how they select their stock, or how they train their staff or how they manage the service more creatively, or how they respond to local needs."* (Assistant Director of Library Services)

The traditional role of the professional librarian, based on technical expertise, was thus passed down to staff who occupied non-professional posts, who at the time still possessed professional qualifications although this was not necessarily the case, since this role was now considered routine and suitable for non-qualified librarians as was already happening in other authorities. Indeed the position of those librarians who occupied this role was still far from clear:

> *"It seems that increasingly in this authority you don't even need professional qualifications to apply for certain jobs ... we've recently had a member of staff appointed without professional qualifications on a scale 5, and I believe there's even team leaders within the system who are not professionally qualified, ... it's only desirable, not essential, to have a professional qualification and not just for library assistants but also for librarians, because the council is seen as an equal opportunities employer in all things, but I still think that's strange, if it's a professional job, I mean I can't go away and be an accountant, I haven't got the qualifications, but it seems anyone can come in and be a librarian".* (Snr Ass. Librarian)

However, before making the necessary reflections about these changes in the profession of librarianship, it is useful to first analyse what this new subdivision of roles in the division of labour in the library had meant for the apportioning of individual tasks.

7.3 Professional-manager tasks

Individual tasks are assigned within the operational plan through which the objectives and priorities of a library service are defined. Tasks are, in fact, the last stage of the process, which encompasses the formulation of strategy, the implementation of objectives and the definition of targets. The whole process is conditioned by two main factors: the amount of resources available and the service policy directives within which library service provision is framed. Therefore, the possible options for many decisions are limited by the particular amount of resources available and by the service policy that the professional-management and the governing body have decided to adopt. To a certain extent, it is thus possible to say that the kind of work that librarians have to carry out is shaped by their professional-management and by the governing committee. At the time of political conflictuality of this investigation, both financial control and the making of service plans become of particular interest to politicians who decided to withdraw from their dependency on professional judgement and play a more prominent role. This was naturally due to the financial and political pressure exercised by central government on them. The result was that resources had to be allocated in a more controlled way, money had to be spent more 'wisely' and in the best interest of customers, whose needs and requests had also to be identified more precisely in order to permit 'value for money' provision of the service.

Consequently the whole management of the library service was re-organised in order to permit more efficient use of resources and of professional staff by urging for budget monitoring, for the search for external funding and independent forms of income generation and a system of performance assessment. The power to allocate resources and the power to control the decision-making process emphasised the critical differences between bureaucratic-administrative power and professional-managerial power and represented the most strategic point of contrast between the two. Librarians' professional work changed insofar as the most important tasks to be undertaken by the professional workforce became those related to the new conception of good management practice and which could be grouped in three main phases: Planning, Implementation and Monitoring. Professional librarians were employed to carry out a number of tasks relating to these three phases within the library service. The main professional tasks concentrated on the following activities: financial control and resource management; developing service plans and policy; surveying users and establishing service needs; implementing and promoting services; reference and selection of new materials; and evaluating the performance of library personnel. The

following paragraphs present and comment the type of relationship, as described by the professionals interviewed, between the activities they undertook and the above listed tasks.

7.3.1 Financial control and resource management

In a professional-management organisation, like the Birmingham library system before the amalgamation, professional-managers usually have the power to control the type and the amount of resources available. This power was normally placed in the hands of senior managers and in particular was at the discretion of the director of the library service who served as the interface for the other chief officers in the local authority and the elected members. With the creation of the new departmental managerial structure and the appointment of a general director, the head of the division of Libraries and Learning felt that her power in establishing budgets and allocating resources had diminished:

> "*I think, at the moment, what is worrying me is that within this new department I don't think I've got enough financial control and there's far too much power in the hands of accountants and not enough in the hands of managers and I would think one of my important roles is to get that control in the hands of managers and push it down as far as we can in the organisation.*" (Assistant Director Libraries and Learning)

While waiting for a "*greater devolution of budgets*", as forecasted by the Head of Central Library, the senior managers had specific responsibility in the control of resource allocation and the monitoring of budgets, it was up to them to decide how and where those resources could be spent. Manager-librarians had control of resource allocation in relation to their jurisdictions; in particular they decided how much had to be placed in the material fund, the book fund, the equipment fund and the promotional work fund. Decisions on budgets were taken by the Regional Management Team for the allocation of funds for the community libraries and by the Faculty Service Management Team for information services in the Central Library. The part of the budget over which neither the senior management nor the manager-librarians had control was the staffing budget, as explained by one component of the management team:

> "*Staffing budget is not within my control even though I have staff who are responsible to me ... we haven't got that freedom and with that sort of freedom there are drawbacks as well ... it's what schools are facing, they have their own budgets so they*

can decide whether to mend the roof or to employ another teacher ... we haven't got that sort of flexible approach." (P. O. Children, Youth, Education)

The reason for this lack of flexibility, stressed a Regional Library Manager, derives from the fact that:

> *"It's established by the accountant because our staffing budget is financed and cash limited and that's it, it's given out and it's worked out based on the number of posts we have on our establishment. We have a turnover rate, which is the amount they estimate, the vacancies we will have to keep before we can afford to fill any, because our staffing budget isn't 100% funded"* (Regional Library Manager)

The control over spending was a matter of great concern within the library service division to the point that it had become the specialised task of a manager-librarian who described her role as follows:

> *"My role is monitoring so I'm closely involved ... without taking responsibility for it, with financial control the idea is that budgets for the book fund are devolved, responsibility for budgets is devolved to service heads and community librarians but somebody has to give them expenditure figures and stop them overspending, encourage them to under spend, I don't allocate resources but I try to ensure money has been allocated, I don't establish budgets but try to make sure they work and I liaise with accountants"*. (Bibliographic Service Manager)

When the resources available were put at the disposal of Community Librarians and Heads of Service, they could only decide whether to allocate the money given to one category of stock or to another. They had some degree of control over finances but within the confines of decisions that had already been made. It is not possible to say that they were completely excluded from the budget process, but their involvement would be to a certain extent informal, as pointed out by one of the respondents:

> *"In terms of things like saying «I think it's time the building was decorated again, because it looks a mess, or the lift hasn't been working properly, we need the lift to be refurbished», again that kind of physical problem is certainly a responsibility of mine and the other responsibility regarding resources is within the book fund I'm given, I have really quite a big say in how I spend that"*. (Community Librarian)

The group of librarian-managers not only had little say in the process of allocating funds, but in order to secure the resources needed for their services, to cover, for example, new books, periodicals, continuations etc., they also had to compete with other colleagues and provide justification for their proposed spending:

> "*We would have to argue for a particular portion of the overall reference library funds, almost in competition, perhaps with other subject departments ... Once that has been established, I would be responsible with the other service head, for actually controlling it in the sense of allocating it for things like book binding, conservation, microfilm and so on and keeping a supervisory eye-out that the money gets spent but it's not overspent.*" (Head of Service)

Therefore Community Librarians and Heads of Service, once they were given a set budget, could decide how they wished to allocate the resources but they were also accountable for their spending to line managers, they had, in fact, to produce a detailed plan where they had to set out priorities, itemise forecast spending and, of course, keep control of that expenditure. Furthermore, they were also expected to manage any income generated from photocopying and other services that had become chargeable. This process was well described by one community librarian:

> "*I have to provide a plan on how we're going to spend our budgets for the materials purchased during the next year. I am given a set figure but how it's allocated and spent becomes my responsibility and I have to make sure that what I set up in the stock plan, we actually achieve by the end of the year so I can be measured in terms of how well I've achieved my targets at the beginning of the year.*" (Community Librarian)

Those who had no form of control over budgets were the practitioner-librarians, the personnel who had the responsibility for the running of the service point. They could only decide how to spend the portion of the budget allocated them but they were not in a position to directly influence how much that sum might be.

The whole process of budget allocation shows that librarians at any level seemed to exercise less power of control than in the past. The sort of control they were urged to make was over their spending for which they had become accountable directly to the political management of the city council. As long as the power to control resources was in the hands of library managers, librarians could claim to have prevailing authority in the bureaucratic organisation

of the library, with the shift of control in favour of the inter-departmental managers, that power had, for the most part, vanished. Consequently for the profession of librarianship the risk of being deprofessionalised had increased.

7.3.2 Formulating library service plans and policy

Before the last restructuring, the power to control the process of service planning and policy setting, like control over resources, was very much at the discretion of the professional managers, to whom the library authority delegated the function of identifying service needs and how they had to be catered for. Once the library committee had given the necessary political input, it was then the task of the library management to set out a strategic/operational plan through which service policies would be achieved. Furthermore, the library professional-managers served the function of advising the decision-making process and implementing service policies on the basis of a claim to possessing the necessary specialised knowledge and competence. These arrangements were altered by the financial and political pressures exerted by local government on library managers and professionals who were required to frame library service objectives more strictly within the overall policies of the local authority, to produce performance information about the service and to demonstrate the application of good management practice, by pursuing a more deliberate targeting of expenditure and by introducing systems of appraisal. The following comment is quite explicative of the close relationship between expert library managers and politicians:

> *"I can't think of priorities for the library service, I can't work with the Assistant Director on strategy unless I have got an understanding of the city council's priorities."* (Head of Central Library)

Every year the senior management team produced a Strategy Plan which contained the 'strategic objectives and priorities' for the coming year aimed at providing a framework for local library managers and professionals as they wrote their Forward Plans and Stock Plans. Since the library service had become part of the Department of Leisure and Community Services, the senior management team decided to take a three year perspective for service strategy which would roll over each year and extend into a new three year strategy review, as explained by one component of the senior management team:

> *"We have put a draft out to everybody, all the senior managers, and on the basis of their comments we'll be putting that together and that will represent our plans and*

priorities for the next three years. We'll be able to change it each year, but it'll give us a longer-term picture. Being responsible for research and performance, are integral to having a strategy because your strategy will often be based on those things, they're quite important areas of our planning process that inform plans and policy". (Head of Central Library)

The Regional Management Team, as well as the Information Management Team of the Central Library, produced their Forward Plans, which contained "*interlinks with the Strategy Plan ... so that we have a vision of where we are going and what we are trying to do ... and also as part of various strategy groups and working teams and things like that*". (Regional Library Management)

Manager-librarians did, in fact, have an input to overall strategy formulation. Their contribution was also related to their performance review as emerged from the words of one respondent:

"*What I'm going to do for the year relates very much to that strategy and at the end of the year, what happens during the year, governs very much one's influence on what should happen in the strategy overall, so I think I've got a fair amount of input into policy regarding library services*". (Faculty Manager)

This feeling of involvement with the process of service policy formation became more and more feeble going down the management structure, indeed lower managers could only try to inform that process, as pointed out by one respondent, by "... *convincing my immediate line manager to (a) understand (b) accept and (c) take it (my opinion) forward and seek change in that way*".

The opportunity to have an input into the service arose during regional meetings, which took place every month, and where community librarians had the chance to discuss relevant themes that came up. However, one community librarian pointed out that:

"*There are times when our opinions as librarians and service providers are actively sought, there are times when we have views regarding a stated policy or plan that is already formulated or in the process of being drafted, to the extent that it's almost finished and then it's passed through our lines of communication upwards, and there are times when a plan or a policy seems to have been created for the best possible*

reason entirely without any input from us and we get to hear about it through line management". (Community Librarian)

The general feeling among community librarians and heads of service was that often whatever they said "*doesn't go very far*" and that "*the policy is already made for us*", however, when an input, even if "*limited*" was possible, this would leave them with a fair amount of autonomy with regard to their responsibilities provided it "*fitted in overall with library strategy*". Librarians were asked to express their opinion, but more frequently, they were required to provide information:

> "*to senior management to look at what it is you want to do, to provide statistical work for them so they have something they can approve or not approve. At a local level we have to provide our own Forward Plan every year as to what we want to do and that has to relate to both city council policies and departmental polices and the Customer Charter ... so we have targets we have to reach but how we achieve them is under our control but again it has to be approved by senior management*". (Community Librarian)

The practitioner-librarians, who had responsibility for providing the service, had even less involvement in the process of service policy planning which was "*a discussion between the three senior staff, some things we don't have a say over, anything that comes down from central we have to implement.*" Like their colleagues in the upper layer of management they were responsible for "*passing ideas or comments up through*" and for "*carrying out policies but little input for making them*".

The whole process of decision-making, under increased financial and political pressure, seemed to be governed more and more by bureaucratic criteria based on systems of control and measurement of performance against which results had to be demonstrated. The process of developing service goals and priorities which was once the exclusive realm of library managers had to be re-organised in a way that conformed to political will. At the time of devolution, policy objectives were part of the political process of the local authority while library management formulated operational objectives. One had the statutory duty to provide the library service to the public and the other was responsible for fulfilling this duty. It was a relationship based on trust.

Political changes altered this relationship creating a situation where the library service, just like any other council service, become subject to increased pressure to be well-managed, accountable and demonstrably providing value for money. Library services became accountable to local authority; local government was accountable to central government. The virtuous circle of mutual trust was broken. Consequently, the whole management of library service provision could no longer be based on managerial criteria linked to professional values, but rather on purely managerial criteria linked to administrative or business-like values. Again this was a sign of deprofessionalisation. Furthermore, it appeared that central government's plan to establish a national system of control had succeeded; the service planning process not only became a necessary tool for the self appraisal of the local authority with regard to the provision of services, but provided the Secretary of State with the opportunity to examine, on a national scale, the services provided by every single library.

7.3.4 Surveying users to establish service needs

The third key element that Birmingham libraries took into account in formulating its annual (and then triennial) strategy plan was the identification of community needs. Both the library committee and managers considered it vitally important that users' needs were precisely identified in order to develop service objectives and priorities that were both realistic in their construction and effective in terms of their realisation. It was envisaged that survey research should be used to assist in the process of identifying community needs (i.e. books, information, cultural, social and economic opportunities, etc.) and the construction of strategy plans for meeting those needs. The outcomes of survey research had to enable the strategy team to define priorities and help them to improve the process of budgetary allocation in service planning. This important task was entrusted to a specific office, the Research and Policy Development Office, where various research surveys were undertaken with the aim of discovering *user satisfaction*, *user-centred stock development requirements* and the *library role from a user perspective*. Research activities were also deployed to carry out market-analyses in order to find explanations as to why certain parts of the service were underused, to understand why certain sections of the public were not using the service, or were using it very little, and finally to single out potential users, or potential groups of user.

The research and policy officer had to inform senior managers of the outcome of research activities for the preparation of service objectives and priorities, and when, unexpectedly,

also this officer became a victim of staff cuts, his work was taken over directly by a component of the senior management who set up a specific research project team:

> "*I have a group called a research forum made up of people from different parts of the service and all that information will go to them, be shared ... the people involved are managers of particular services, in central library or from community libraries, library manager or regional librarian, principle officer of lending and library services, their job is to represent the interests and needs of different aspects of the service so that between us, the group has an overview of the library service as a whole and they can speak on behalf of their colleagues in their respective areas as to what might be more important kinds of research to undertake.*" (Head of Central Library)

The manager-librarians judged the use of research to discover user needs positively. It was maintained that, unlike in the past, useful information could be gathered about how users see librarians, how they use the service and what they think of the service offered. Thanks to user survey information, one Regional Library Manager pointed out, it was possible "*when we're looking to make budget reductions and looking at what people value about the service and how they used it*" to 'invest' in one service rather than in another. From this perspective, although less positively, another respondent stressed that the main reason for doing surveys was certainly to achieve sharper focus on user requirements, nevertheless, he argued, that that "*does not necessarily always mean responding to their needs*". The true aim, he continued, was the desire to narrowly specify service provision on the basis of explicit user requests and the resources available, but to the detriment of the library's democratic role to offer a broad range of materials. Furthermore, it was lamented that professional judgement alone was no longer sufficient to interpret user demands, as these had now to be backed up by statistics:

> "*Some people on the counter at the service points may even be better at this than some in higher authorities, who are not so close to the actual sharp end .... maybe the research confirms, as much as anything else, what you already know but I'm afraid these days gut feeling is not taken as gospel, you've got to have the research to back it up, to present the evidence to higher authority, not in the library but in the council itself ... it's very sad that people who have got professional expertise built up over many years, and there are many of us, although increasingly fewer of us, our opinions are not taken into account to the same extent as they were in the past and used ... we*

have to have physical evidence, ... it's not using that expertise which has been built up within the staff if you've got to do a survey to find out something most of your senior staff can tell you and I'm not blaming our management, I think it's beyond that." (Head of Service)

The central function of user surveying served to enable the precise determination of priorities and effective targeting of financial resources both locally and citywide. This practice not only allowed Birmingham libraries to control spending and to provide a more narrowly defined range of services, but also demonstrated their conformity to Public Library Policy and Planning Guidance Notes defined by the DNH. It appears that the library service committee and managers consented to central government's proposal of pursuing 'customer consultation'[1] in the definition of explicit service standards, relegating to a secondary role, however, librarians' professional judgement. In defence of librarians' expert judgement in defining user needs, the Library Association had emphasised the importance of assuring consultation with both customers and staff to ensure that the library's commitments were relevant to individual needs and to the interests of the communities. In order to prevent the public library from becoming a mere commercial operation governed by market values, the Library Association argued, it was necessary not only to take into account user demands but also minority interests. To this purpose the role of expert librarians was irreplaceable. The charter approach, from which the customer service culture was drawn, could only work, the Library Association maintained, in organisations which valued professional librarians and consulted with them. It did not emerge from the views gathered that Birmingham Libraries provided such assurance.

7.3.5 Implementing and promoting services

Now that professional-management work has been examined in relation to the primary functions of resource allocation, establishing user needs and service planning, the next step is to analyse how professional expertise is deployed for the implementation and promotion of library services. Within an organisation perfectly attuned to the underlying philosophy of the division of labour in the 'team structure', professional librarians now had minor involvement in the important phase of service provision; they managed the organisation and delivery of library services but they did not manage the day-to-day running of service points, this function was in fact the domain of 'non-professional' staff, the practitioner-librarians. The

[1] One of the seven principles of public service given by the Citizen Charter (1992) was "*evidence that the views of those who use the service have been taken into account in setting standards*".

implementation of planned services, the promotion of new services, the designing of operating procedures and the supervision of assigned work were all tasks carried out by Deputy Community Librarians, Senior Assistant Librarians and Team Librarians under the supervision of Community Librarians and Heads of Service who, with responsibility for groups of libraries or services, were no longer, however, in direct contact with service points.

Senior library managers, who played a strategic role in service planning, were not supposed to have any implication in the direct implementation of services, although in the new set up of the corporate organisation in which libraries operated, even the role of Assistant Director seemed to have changed and her contribution shifted to a more line management level. With the establishment of a departmental management structure above the divisional one, the general structure of authority became more hierarchical and consequently divisional roles were slightly downgraded (this may or may not have been temporary). This interpretation appears to be confirmed by the words of the Ass. Director:

> "*The thinning out of the management structure and what that means in terms of how my role is different from my predecessor where I have many fewer managers to work through and they have to be more hands on in terms of service development; and working with managers more lower down in the hierarchy than perhaps has been the case in the past, I can't afford to be so distant from what's happening to services generally; so I sometimes feel I am pulled in several different directions, I can go from one meeting where I am working at a very corporate level with a chief executive and then the next meeting I might be talking about some very basic things with managers from the middle of the organisation ... I think it's because there's been this anxiety to make savings and because we've been part of this merging of three departments, one of the things that happened was a very big move towards taking out layers of the organisation, we've gone a bit too far and now we've got a dangerously thin management level in terms of simply managing things effectively and efficiently.*" (Ass. Director Libraries and Learning)

The second layer of professional-management, the manager-librarians also stressed that they did not have any direct implication in the phase of implementing services, whereas they might be involved in the promotion of services when that took place at library system level, as "*service development, in a way, is at the sharp end*".

The supervision of planned service implementation was the responsibility of the librarian-managers who had to ensure that service policy was brought to fruition. Community librarians claimed they enjoyed a certain amount of freedom of action when working at local level, although they had to make decisions within the "*guidelines laid down by senior management*" and the staff, materials and resources available. Librarian-managers and practitioner-librarians were also those responsible for collecting user comments and complaints regarding the implementation of new services and procedures. It was observed that sometimes operating procedures, which were introduced at local level, clashed with service policy defined at higher level. The reason for this tension often derived from the element of financial control, which, according to many community librarians, tended to override any other element contained in a service programme. The pressure exerted on libraries to raise money was perceived as a source of contrast to the implementation of certain service policies directed at improving the quality of people's lives in the community. This argument was explained by one respondent who pointed out that it was not coherent to have an anti-poverty strategy, directed at people on limited and low income, and to then decide to extend charges and fines to senior citizens.

> "*the two things are contradicting each other ... it can be said, yes in the bigger picture the actual figure this low level of fines generates, helps us provide better services for other people who need ... but the two things are still not following the same principle, it's a double speak to say support people on low incomes by fining them, take some money away from them, so we can support them better*" (Community Librarian)

On the matter of who established the guidelines and regulations for carrying out operational tasks, it emerged that service policy was designed to make working standards and procedures as homogeneous as possible and therefore guidelines and regulations were established at central level and had to conform to the rest of the city council. Far from being devised by referring to guidelines developed in professional institutions or associations, occupational standards and procedures were defined by the city council in order to allow for greater standardisation. Once again the reason for this choice seemed to match the logic underpinning the overall idea of efficient management of council services: saving money through flexible use of the staff.

> "*There are things you've got to try and standardise so, it grants flexibility for staff having to move round from service point to service point, you'd need to be fairly*

consistent that everywhere does the standard things in a standard way so you're not creating too much of a problem." (Community Librarian)

Within the general framework of city council regulations it was, then, the senior management who established guidelines for library service operations and procedures often on the occasion of technological innovations and rationalisation of resources. Because of the need to reach greater standardisation and in order to avoid localisms in work practice, guidelines for operational procedures were often laid down without the direct involvement of service providers and their line managers. Rather their definition was based on teamwork as explained by one respondent:

> *"There are a number of specialist committees, they're not usually designated so, they're usually called study groups, these are comprised at the moment of senior library managers, people who are maybe running a region or department in the centre of town plus a senior administrator for that area who would be discussing how we provide (certain services) and quite often these people have input directly into the system, they're not exactly specialists, some of them may be, they establish the guidelines."* (Community Librarian)

One opportunity for the definition of new guidelines was the implementation of the new computer system which obviously implied changes in many library procedures, like issuing books, retrieving information, compiling statistics, etc. which would theoretically have required the opinion and experience of librarian-managers and practitioners. What was, in fact, happening was described by one community librarian:

> *"At the moment the example is the new library management system, unfortunately the people who tend to be consulted are people who have a professional interest in something rather than people who know anything about it so we do get into problems and we are asked to help out, we are consulted on things, but in some cases the people who have been doing it longest and have greatest experience of operating procedures are not listened to. Some of the problems of the new library management system could have been solved well beforehand by listening to people who have had years of experience".* (Community Librarian)

The supervision of standardised procedures was considered routine, thus mainly entrusted to lower managers and practitioner-librarians. Regional managers and faculty managers were

obviously responsible for their staff, but they did not control their day-to-day work, they intervened only if "*something out of the ordinary crops up*" otherwise the community librarians or the heads of service were left to deal with matters. Also librarian-managers did not exercise a direct supervisory role, rather they provided "*managerial supervision*" and would usually delegate this kind of work to other staff, as explained by one community librarian:

> "*I have two job share deputies on scale 6 and a scale 4, and in practice it is scale 4 who does all the day to day supervision of the library, problems tend to go to the deputies, it is only when a decision has to be made by me, or in some cases I'm the person designated by senior management as who can decide that.*" (Community Librarian)

Operational procedures, work regulations and guidelines that governed the implementation of library service policy seemed to be very much enforced by bureaucratic standards rather than occupational ones. Also the process of defining procedures and standards depended not so much on professional expertise or experience, but rather on managerial criteria within the broader council policy. The general aim seemed to be maximum standardisation of procedures and standards, which would allow for flexible use of professional staff and not exclusively in the libraries. Neither professional culture nor beliefs, developed in professional institutions, nor professional policies and guidelines, elaborated by professional associations, were seen as relevant to the definition of rules and roles or the assignment of service tasks in the library system. Rather, the guidelines developed by central government on how to promote effectiveness in the public libraries with planning and measuring services appeared to have been fully adopted. To this purpose the former Office of Arts and Libraries had published three documents: "*A costing system for public libraries*" (1987), "*Key to success: performance indicators for public libraries*" (1990) and "*Setting objectives for public library services*" (1991) [2]. The shift in the balance between occupational standards and external administrative and managerial standards was clearly in favour of the latter. Another unequivocal sign of the loss of control over the division of labour by professional-manager librarians.

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[2] Office of Arts and Libraries, *A costing system for public libraries*. Library Information Services N. 17, HMSO 1987; Office of Arts and Libraries, *Key to success: performance indicators for public libraries*. Library Information Services N. 18, HMSO 1990; Office of Arts and Libraries, *Setting objectives for public library services*. Library Information Services N. 19, HMSO 1991

7.3.6 Reference and selection of new materials

Senior managers and middle-managers said over and over again, during the interviews, that reference work and selection of new materials had to be accomplished by "*people working at the sharp end*", meaning the work of the librarians who had to manage and actually provide the services. Reference and selection stood as the last bulwarks of traditional professional tasks. For decades librarians based their claim to professionalism on the possession of specialised knowledge to apply to these two tasks. According to this claim, reference work allows professional librarians to demonstrate their control over the delivery of services in their relationship with the users. The user goes to the reference librarian with certain 'expressed' information needs and the professional translates the expressed need into an effective need. In order to fulfil this task, librarians have always placed considerable emphasis on the professional skills in understanding and defining user needs and in identifying and accessing the various sources of information. Selection, like reference has always been indicated as a central professional task. Deciding what does or does not go into the collection requires a great deal of knowledge of the field covered, of user needs, of the current state of the collection. However, the processes for the identification of user needs and the process for stock planning adopted in Birmingham left some doubts as to whether the professional expertise of librarians was employed to any great extent. Standardised procedures for establishing user needs and for acquiring new materials seemed, in fact, to have had priority over librarians' professional judgement.

All the heads of service and community librarians met weekly (monthly for children's books) in order to choose the books they wished to purchase from the "approvals display". It was a very efficient system: the books chosen were immediately catalogued by the bibliographic service which then passed on full details to the library supplier who delivered the catalogued books directly to community libraries and information service points. The actual cataloguing was done by a small group of experienced people (six in total for the whole library system!) who were not, however, professional librarians. This was possible thanks to the type of contract that the bibliographic service had established with the library supplier as explained by the head of this service:

> "*We don't formally contract cataloguing out, what we do is from our suppliers we receive free of charge a catalogue tape, which basically means we can catalogue books faster because the data is already there. It comes from the library supply*

company, they actually do the cataloguing themselves, they would argue that the records they're providing are at least as good as the ones we could get from the British Library, so they are quite good records. So what they do is they provide us with a set of books from which we select each week, as well as provide us with the magnetic tape of catalogue data which corresponds to those approved services, so when we want to catalogue, we can call up the record from our data base, it's already there, because we've already loaded that data on. It means we can work faster, so we've needed fewer cataloguing staff over the years". (Head of Bibliographic Service)

Librarian-managers were actually responsible for the selection of new materials, and were allowed to have a fair amount of flexibility, although they had to stick to what had already been decided in the stock planning. The acquisition process dictated the boundaries within which librarians could undertake the task of book selection, as emerged from the following explanation:

"*I actually take the materials fund, decide how much of that I'm spending on various sections of book, stock or materials, in my team for my libraries I do that, but then I ask the views of the providers and suppliers. Because of the way book acquisition and selection operates, we have certain suppliers, so that the structure is there for me to go to and be part of, like on Thursday and Friday I go and select reference and other books every week, children's I select from a bigger list once a month, so it's actually I'm the person who ticks the box.*" (Community Librarian)

The task of selection had not been, however, excluded from the team logic, which provided some concrete advantages for community librarians who could exchange ideas and opinions about new publications and, above all, rationalise purchasing between close regions. This point was emphasised by one community librarian who maintained:

"*I'm in charge of the materials that get bought, and again being part of a team, we work together to make sure that within the geographical area where we're based, there are particular items that maybe I don't want to buy it doesn't fit into my stock plan, it might be something we needed as a team so it would be discussed.*" (Community Librarian)

Notwithstanding that the vast majority of heads of service and community librarians confirmed that book selection was "*definitely their task*", "*that's what librarians are*

supposed to do", "*that's down to me solely*" and in which they felt "*very heavily involved*", a few others did maintain that:

> "*I would lay down general guidelines in terms of collection development policy but it's largely at a level below that the actual selection of material would be done, so it's like a scale 4 to 6 type responsibility*". (Head of Service)

Reference work was highly specialised in varied subject areas in the Central Library, and based on general information in community libraries. Birmingham library users[3] rated the provision of information by expert librarians highly in their expectations of the library service. Senior managers, particularly, emphasised the information role of libraries as an increasingly important factor in the local authority's strategic planning for economic regeneration and development. Indeed the latest technological developments, the idea of the digital library with the diffusion of on-line catalogues and Internet indicated that public libraries had a major role to play in information provision[4]. Despite a general agreement on the importance of librarians' role as information providers, it appeared that reference work was only partially undertaken by the more expert librarians, heads of service and community librarians, who, taken up with their managerial tasks, actually spent less and less time on the enquiry desk, leaving the day-to-day contact with users to their subordinates, the team leaders and the assistant community librarians. Furthermore, reference work also appeared to be regulated by managerial rules, which established the length of time that a librarian had to devote to each enquiry.

> "*Enquiry services are free unless they go beyond 30 minutes when it becomes research and we're allowed to charge 15 pounds an hour, but that's an exception*". (Team Leader)

From the comments gathered it seems that the technical knowledge of professional librarians could only play a small role in the attempt to defend an occupational form of control over library work. Many of the technical skills of librarianship had either become the domain of non-professional staff or had been subject to great standardisation. Only the functions of

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[3] Birmingham Libraries, *Citywide libraries survey: summary of results*, Birmingham City Council: Department of Leisure and Community Services, March 1994

[4] In 1997 the Library and Information Commission launched a project, later supported by the new labour government, called New Library: People's Network, which gave a new impulse to public libraries' information role. It proposed that public libraries should be connected to a national digital network, giving them a fundamental role as mediators of electronic contents and gateways to a vast wealth of online information.

selection and reference had been left to professional librarians, who could, however, use their professional expertise only to a limited extent in the fulfilment of these tasks, once central to their professional work. The other three linked tasks of acquisition, processing and cataloguing had been either delegated to non-professional staff or contracted out to external agencies. The whole process of management and monitoring of library service provision was evidently based on managerial practice where the technical/operational side of work was sharply separated out and relegated to the status of non-professional routine tasks. Professional librarians had no chance to resist the request to take on managerial skills because to solely maintain professional-technical functions would have meant accepting the risk of a rapid devaluation of their job. The next paragraph examines how the professional librarians interviewed perceived the skills and competence needed to carry out their new tasks.

7.3.7 Librarians' difficult choice: managerial skills Vs professional skills

There are two recurrent themes that come to the fore on reading the comments and descriptions of librarians' professional skills. The first is the impressive range of skills that are usually attributed to librarians as indispensable features to successfully keep pace with change and the second is that the most important of these abilities is the need to adapt and respond to change itself. One authoritative example comes from the national review[5] of public libraries, which has peremptorily stated that librarians need to develop 'multiple skills' in response to social and technological changes in public library service. The positive aspect of this elevated responsibility of librarians is that it finally seems that the old image of the shy, reserved, although knowledgeable librarian has given way to the dynamic and pro-active librarian of today's society. The personal qualities that are put at premium by employers and library users, the same research maintains, are those in contrast with the stereotypical librarian. Therefore the ability to deal with all kinds of people is considered foremost; in fact, communication and interpersonal skills are two of the abilities most required of today's librarian. To these abilities, one must add other professional skills, which are not always fully recognised, these are librarians' understanding of the collections, their ability to deal with enquiries and to organise and disseminate information in the service of maintaining access to knowledge.

[5] *Review of the public library service in England and Wales*, op. cit. 1995, p. 243

These latter, traditional librarians' skills, although viewed as relevant by the people interviewed for this study, were to some extent set aside to give more emphasis to a number of additional managerial skills. In the division of labour in the team structure of Birmingham public libraries, it was considered fundamental that professional librarians possessed the ability to plan and set priorities, to understand political change; as well as other managerial and analytical skills like the ability to manage acquisitions and deploy resources, to promote library and information services; and to understand user and non-user need. Senior managers stressed the importance of being able to actually "*sell the service you are representing to other people whether it is politicians or the other officers of the city council or to general customers*". Above all, the Ass. Director argued, it is necessary to have a certain amount of political understanding.

> "*I didn't have direct contact with politicians very much until I got this job and in a year I've learnt a tremendous amount about dealing with politicians, seeing what's difficult I think for people in professions is to see their activities as politicians see them rather than as professionals see them and you have to shift your perspective quite a lot otherwise you're going to end up getting into trouble either by doing something which cuts straight across what the politicians expect from you or just by being blind to the fact that they have a slightly different agenda and in the end it's their agenda, if you cut across their agenda you're going to have problems for yourself and for the service*". (Ass. Director)

This view was echoed by another respondent, who stressed that in her job, she now needed:

> "*Much more awareness of politicians and politics and since we've been in this new structure much more as well because our new department is far more politically aware and cares much more about the impact on politicians then we ever did as a library department. It's being aware of what we do and the impact it will have, the impact they will see it having; being aware of things they like and don't like and then tailoring what you say to fit in with their known ways of working.*" (Regional Library Manager)

The Head of Central Library indicated the ability to think ahead, to plan and identify priorities as the most important skills for a senior manager who is responsible for setting strategies and managing budgets. Leadership skills were considered as other necessary abilities for those professional managers who needed to give instructions and motivate staff; particularly at a high level, professional library managers had to be able to understand

political priorities in order to transform them into operational objectives and to ensure that lower managers would keep that political input for the implementation of services. General management competences like stock management and project planning were claimed to be necessary for every librarian who was involved in the management of service provision "*so that you know how to manage things that have a beginning and an end*", as well as "*a certain amount of negotiating skills when dealing with outside contractors and suppliers*", in order to get the best deal possible, both in financial terms and in service terms.

What generally emerged from the respondents' remarks was that the profession of librarian had become more complicated compared to the past, because now they had to take care of a diversity of issues related not just to the service, but also to staff, buildings and financial problems, furthermore they were required to follow different projects in which they might be involved as team leaders.

Acquiring so many new managerial skills, one respondent argued, had meant giving up many of the traditional professional skills:

> "*I have become deskilled in things I particularly took pride in some years ago like stock development and stock management, selecting materials, performance indicators computer issue systems, I'm completely deskilled in many of those areas now because I've moved on and away from them.*" (Regional Librarian)

Some librarians revealed their reluctance at the idea of completely abandoning the old skills to develop the new ones, although this fear was not apparently shared by all, as the following comment shows:

> "*In a place like the reference library here which is a vast organisation with a lot of stock, then subject expertise and years of experience do count for an awful lot, although I'm not sure certain other people in the organisation have that same sort of opinion.*" (Head of Service)

In fact, other librarians felt that in their new position as heads of service they mainly needed leadership skills and subject knowledge was not "*as important as it used to be. That is a big difference over the last few years, because at one time, if you were in charge of a particular section it was also widely assumed, you were the person who had the most knowledge of everything that went on, all the resources within that section, it was almost as if you couldn't*

provide leadership unless you had that knowledge, that's disappeared to a great extent, so it's those e qualities like motivational and communication qualities that are most significant plus basic efficiency." (Head of Service)

Indeed the internal conflict between the professional and the managerial side of an occupation which clearly comprised both, was perceived as the prime concern by many librarians who, however, realised that taking on managerial skills could mean the only possible way to improve their economic and occupational status. The acquisition of managerial skills did not, in fact, necessarily mean losing identity as librarians, provided that professional values and skills continued to cohabit with the new managerial ones. The real risk of losing identity could derive from the adoption of purely managerial skills to be used in the development of business-like services, which were now part of a large corporate organisation where the profession of librarian was one among other competitive professions. The importance of maintaining an awareness of librarians' professional culture and beliefs in order to resist complete bureaucratisation of the profession as a consequence of the merger of the library service into a wider department was underlined by the Assistant Director:

> *"I've moved quite along way from the profession to managerial status and sometimes there is a conflict between the two and you have to decide which side you're standing on at any particular time and sometimes sticking with professional values can cut across what's seen as managerial competencies and that can be a real problem and I think that's the big leap you make when you move from a specialist area ... to basically being the chief officer for a service where you are there to manage all the conflicting needs of a service and you have to stand back a little from the professional issues, although I think it's wrong to forget those professional commitments because you are there as the person representing your profession within the overall range of services within the city council."* (Ass. Director)

It appears from these comments, that the threat of deprofessionalisation for public librarianship did not come from the first wave of change which, for professional librarians, had meant assuming a more managerial role with a consequent new internal stratification of their occupation. On the contrary, that first change had represented a phase of the process, which Freidson (1973, 1986) so clearly described, of rational co-ordination of the division of labour where librarians seemed, however, to remain the dominant profession. With the establishment of the team structure, professional librarians abandoned the traditional skills

for the new managerial ones, but in the new and more flexible division of labour a form of occupational authority, and not an external bureaucratic authority, determined the content of library service and the way it had to be catered for. Work tasks were controlled by those who actually performed the productive labour. Although the introduction of the team management structure had meant a substantial shift from the previous work arrangements and status of professional librarians, this shift was the product of internal dynamics brought about by organisational change, and had not meant for librarians the loss of control over their profession.

What really undermined the status of professional librarians was the second wave of change brought about by external economic and political pressure, which led the library service to become part of a larger department together with two other council services. It was at that point that professional librarians, who had not had sufficient time to consolidate their commitment to the team structure, worried by heavy staff losses and weakened in their new incomplete role as managers, found themselves in great risk of deprofessionalisation. In the new corporate organisation they were no longer the dominant profession but had to compete with other occupations, and the control over work had passed on to a new 'external' managerial structure which became the main interface with the political power and which based the management of services on standardised procedures and rules developed by bodies relating to central government.

Professional librarians found themselves not only psychologically unprepared to face the threat of deprofessionalisation but also lacking the necessary unity which is usually based on shared values and beliefs acquired in schools and enforced in work where a common body of knowledge is put into practice. The need to recreate the ties between work practice, formal education and training can be evinced from the words of one respondent who argued:

> "*The sort of skills that are needed are different from the sort of skills I was taught at library school, the higher up you get, the more it becomes a management job rather than a library job, the main skill I need in this particular post is staff management and people management, which they don't do a lot of at library school.*" (Community Librarian)

Systems of recruitment, formal education, training and qualifications have a major role in creating a common professional identity and colleague cohesion which, as stressed by Abbott (1991), seemed the only hope to resist to the trend of bureaucratisation which risked

transforming a long standing profession into a generic council service occupation. In the following section, attention is focused on individual stories of recruitment and professional education in order to draw from those interviewed a picture of the changing status of librarian's professional knowledge.

7.4 Recruitment, formal education and qualification

Entry to the profession, job mobility, and career patterns for public librarians have changed considerably during the last thirty years. From the vigour of the sixties and the seventies, the labour market for public librarians went through a phase of weariness during the eighties to finally become moribund in the nineties. This trend was mirrored by the experiences of the thirty professional librarians interviewed, who although they could not be taken as a representative sample at national level, certainly were so, as explained in the methodology chapter, for the entire professional workforce employed in Birmingham public libraries. Twenty-six of the librarians interviewed entered the profession between the sixties and the end of the seventies, and only four during the eighties. Nobody was recruited in the nineties. Specifically, in Birmingham the last two qualified librarians to actually occupy a professional post were appointed in 1990.

For twenty of the librarians selected, the Birmingham public library system represented the first job. The majority of those who came to Birmingham for their second professional post were appointed in the most recent years. Only three out of thirty had had earlier work experience in a university library. All the others had never worked in libraries other then public libraries. Although all the thirty interviewees had entered the profession as Library Assistant, those appointed by Birmingham authority in the sixties and in the seventies had had a more articulated career development, some going through all professional stages up to the higher ranks. Also those employed in Birmingham in the first half of the eighties had enjoyed good career opportunities, however unlike their older colleagues, they had been selected because of their specialisation, as in the case of, for example, the ethnic minority librarian, the bibliographic service manager and the audiovisual resources librarian. For those who were recruited after the second half of the eighties, professional advancement became very difficult and almost rare.

According to the view of many respondents, the whole Birmingham libraries professional workforce was relatively young; there were only two or three people who were just over 50 as the recent restructurings had led the older librarians to take voluntary redundancy.

Furthermore, they pointed out that there were also very few professionals who were less than 35, in fact the large majority of the interviewees aged between 39 and 49 which confirms the greater chances of employment for those who had wanted to enter the profession in the seventies. Moreover, the majority of the 17 female librarians interviewed had been recruited in more recent years, whereas male librarians were more numerous among those who entered the profession in the sixties and the seventies.

Another general element that could be of some interest is the fact that those with higher university qualifications are those who entered the professions in later years and who also had less opportunity for career advancement, in fact the majority of those who possessed a postgraduate diploma entered the professions from the late seventies onward. This latter trend had obviously been the result of changes in the educational routes to enter the profession that had occurred over the years and culminating with the renunciation by the Library Association of the monopoly over professional qualifications thus allowing Universities to run autonomous courses in librarianship. In the following sections these general trends are described in more detail, drawing on the individual experiences and perceptions of the professional librarians interviewed.

7.4.1 In the sixties

In the sixties public libraries enjoyed a period of great expansion. They became part of central and local government policies to ensure that everybody in the community had equal access to knowledge and education, as well as to other social and health services. Therefore, for those who, at that time, decided to embark upon a career in public librarianship, not only was it an easy task to be appointed by the city council, but it was not even necessary to undertake a long period of education and training.

> "*In those days, you just wrote in and said you're interested in the city council, unlike today where specific posts are advertised. Then you just applied and got interviewed, there must have been 30 or 40 people on my induction course, and they recruited that every September. It was a time of great expansion of library services.*" (Community Librarian)

At that time, future librarians often went to libraries straight from school at the age of 17-18, where they had to acquire, on average, three years of work experience before being allowed to attend a two year course in a library school in order to qualify as professional librarian. All

those interviewed who had been appointed by Birmingham libraries in the sixties, had gone to library school with a traineeship programme through which they attended a qualifying course organised by the Library Association, either simply on job leave or on a full salary; in both cases their post was guaranteed when they came back. It was very much a vocational scheme aimed at acquiring all the necessary skills to exercise the profession. During the first compulsory period of work experience, professional candidates were able to learn different aspects of professional practice and to get to know different sections of the library and when they came back the chances of career development were significant. How the system worked is well explained by the words of one respondent:

> "*I came into Birmingham libraries as a graduate trainee, something we don't have these days, you got a lot more money as salary and you got a training package which included going to library school. In the 60 and 70's there were a number of posts each year for which you could compete and if you won one you got a salary, which was half as much again as if you'd just started in the library service. You got sent to library school to study and a salary paid while you were doing this, so you didn't have to apply for a grant, because the process to be a chartered librarian involves some study at library school and some supervised work in libraries, you then got a special package of training where you were given experience in various sorts of departments in a structured sort of way and so on, it was something some city councils just thought was worth doing, if you got one of these you were required to stay with that library for two years after you qualified.*" (Head of Service)

Library authorities were so convinced of the important role of professionally trained librarians for the development of services and for the identification and solution of community and user needs that they tried to support their recruits as much as possible in helping them to get the necessary training and qualifications. In fact, for those who, for some reason, could not access a fully paid salary traineeship, the library authority offered alternative opportunities. New entrants were allowed to attend library schools on what was then known as a 'sandwich course' that is a six-month librarianship course alternated with six months work in the library for a period of three years. Both methods of obtaining professional qualifications allowed librarians to start a florid career in librarianship, as one interviewee emphasised:

"I joined in 1961, worked as a library assistant in various community libraries and I spent about six months in the reference library and then I decided to get qualified so I went to Liverpool library school and in those days they did a 'sandwich course', so for three years I spent from July to December in Liverpool and came back and worked from January to June in Birmingham library and that started me up the ladder, I was given a promotion fairly rapidly, and I was lucky doing a sandwich course because I was studying and moving up a bit almost as a logical progression." (Community Librarian)

After the Public Libraries and Museums Act came into force in 1964, the Library Association introduced a new qualifying system for accessing professional posts which allowed university institutions to award their own qualifying degrees without any further approval by the Library Association. For a few years the two systems worked together, students could enter library schools from either sixth form college or from university, if they had taken a degree in another subject. When the Library Association finally decided to give up its role as examiner and hand it over to the Council for National Academic Awards, it started off with a postgraduate diploma in librarianship as a form of qualification. It was an ephemeral attempt to keep the interest of librarians alive in applying for the Chartership scheme. Soon after, universities introduced their own postgraduate diplomas in Librarianship, which later became Information and Library Studies Diploma.

7.4.2 In the seventies

From the beginning up to the end of the seventies, job opportunities for public librarians were still very high in Birmingham, the expansion of the services fostered by local government reorganisation brought about major investments in public libraries, the most important of which was the opening of the new Central Library in 1975. Widespread education, the increase in library users and the central role of libraries as a community service meant further development in library services, particularly those concerned with education and culture. An expert workforce was then required to develop information and reference services in the central library and promotion of children's reading as well as adult learning in the branch libraries. In some occasions it was simply sufficient to apply for a job in the city council in order to be employed, as one of the respondents remarked:

"I wrote a letter to city council saying I would like to work in the library and they invited me for an interview, no post was specified, just a general thing, trained scantily

by the council, I had an induction course, an introduction to how the city council worked really, ... most of it was on the job training, not as structured as it is now. City council paid in the sense that I had a grant but not library services, I didn't have a traineeship where they pay your salary, because I think they'd stopped doing it at that point." (Team Leader)

From now onwards more and more of the new entrants to the profession were university graduates in a specific subject or graduates with a specific postgraduate diploma, for whom a career in public libraries continued to reserve high opportunities for advancement. Libraries still represented a good job opportunity for those who had graduated in a humanistic subject but who had rejected the teaching profession and with a one-year postgraduate course in librarianship they could gain the necessary qualification. It was no longer possible to go to library school on a paid traineeship scheme, however new recruits were allowed to obtain professional qualifications on a year's leave of absence, as in the case of the following respondent:

"I started working for Birmingham in 1974 when I left university, I've got a degree in English. So I started off as the Shakespeare Library junior and I did that for nine months before I went to library school, and I did nine months postgraduate qualification in librarianship. They gave me leave of absence, they didn't pay me but they kept my job for me. At that time, the postgraduate qualification was awarded by the Library Association. I then came back and went to work in a community library where I stayed for six months and got promotion, back to Central Library, I worked as an assistant librarian in philosophy and religion for about 18 months, then I got promotion out in the community libraries which is where I stayed ever since. In 1989 I was promoted to area librarian and since then I've had two changes of title and the role changed slightly, without actually moving, I stayed in the same place, and looked after a different range of libraries, I was then a regional librarian and then last year I was appointed regional library manager." (Regional Library Manager)

Towards the end of the seventies, the economic recession started to bite and access to the profession and career advancement became harder. In the meantime, managerial skills became more and more essential if librarians wanted to occupy a higher position in the hierarchy. Professional advancement became more competitive and the simple possession of the Library Association diploma, although coupled by Chartership status, was no longer

considered sufficient to improve one's position in the library. Some librarians holding the old professional qualification accepted to convert it by undertaking part time courses in order to obtain a university degree in Information and Library Studies. Others renounced further advancement and blamed the Library Association for having deceived the promise made by changing educational patterns.

> "*When I went to Liverpool (Library School) the then education officer of the Library Association assured us that whatever course we did was equivalent to a second degree, then for many years I was a member of the Library Association but they then decided in their wisdom that they were going to have a degree profession and all those people with ALA 's could do another course to upgrade their professional qualification to degree level, which is not what we were told in the beginning, and I began to think well if this is what a professional organisation thinks of its own professional qualification are they worth bothering about, I think the Library Association in its quest to become a degree profession abdicated most of their responsibilities, they let library schools set up their own courses, as far as I could see with no supervision, everybody was doing something different and I came to the conclusion, they didn't think a great deal of their own profession, that was my reason for getting out.*" (Community Librarian)

In order to maintain and improve cultural legitimation of the Chartership status, the Library Association had to decide to introduce longer and more rigorous training. Candidates had to take an accredited degree or a postgraduate diploma in library and information studies and then complete a one-year approved training programme finalised to the realisation of a professional development report. However since associateship was separate from the qualifying process, more and more librarians did not bother to go for charter status. It was not necessary to have the title to enter the profession and many employers did not even consider it important for career advancement. Rather it became increasingly important to possess managerial skills, therefore it appeared more convenient for those more ambitious librarians who wanted to progress, to undertake postgraduate courses finalised to a degree in public service management or business administration.

7.4.3 In the eighties

In the eighties, the "golden age" when it sufficed to simply send a letter to the city council to get a job and be allowed to attend a paid course in order to gain professional skills and

status, seemed a distant nostalgic memory. Appointments in public libraries became increasingly rare and were targeted at the employment of personnel already in possession of specific skills and experience. Computer skills, specific managerial skills, specific service skills were now indispensable to access a professional post, whereas professional qualifications were considered as base requirements to enter the profession. Career advancement was no longer an automatic process finalised at the internal professional development of the library workforce, rather it became highly competitive, given the scarcity of posts available and the unwillingness of local authority to fill vacancies in order to achieve staff budget savings. One of the respondents who had taken all the necessary steps to ensure a career in librarianship and who finally managed to be appointed in Birmingham provides a good example of the difficult circumstances of that time:

> "*I'm qualified but not chartered, it's not that it's not important, the reason why is... Birmingham library services don't specify in their job descriptions that you have to be chartered. In 1983 I worked for a year in the university library in Birmingham and then I took my postgraduate diploma (in Information and Library Studies) in 1984 completed that 1985. I was then unemployed for two years between 1985 and 1987 and I applied for lots of posts, all in libraries, most of them in public libraries. Then I got a job as a library assistant at Handsworth library (a Birmingham community library) in 1987 where I am now. The Handsworth job was a temporary post for 6 months, they interviewed me and I got it and then a permanent post came up. So I've been at Handsworth since 1987, for 8 years, I am now acting community librarian but I will go back to assistant community librarian.*" (Ass. Community Librarian)

Similarly the youngest of the people interviewed who had taken a degree in Librarianship and Information Science in 1987 and then also Chartership in 1989, although she had managed to be appointed in 1990 to work for library services at home as deputy, on her career prospects after 5 years merely remarked "*I am still there*". It was easier to be appointed and progress in their career for those who had had the opportunity to specialise in computer systems, as in the case, for example, of a former community librarian who said that:

"In 1983 I became part of the computer team, then I became co-ordinator for service monitoring, looking after cataloguing, acquisition and inter-library loans, and from there I came here as material acquisition manager."

or for those who had transferable skills preferably relevant to the scientific management of the library service, as in the case of the bibliographic service manager who had had no problem in finding highly rewarded posts in different libraries, and not solely public libraries:

"As a professional librarian I've worked in 3 institutions, I worked in 2 academic libraries before now both within the general bibliographic services area, when I came to Birmingham, it was the first public library I'd worked in professionally, that was 8 years ago, I came in the general management planning ... which I did for 4 years, and then I moved across into this area specifically." (Head of Bibliographic Services)

By the end of the eighties the labour market for public librarians was in a profound crisis and the profession's lack of legal and economic status made librarianship more vulnerable to the changed attitude of local government which became increasingly reluctant to employ professionally qualified librarians for the day-to-day management of library service points. Furthermore, the general acceptance of professional definitions, principles and standards by politicians and administrators which had characterised the organisation and delivery of library services in the sixties and the seventies disappeared in the eighties and was replaced by broad trust in management and information technology theories and techniques. Following the devaluation of professional associateship, professional qualifications also entered a period of crisis. On the one hand, it was not unusual to encounter arguments based on the idea that librarians do not need a specific professional qualification to take on their tasks in public libraries, on the other hand students became more and more attracted by the new prospects of a career in other areas of the profession.

7.4.4 In the nineties

In recent years, most of the library schools in the country stopped including public librarianship as a separate specialisation in their programmes of study because of the scarcity of the jobs available in that sector. Very few students who graduated in Library and Information Studies in the late eighties ended up working in public libraries, preferring

to go into other areas of librarianship, like school libraries, health and medical libraries, and more recently also industrial libraries and legal companies. Public libraries were perceived by students as not being a very good job opportunity because there was little movement and the publicity around the increasing number of closing libraries did not help to raise this profile. For this reason many of the sixteen departments which ran courses in library and information science no longer looked at public libraries as a real market at all, and preferred to propose public librarianship as part of other courses.

At the local University of Central England, for example, students were offered a three-year undergraduate course, which covered the core areas of library management, information and resources, and information technology. Within this course, students were also encouraged to opt for a particular pathway, one of which was public librarianship; others were academic librarianship, school and university librarianship. The course was unique in that it included an extended paid placement, so that students could actually go out and work in libraries for nine months from April of the second year through to December of the third year. However, the Head of Information and Library Studies explained, that it had become difficult for students to find suitable placements in public libraries, as they no longer had the funds to cover salaries for students on work placements for that length of time. The result of this was that for that year, 1995, only 1 student out of 35 was able to get on the job experience in a public library. Indeed, this was the first placement that had been accepted by Birmingham libraries for some time due to "*money being tight over the last 3 years*". Nevertheless, the Head of Information and Library Studies was eager to emphasise the close links with the library service thanks to staff training, although this later emerged in the interview to also be in steady decrease due to lack of funds and consequently an increasing amount of training was handled internally within Birmingham libraries in order to restrict training costs.

The virtual immobility of the job market, the worsening of career prospects and the devaluation of professional qualifications, in the nineties, had finally had a negative effect on the whole educational pattern for future public librarians. Not only were professional qualifications not considered necessary to access those posts designated to fulfil professional-technical tasks, but they were also not judged essential for appointment to professional-managerial posts. On the one hand, professionally qualified librarians were no longer appointed for the lower graded posts, on the other hand, librarianship qualifications were not required to access higher grades. In Birmingham, for example, one interviewee

explained they had a "*fairly strict recruitment procedures*" which related personal specifications to job descriptions. There were two elements of the personal specifications, those considered *essential* and those *desirable*; a qualification in librarianship fell into the latter category insofar it was not seen as "*essential for all professional posts, it's desirable, but it is argued that it is against equal opportunities because you are ruling out people who haven't elsewhere*". Whatever the real reason was for considering educational qualifications in librarianship "not essential" to access certain grades, some respondents had experienced it, as in the case of the following:

> "*When this job was advertised, they did not insist on professional librarian and staff were very concerned about that and I think they were right, ... you need a professional background to do this job, if you're going to organise library co-operation, you need to know about libraries.*" (Director Regional Library System)

At the other end of librarians' occupational ladder existed the same sort of ban against professional credentials:

> "*We don't appoint professional librarians to lower graded posts, we have a cut off point at scale 4 in this building (Central Library), and scale 4 to 6 in community libraries and we will not appoint a professional librarian to those lower graded posts, although if they have a degree in librarianship we won't appoint them, if they have a degree in anything else, we quite happily will appoint them to these lower grade posts.*" (Regional Library Manager)

With all entries to the profession of public librarianship blocked for qualified librarians it is not surprising that students deserted courses in public libraries preferring other areas of specialisation. Furthermore it became harder and harder for the Library and Information Science Departments to justify the choice of keeping courses alive in public libraries to their colleagues of other departments, in a period were universities were obviously not immune to the logic of competition and cost-effectiveness. The devaluation of librarians' technical knowledge and the increasing emphasis on a managerial knowledge, which did not need any support from technical librarianship in order to be applied in the development and provision of the library service had finally had an impact on the educational patterns for librarians. By the mid nineties there were proposals to introduce National Vocational Qualifications also in librarianship, this then stimulated interesting discussion at a national level as to which levels should be made available for NVQs in this field. Whereas it was

taken for granted that degree level - level four in the NVQ system - would be available, there were differing opinions as to whether it was necessary to include further levels – in this case level five – so that NVQ's in librarianship would be possible up to postgraduate level. Here the dichotomy between managerial skills and professional skills came to the fore, as succinctly explained by one interviewee, who was acutely aware of the repercussions of this debate on professional education.

> *"They were talking about introducing a level 5 NVQ, which is postgraduate, which is interesting because they were saying should there be one in librarianship? or at that level are we talking about management? and there are NVQ's in management, at level 5, so do we actually need them in librarianship? Can we justify them? Is there sufficient specific work professionally related to librarianship at postgraduate level? or is it basically that once you've got to level 4 at degree level, <u>that's it as far as professional issues are concerned</u>. After that what you're looking at are management skills and abilities, which is really interesting because there are 2 bodies of opinion, you've got one saying postgraduate qualifications in librarianship should be converted somehow, nobody's entirely sure, into some kind of NVQ and a considerable number of people say no, you don't need that it's just management and I have to admit that now most of what I do, you <u>wouldn't require a professional qualification</u> to do"*. (Regional Library Manager)

The exclusion of professionalising curricula from official courses in librarianship was the last devastating effect of the overwhelming thrust of bureaucratisation, primed by political and economic forces, which now appeared able to sweep away the resistance to external control built up industriously by librarians over a number of years. The loss of the monopoly over professional knowledge was the first of a series of submissions that brought about the devaluation of Chartership status and finally of educational credentials themselves. The attempt to resist bureaucratisation had functioned as long as librarians managed to include managerial knowledge within the domain of their professional education and accepted the standardisation of certain technical skills by devolving them to para-professionals. Once the imposition of a new managerial culture had transformed the heteronomous organisation of the public library, where librarians were, however, the dominant profession, into a large corporate organisation and work arrangements and procedures were developed according to non-occupational standards, any attempt to maintain control over work by librarians proved ineffective. Recruitment became solely the

domain of administrative procedures and individual prestige and rewards were linked to attributes other than professional skills and expertise. With the weakening of the 'alliance' between local government and professionally qualified officers, the legitimation of the individual and the collective authority of public librarians, once guaranteed by the acceptance of educational credentials and occupational standards by council administrators and politicians, now rested on librarians' contributions to the effective management of the corporate organisation.

This trend is described by sociological theory of the occupations as deprofessionalisation, a trend from which the majority of today's professions, operating to a large extent in a condition of organisational dominance, have no escape. However, as Abbott (1991) points out, today's professions can attempt to resist the process of bureaucratisation by relying on occupational cohesion and solidarity. This topic is addressed in the following concluding paragraph of this chapter

7.5 Librarians' professional cohesion

Abbott (1991) argues that the major threats to today's occupations are the increasing commodification and bureaucratisation of professional work. Both these trends underpin the diffused condition of many professions, which today operate in organisations. However, Abbott continues, while commodification leads the "bottom end" of the expert work to become routinised, it also creates new opportunities for the élite of the profession, since in many cases expert commodities are developed and controlled by professionals themselves. As for example in the creation of databases and specialised bibliographies by expert librarians. Also the process of bureaucratisation can, according to Abbott, be minimised by those professions, who might maintain control over the division of expert labour in the work setting, provided that professionals develop a strong sense of colleague solidarity and cohesion. If professionals employed in organisations see themselves as a collective group who take account of each other's actions, interests and beliefs then it is possible to resist the threat of bureaucratisation, also in those heteronomous organisations described by Johnson (1972) where high occupational differentiation keeps group solidarity low. Collective agreement, group cohesion and identification form, Reeves (1980) argues, the normative foundation, which, for librarians, represent the only source of occupational authority. A common culture and way of acting together with a set of shared values and experiences create that occupational solidarity which gives the group certain

strength to control work. On the contrary, if professionals under organisational dominance do not behave like a collectively acting group, they risk becoming a mere disconnected group of individual workers, thus more vulnerable to external control. Common career patterns, common training, and a common body of daily practice play a central role in establishing a common occupational culture, thus forming group cohesion and identity. Involvement in the professional association, its meetings, its policy, its journals and its training proposals represent a few indicators of occupational group cohesion, on which the group of librarians interviewed were asked to express their views.

First of all it has to be stressed that 24 out of the 30 librarians were members of the Library Association and 23 had Charter status. Although subscription to the association was high the general attendance at meetings promoted by the association was low indeed very few comments were openly positive about the Library Association's activities. Rather, negative judgements came from both those 'modernists' who complained that the Library Association "*tends not to live in the real world*", as well as from those more 'old fashioned' members who maintained that the Library Association "*goes off at tangents and sometimes falls short of protecting members interests*". This expressed estrangement of Library Association activities from its member base had resulted in the progressive disinterest of many of the librarians interviewed, who diverted their professional development requirements towards in-house meetings and seminars, as in the emblematic comments of the following respondent:

> "*I don't attend that many professional meetings, I don't feel I would get a lot from them because I've found that there's such scope from within to test your professional ideas because there's such a breadth of opinion within, when I used to attend professional meetings I never felt I particularly got a lot from them so I'm not involved in the profession in that way.*" (Regional Librarian)

Professional meetings organised by the Library Association were perceived by some as of little use for the practical aspects of work in the library, by others as too "*academic*" or too broad either because they tried to cover too much or because they concentrated on "*theoretical issues*". Indeed, the Library Association has a difficult task because it is wedged between being a professional association and having, therefore, to create standards and debate professional issues, and also being a pressure group because libraries are part of the "*whole financial service process*" and sometimes in trying to be one or the other, it was

felt, it falls between the two. Furthermore, not only the majority of the mainstream librarians felt their practical needs and interests found no sounding-board in the Library Association but also those who represented particular sections, such as the Ethnic Minority Librarian, felt that the Library Association did little to support them.

> "*When I got into this field, ethnic, I realised the Library Association didn't really cater for us and we set up our own group, you can have you own group but you cant get into the mainstay of things, you can't influence any policy, you're marginalized ... it's a sad indictment on them that they haven't taken black people seriously enough, they want us to join and pay subscription but we're invisible.*" (Ethnic Minority Librarian)

In sum from the information gathered it emerged that the Library Association tended to address its meetings to specialist professional issues whereas in-house seminars focused on more general managerial issues sometimes proposed by private trainers hired by the city council. Notwithstanding it appeared that the detachment between librarians and the professional association had reached a critical level, it seemed perhaps even more significant to hear from many respondents that training, in general, was no longer an easy option of professional development, compared to the past. Nineteen people out of thirty emphasised the fact that they now had little chance to attend training courses. Typical comments were "*I can't remember the last time I went on a training course*"; or "*I haven't been to many courses over the last years.*"

A similar pattern emerged when the interviewees were questioned on professional journals. The vast majority (16 out of a total 24 who answered this section) claimed that they regularly read the Library Association Record, whereas only a mere 8 could remember reading an article they considered valuable. Comments on the journal articles described them as "*not terribly new*", "*particularly uninspiring*" and indeed the interviewees seemed to find that they had to look elsewhere for information that was now truly relevant to their current professional lives "*The most interesting things I read are not necessarily in the library journals*" and their focus and concern shifted to the corporate organisation "*I'm finding increasingly that of the journal articles I read now, the most interesting articles are more about local government and not specifically about librarianship*". The overall impression from the interviewees' extensive comments was that subscription, like membership, seemed fostered more by force of habit than by a truly active interest and

belief in the professional association and this was supported by the fact that very few of the librarians interviewed on this particular matter (a mere 5 out of 24) contributed to the journal with material of their own. Thus, just as the apparent professional cohesion indicated by the level of membership to the Library Association is then belied by the scarce interest and involvement in the association's activities, so the seeming cultural identity indicated by the high subscription rates to professional journals is belied by the scant regard for and contribution to the material published in the journals.

When asked about how they then viewed their career prospects within the profession of public librarianship, two interesting trends emerged. Of the most experienced librarians interviewed, those who had appeared to have kept faith with a more traditional librarian role (the practitioner librarians as well as many of the most experienced community librarians interviewed) felt very keenly that their career prospects had been "*dramatically*" diminished because there were "*effectively considerably less number of posts*" and indeed some respondents claimed their fears were such that "*given the situation I'd just be happy to hang on to the job I've got*". These fears were likewise shared by the more recent entrants to the profession who saw little hope of career mobility for the future, as the Assistant Community Librarian, on the bottom rung of the professional ladder, commented "*I am an assistant community librarian and I would like now to progress to being a full time community librarian not just covering for somebody, but there just aren't any posts*", in fact the only hope of promotion at the lower professional scales appeared to go necessarily hand in hand with more managerial roles "*I'm on a scale now* (scale 6) *where it's very difficult to progress from, there are very few jobs and even if there are jobs, they tend to be less active, more managerial*".

The other side of this coin was viewed in a more positive light by those librarians, who, having already taken on managerial roles, saw in these more "*transferable* skills" increased chances of employment elsewhere:

> "*now I've actually got this job, it does open door further up, now I have the ability to get a wider range of skills and abilities ... its harder for people lower down the structure, any promotion opportunities tend to be removed because of the budget cuts, whereas now I can look outside and I now have the skills and abilities to make employers elsewhere look at me seriously. In terms of professionals, community librarians, because of the distinct lack of specialist posts and now that there are so*

many other people competing, if there's a promotion possibility, that post tends to be deleted, so they don't got the opportunity and also regional librarians are in the same position." (Regional Library Manager).

Although the overwhelming majority of librarians saw their future career prospects in a very bleak light indeed, half the interviewees, despite their lack of job security, nevertheless believed they would stay in the library profession as long as possible. Again, as much as being spurred by a love of the profession, this belief for many seemed to rest on a kind of resignation, fed by the conviction that experience in public libraries reduced their employment chances "*I'm sort of rutted now, there's nowhere else to go, I would leave public libraries if the right opportunity came along, but with the job record, 15 – 16 years in public libraries, employers wouldn't be likely to take me on*". This conviction cut across the board and was echoed by practitioners and managers alike.

> "*I doubt even now that a senior manager in a public authority library would be appointed to a university library, I'm sure they wouldn't and I think that's rather sad because I don't think those who are recruiting really understand what they're looking for which are general transferable, managerial skills, the ability to deliver personnel, to deliver resources, to deliver strategies rather than some kind of arcane expertise in the profession, so I think they are generally transferable skills but the question is how easily you could convince another employer of that*" (Head of Bibliographic Services).

Comments from the other half of the librarians interviewed ranged from a longing for the opportunity to take early retirement as so many of their colleagues had already done, to a despondent "*Ask me next week!*". The respondents' low expectations as to the prospects of remaining in the occupation was a further indication of librarians' lack of the necessary cohesion and identification with the profession to resist the pressure toward bureaucratisation. Public librarians fell short in each of the variables indicated by Abbott (1991) as important qualities for occupational solidarity, that is a common career pattern, common training and common recruitment experience. Consequently, under the thrust of change, professional librarians appeared a heterogeneous community whose internal referral system seemed to be based more on inter-organisational links than on intra-professional solidarity and cohesion.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the profession of public librarians has been presented and analysed as it appeared through direct observation and through the comments and experiences of the people interviewed. Individual roles and tasks had been identified and the skills perceived as necessary to carry out the relevant duties described. Changes in the professions were emphasised by respondents at all levels of the internal occupational stratification, although the librarians who traditionally carried out technical-professional tasks seemed those most affected by change. All professional librarians were required to take on a managerial role delegating the traditional professional skills to non-professional staff who became responsible for the actual provision of library service. However, this devolution of professional tasks did not seem a mere standardisation of the basic part of professional work, which, having been routinised, was passed on to lesser qualified personnel. The change in the division of expert labour appeared to have a more significant impact since the whole technical work of librarians was deemed 'non-professional', insofar as it was decided that no professional inference was needed. What was once considered professional became routine and passed down to non-professional staff, and the use of abstract knowledge reserved for the exclusive domain of managerial tasks. Professional judgement was no longer considered sufficient to establish user needs as these had to be identified through customer consultation techniques and also the work of reference and selection, although left to the responsibility of professional librarians, seemed to be regulated by managerial rules.

Occupational control over work, which to a certain extent had been possible as long as the library service remained an independent organisation, largely vanished with the merger of the libraries in a wider corporate organisation where co-ordination of individual roles and tasks was now regulated by purely administrative and managerial criteria. Allocation of resources, planning by objectives and identification of user needs became part of the domain of the new managerial structure over which politicians had more direct control. Before the library service restructure, librarians could claim to exercise a certain degree of control over their work on the basis of the acceptance by administrators and politicians of the occupational standards and definitions for the administration of library services. This form of occupational control was based on the normative foundation of librarians' authority, as they lacked the legal and economic power of the more established professions. This authority had three major sources: the educational process which

provided professionals with a common identity and culture; the professional association which developed policies, standards and definitions underlying professional practice; and the worksetting where job descriptions, work arrangements and standards were implemented on the basis of professional education and training. From the information gathered it emerged that the links between these threes sources of normative authority and librarians had weakened to the point of providing very little group cohesion and solidarity. As a consequence, the power to control library work was increasingly placed in the hands of external managers. The legitimacy of librarians' authority to exercise control over work, once ensured by the possession of education credentials and approved training, seemed to lose validity in the eyes of the city council administrators and elected members who entrusted the provision of library service more and more to managerial practices and rules. Variations in the recognition of librarians' means of legitimating their professional work are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 8

CHANGES IN THE PRINCIPLES LEGITIMATING PUBLIC LIBRARIANS' STATUS AND COMPETENCE

8.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses research findings aimed at grasping and understanding possible variations in the principles legitimating the validity of the profession of librarian, that is how librarians define and organise service objectives and policy. Changes in the means of assessment and control of librarians' work in the context of the case study is evaluated by analysing the views and expectations of an external audience concerning librarians' personal characteristics, skills and competence. In particular, the purpose here is to report on and discuss the opinions of key players outside the profession (employers, educators, heads of other major services and senior managers) as to what librarians are and what they ought to be, *what* librarians do, *how* they do it and what they should do to better fulfil their tasks in a rapidly changing environment. To this purpose the chosen group of interviewees assumed particular relevance in the wake of the wave of restructurings which had, among the many other effects on the librarians involved in almost all aspects of their professional role, also brought to the fore the increasing weight of political pressure to which librarians are subject.

For all these reasons it was considered relevant to gather views revealing perceptions of the social image of librarians, of the cultural recognition of their skills and knowledge and of the way librarians deliver services, from those who participate in, or are in a position to influence, the decision-making process, in order to understand what should be, in their opinion, the attributes of a librarian best suited to operate in the changed environment of public library services. Key people's awareness of the social validity of the library profession is considered here a means to legitimate, culturally and politically, librarians' activities: how they define and carry out their work and the beliefs and values on the basis of which they organise and deliver library services. Perceived standards of librarians' competence and performance are also considered extremely important in intimating policy

choices aimed at improving the 'quality' of service on which professional credibility and integrity depend. In sum the aim of this chapter is, on the one hand, to report and discuss key players' perceptions of desirable personal attributes for library and information professionals and, on the other hand, to examine the extent to which librarians' body of knowledge, qualifications, competence and performance conform to the expectations of decision makers, senior managers from other divisions of local service organisation and elected members. In addition to evaluating the match between librarians' requisites and decision makers' expectations this phase of the research also considered alternative systems of legitimating librarians' work and performance, in order to do this particular attention was given to external systems of evaluation of the quality of library service, new criteria for assessing librarians' performance and the attempt of central government to review, and re-found, the public library mission.

The chapter is divided into three main sections covering social, cultural and political aspects of legitimate means of supporting librarian's professional status. It has been assumed that social legitimation for librarians depends greatly upon the social image of their personal characteristics and skills; cultural legitimation upon the acceptance of the relevance of the possession of specific qualifications acquired through a certified high level of formal education and training and finally, political legitimation upon the formal recognition of librarians' functions and service policy.

8.1 An external audience: key players in the library system

The aim of this phase of the research project was to discover the general orientation of non-librarian key players towards service policy, procedures, style of working and standards of service delivery developed by library professionals both at managerial and technical level. Shifts from the perceived validity of the librarians' professional model towards other models of defining library work and policy, are seen here as a sign of a shift in the legitimation of librarians' status and a potential departure from a collective occupational orientation in the organisation of the public library system. Before introducing the core issues to be discussed in the interview, each respondent was asked to explain what sort of relations or interests they had with Birmingham libraries. The information thus obtained gave a glimpse of the current position of public libraries within the citywide context of local authority services as well as in relation to education providers.

The Chairmen of the Committee explained that his first concern was to make sure that the key elements of the political philosophy of the City council were taken into account in libraries, that staff understood them correctly and that services were run as efficiently and as well as possible, that is, managed effectively in terms of financial control. The most important key element of political concern in libraries was considered to be accessibility. The Chairman raised the question as to why, considering that services are currently free, not everybody used libraries and the groups that one might like to see using libraries generally don't. Thus, the aim, according to the Chairman, must be to promote the library services, extending them to specific groups. The Chairman declared that he was very keen on the library service at home, which caters for people who for one reason or another are unable to go to libraries "*so the library goes to them*". That was one of the key elements of accessibility quoted. In addition the Chairman talked about looking at the very large ethnic population in the city - over 20% - to see whether their needs were being catered for and likewise for the needs of women. In short, the Chairman explained how the city council was looking to see whether the needs of all different sections of the community were being catered for, in terms of *"overall management on a political role"*.

The Chairman went on to explain that not being an expert librarian but a politician, he would take advice from the paid officials employed by the city council who possess a great deal of "*skills, experience and qualifications*". Nevertheless, it was pointed out, if things were to go wrong, it would be the chairman of the committee who would be called to account. Thus although the Chairman might be quite happy to take advice from the "*experts*", it is only advice and decisions are taken by the politicians who are responsible for such decisions.

The Councillor interviewed also emphasised the political sphere in library services, stressing the relationship between the city council responsible for the library service and the libraries themselves, which are merely one of the many services that the authority provides. Thus the library service is subject to the "*political influence*" of the "*ruling group*" although this had "*diminished somewhat with the greater centralisation of policies in all spheres of local government including library services*". In addition to this, the councillor stressed, the major considerations are coloured by issues of management and "*those managers are steered by the policies of the council, the decisions of the committees etc*".

Politicians and library professionals come together, the councillor went on to explain, to discuss things. In fact, the politicians would expect "*professionals to come and give their opinions of what they feel is happening and the impact of our policies, the impact of central government's policies, the rhetoric is certainly one of an open system in which the professions and the workforce are able to articulate their concerns*". The councillor's experience relating to libraries through his residents, is that there is concern over the possible closure of local libraries and thus as their political representative, the councillor interviewed claims to be vigilant in preventing that from happening.

Similarly, the Director of Leisure and Community Services, through the elected members, is bound to support city council policies. As director of what used to be three previous departments, the Director of Leisure and Community Services is accountable for the strategy of all those services which now fall under his direction, for their overall management and has financial responsibility and this for library services too. In his own words his job is to implement the policy set down by the elected members and his experience has been that" *in an area like libraries which tends to be an area which is not politically controversial, all the political parties think having libraries is a good thing, then there is something of a vacuum insofar as the members are not particularly strong on promoting policies around libraries and therefore there will be more room for me to try and advise them on the directions available in the public libraries service and how we might follow those and what we would need to do to do that*".

The Director justifies the merger of the 3 departments, which was effected in order to promote common areas and to promote synergies, as far as libraries are concerned, by assuring that the merger would not, however, "*affect ... the core functions of libraries, they are influenced by other things but it does allow us to enhance and bring into more use perhaps some of the facilities which libraries have had to try and get a greater benefit for the people in the city*". The Director then goes on to focus on the issue of public expectations and tailoring the service to respond to public demands "*so one of the things I would want to think about doing is how we harness that public perception about demand, about what people want, about what they're asking for and how we can use that to help feedback into the policies that are then developed to shape the future of the library service*" - an issue which was to be reflected almost unanimously by all those interviewed. The policy making process, according to the newly appointed Director of Leisure and Community Services, was a dual one: "*And so the relationship is both one of bottom up*

with them feeding back information which is relevant to policy development and for certain aspects of policy, top down with certain policies feeding down to individual librarians and particularly around corporate areas of work which are important to city council and there's an interesting tension between those two things".

The Head of Youth and Community Services, with particular reference to his own area of action, likewise echoes this emphasis on the "*corporate*" role of librarians as city council employers first and foremost and how the merger of the three departments could serve to bring this principle home to librarians *"and also help them to clarify that they're all in the same business really"* i.e. serving the community.

The need for close co-operation, on a now more structured basis since the merger, is also brought up by the Head of Adult Education Service, who likewise stressed that areas of *"overlap"* are to be exploited. Both services – the library and Adult Education – are people orientated services and as such should have, as their ultimate aim, the desire to assist the users in understanding access to the information available, a point emphatically stated by the Head of Adult Education Service but which was to emerge as a problem area from the interviews with the deliverers of service insofar as it had become an area sacrificed due to cuts in staffing. This relatively recent problem was readily acknowledged by the Head of Adult Education herself *"I think the people are absolutely crucial. One of the biggest problems perceived, is that librarians haven't got enough time to spend with a customer".*

A similar comment on cutbacks in the library system and how this had affected not only the *"contact"* time with customers but also, to some extent, the scope of activities was made by the Head of Arts, Museums and Art Galleries in a quite detailed description of how the two areas of the department are interfaced *"libraries are now in Birmingham narrowing their arts focus very particularly onto the arts of the written and spoken word ... so I see my connections and relations with the library from now on as being quite specifically related to issues of the arts of oral and written literature whereas in the past they've actually been slightly wider than that."*

The Head of Strategy and Planning in Community Services emerged from the interview as a new contact for the library service in the sense that hitherto this department, formerly Recreation and Community Services, had been managed quite separately from the library service. Now, however, since the amalgamation, managers of other departments like the respondent, previously quite extraneous to matters concerning the library service, have

become actively involved in *"issues that affect the library services"* and one example quoted was, in fact, a key issue – the budget. Further examples concerned strategies for application across the whole department of city council policies, such as the anti-poverty policy, an issue taken up by several other interviewees from within the library services in a rather more controversial light. This respondent was keen, however, to emphasise an awareness of the fact that many of the department managers now playing a decisive role in the running of the libraries are in fact outsiders to the service and that it was their firm intention, as a management team, to take the time to gain inside experience a *" way of getting a better understanding of what goes on in order to provide a service"*. This lack of awareness on the part of the new decision makers was, in fact, a criticism levied by several of those interviewed from within libraries.

In a similar way the Assistant Director of the Economic and Development Department, on a senior city council managerial level had been involved in *"the debates around the libraries commission the government was proposing and also the review of the library purposes"*, although in this particular case the respondent did also have practical relations with the library service, not only as library client in using the library facilities to procure information required by the respondent's own department, but also in referring business contacts on to the library service and thus helping in promoting that particular area of library activity. Business information emerged on several occasions as an important aspect of the current library service and the Assistant Director of the Economic and Development Department confirmed that he had been involved in extensive discussions about *"what needs to be included in the economic development strategy for the city which is relevant to (the central library's) business needs"*

As might well have been expected, the Principal Officer of the Education Department explained that he had very close ties with the library service. These ties, however, were not uniquely based on like aims to promote education, literacy and so on, although this had been something particularly in the spotlight with the recent opening of the library's Centre for the Child, but indeed as another client of the library service *"the second relationship we principally have with the library service is they provide and we pay for but they organise, a school library loan service which is based in a school but it's run by the library ... and they promote a relationship between a local school and a local library."*

The Head of School of Information Studies at the local University of Central England also had a dual role with the library authority. The intricate *"close professional links"* operate on various levels: both academic staff and students of the School are clients of the library service in that they use the libraries' facilities for study and reference, but they also use the library in order to *"actually see a library in operation"*. In addition to this, actual members of the library services' staff number among the School's students on both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, thus the School acts not only as user of the service but also as provider for staff development. Finally, the School and public library system come together as a professional regional group *"and look at ways we can co-operate, so a complex range of relations"*.

8.2 Librarians' social legitimation in a time of change

There is no doubt that society is changing rapidly under socio-technical and economic pressures; libraries have also changed considerably from the traditional closed place where books were jealously guarded and card catalogues were the only means of identifying and locating them. The library of today has a much more dynamic image where information recorded on various media can be quickly found through sophisticated electronic systems of retrieval. The general view manifested by the key people interviewed is that, on the whole, librarians too had changed, moving away from what was considered their traditional attitude to their work. What emerged from respondents' comments is that the key to successfully keeping pace with socio-technological progress was for librarians to look beyond their traditional tasks and role and to embrace change with a more flexible and open attitude. In particular, according to one respondent the public library system under observation:

> *"...does rather better than most. Having come from a university where the university library was not keeping pace at all with techno and societal change and was very much trapped in a society which believed it was a gate keeper and they protected very preciously all books and you needed to be quite skilled at penetrating such a system, to come here I don't believe that's the case at all, they are much more up to date ...you can't live here without appreciating the societal change because its a city that's changed enormously anyway, so I think they're doing pretty well."*
> (Principal Officer of Education Department)

However, keeping abreast of change was not so evident in all situations and it was reported that a distinction should be made between those librarians who work in the large reference library and those who work in small community libraries, where traditional systems of registration and management of information had not undergone transformation to the same degree. Nevertheless, this was not to be seen as an indication that the profession had not developed. On the contrary, a Councillor of the Committee argued that is "*what people expect as well, the exception is probably the Central Library where there are other forms of communication. Librarians locally are still dealing with those traditional forms of media, moreover there has been a change in culture where even though it is still the written form, that it is an open system, it's not the books on a shelf which get dusted and looked at from afar, which was I think an image one time, I think that has changed and people are encouraged to come in and be active*".

It was noted that to keep pace with technological advances requires significant economic investment and respondents pointed out that if libraries appeared to be falling behind in the technological race, it was not simply a question of traditional librarians' supposed reluctance to embrace the use of new technology in their work routine. On the contrary, the Head of Strategy and Planning suggested it was often quite the opposite. In his view librarians are in fact ahead of how libraries are changing the actual resources in general, therefore it was a resource problem rather than a lack of vision on behalf of librarians.

However, even if librarians' efforts to catch up with technological changes were generally recognised by those interviewed, from some comments it emerged that the traditional perception of librarians' hesitancy to use new media could in some cases represent an obstacle to professional development. According to some respondents, the very librarians, as well as users, found it hard to convince themselves that librarianship should take on at all the appearance of a hi-tech profession entirely projected toward complete computerisation of its tasks. Some respondents commented that the social image librarians gave externally is that of people who are not dynamic, they are "*caring, people-people, non-threatening and a lot of the new developments are perceived as a threat*". The Head of Adult Learning then went on to say, *"I don't think they have changed outwardly. I think the knowledge base is probably higher than it was for librarians in general. There is an image of a librarian that is never going to change radically, they are never going to look high tech, high profile technocrats"*.

Even if librarians have demonstrated they are able to respond in looking at the IT issues, it would, nevertheless, appear a battle librarians are destined to lose whatever as, although librarians have equipped themselves with information technology, one respondent argued, they are unable to shake of their traditional image in the eyes of the public. To this purpose the Ass. Director of Economic and Development Department observed that the biggest problem that librarians *"have got is that they are called librarians, which sets up a certain image that they are not seen as people able to understand information and direct people to information, because the librarian sends out a different kind of image from that of an information scientist which is another kind of profession".*

Other respondents to the same question took a different view, arguing that there is a sense in which technological change in some libraries has been an inducement to libraries to depart from their core functions and to get involved in a lot of activities, which are not particularly their specialised domain. On this topic the Head of Arts Museums and Arts Galleries expressed the view that in those libraries where they have indeed kept up with socio-technological progress they have done it in a rather destructive way in terms of library's core functions. Whereas, he continued, in the library system under investigation, *"on the whole the library service has not been seduced in that way and it's stayed much closer to the core service of a traditional library department, the service has expanded in culturally interesting ways".*

From these comments it emerges that librarians do not need to turn into technocrats, experts of information systems, on the contrary they should put technology at the service of their professional core functions but should not lose sight of them. It would be a mistake to leave the path that has been covered so far, suggested the Chairman of the Committee, arguing that librarians should incorporate both old and new functions. *"We need that traditional librarian approach which is conservation, managing the archives, but we need to have as well as that people who are service orientated, who look after the public who recognise that all the technology, videos, cassettes, CDs, computer disks, we have to move with the times and not forget where we're coming from and so the answer to the question is we're looking for many people who fit all of many dimensions that we have in the libraries".*

It is therefore important that technology has been introduced in libraries but it is also important that librarians manage to keep the human side of their job and that they still have

time to talk to people. This concept was expressed by the Head of Youth and Community Services who also stressed that librarians, should see their work primarily as community oriented, towards both individual user and special groups of users. According to these views, legitimation of librarians' work comes from their being a people oriented profession and technology is seen as a means to help them to have more time to relate to people, than with the antiquated systems with cards and drawers. Therefore, community orientation and library computerisation can go hand in hand; *"as long as people know how to use technology efficiently, the systems are quicker and therefore it should leave more time for the human side of the job which is contact with the local community"*.

Respondents agreed on the fact that:

> *"twenty years ago you would have just got books in a library and then you would have had records, and then you would have had tapes, and perhaps compact discs and now you can get computer programmes and CD ROM loan service, shows how well librarians have adapted over a period of time to different types of communication and how that must have changed in fact their own perception"* (Director of Leisure and Community Department).

However, other aspects of librarians' work emerged which had also developed over time. One, for example, was the role that libraries play in communities. This argument was echoed by the Director of the Leisure and Community Services who stressed the fact that if librarians want to continue to play an important and irreplaceable role in society they should first of all listen to the signals from the society outside and *adapt* themselves to changing situations; for him this was the key to success and also the measure of librarians' ability to keep pace with societal and technological change, what this respondent called *"grass roots pressure ... their direct contact with the public in such huge numbers will actually exert an influence and pressure on them which must be difficult for them to resist"*.

From the views elicited from respondents it appeared that librarians' social image was far from the stereo-typical librarian often proposed by library literature, which has portrayed them as particularly, shy, introverted and insecure (A.I. Bryan, 1952); controlled, cautious and unperceptive (A. McMahon, 1967; S. Black, 1981). However, according to these research findings there are some reservations. Librarians may succeed in legitimating their role provided that they accept, firstly, the idea of change as an ongoing process, secondly, the need to adapt to new situations and, thirdly, the importance of listening to the new

demands of an ever-changing public. These imperatives emerged quite clearly from the comments of a University professor in the field:

> *"I personally think that librarians have changed or those who have been successful have changed, those have been the ones with charisma and character, able to take on new skills and understand new technology and able to be political animals particularly which is particularly important in the public library field, able to defend their beliefs in a high powered situation and also be fairly proactive in looking where the library could be going and developing and not just staying where it is, so librarians need to have changed to be more dynamic and creative but it's also clear that a lot of practising librarians haven't changed, there's still this old image, and in some cases people who slog away at jobs are needed in some areas of the profession, but we have an unfortunate image generally which doesn't help me recruit new students, it's a vicious circle. "* (Head of School of Information Studies)

This last comment summarises very well what librarians need to do in order to respond positively to keeping pace with external technological and socio-economic change and is perfectly in line with what M. Slater (1984, 1993) has suggested librarians should do to overcome their *corporate invisibility*, that is to be dynamic, pro-active and get out and market their services. What is being asked of librarians, then, is that they take an active and purposeful role in managing community services, in order to do this, librarians have to continuously confront both technological and societal changes drawing on both older and newer resources. In fact, according to respondents' perceptions, modernity and tradition have to cohabit in librarians' approach to work, as they are required to maintain some of the older functions and, at the same time, acquire new ones.

8.2.1 Librarians between tradition and modernity

However positive the image of the librarian, it is sometimes felt that there is a gap between librarians and the world outside the library, creating a considerable anxiety that existing professional staff lack the requisite attributes to cope with the fast-changing environment. Numerous studies (J. Agada, 1984; G. Allen and B. Allen, 1992) have, in fact, tried to define the personal qualities needed by a librarian to successfully accomplish her/his tasks. From such research (C.J. Armstrong and J.A. Large, 1986; R. Stoakley, 1990) it has emerged that library employers and decision makers generally place a high premium on personal attributes, such as enthusiasm and initiative, rather than on the type of educational

qualifications and experience. For this reason it was decided to elicit perceptions on the personal qualities of traditional librarians. Respondents were asked to list the qualities to be kept and those to be rejected. One respondent suggested retaining librarians' interest in people and their ability to find out what individuals need whether in terms of books or information. Similarly, another interviewee stressed the importance for librarians to understand people's information needs. It was considered fundamental in the public library service that librarians be concerned both about literacy and the value of reading as well as the need to be interested in how information might be accessed electronically. The same respondent emphasised that she:

> *"would get rid of the shy retiring non proactive approach. I've got a great belief in the increasingly important role of libraries in all kinds of institutions and for people's development and the only way that will actually survive and improve is if librarians are actually seen as dynamic, involved believable people that can actually work at very senior management levels."* (Head of School of Information Studies)

This was an important recognition of the role that librarians play in providing information and ensuring it is done on a free and equal basis, considering that in today's society a person's success depends more and more on the possibility to access information. To this purpose the Ass. Director of the Economic and Development Department pointed out that one of the virtues that librarians ought to maintain has to be integrity. In these words there is recognition that information is important and maintaining the integrity of access to that information, its consistency and accuracy is absolutely paramount." *there's not enough actually championing why information is important and how it is vital."*

It then emerged from many comments that librarians should be equipped with some sort of analytical approach in dealing with people's enquiries and at the same time be able to promote the importance of information in society. Librarians ought to stress the importance of their role as information providers and encourage people to realise that each individual is an information gatherer but also each organisation is an information gatherer and that they need information to come to decisions, whether it is a social or a business decision. Once again the traditional librarians' role as guide is stressed, but in a renewed cultural and social context. Librarians, emphasised the Principal Officer of the Education Department, should always see themselves as people who are *"pilots, able to navigate a terrain that maybe unfamiliar to particular people and point them in the right direction so they don't*

have a long way to get there". Librarianship in these perceptions is thus viewed as a disciplined profession organised very systematically in order to understand different domains of knowledge and the publications behind different domains of knowledge. Librarians have had to, therefore, become increasingly familiar with the *"knowledge that's available through different media, through different forms"*.

Table N. 8.1 Librarians' Characteristics To Successfully Cope With Change
Able to adapt, listen and communicate
Able to be political
Dynamic and creative
Flexible
Have a multicultural approach
Have charisma and character
Keep core functions
Market and promote their services
Open to partnership
People oriented
Pro-active
Take on new skills and understand new technology
Understand people's needs

The image of librarians as information mediators or facilitator professionals was also reflected by other respondents, the Head of Youth and Community Services, for instance, stressed the importance for librarians to provide information and have time to talk to the library user much more than they used do in the past when the library was *"a very quiet place, and librarians were very much involved in the system of lending books and charging you if you were late and little else"*. Today *"the library is an information centre, it is a local community centre, it is a friendly place where people do not only go to borrow books but for lots of other things"* therefore librarians have to be in line with these changes.

The Head of Arts Museum and Arts Gallery appeared to support in full the stereotypical image of librarians as knowledgeable people. In his case, however, this was considered not so much a virtue as a limitation insofar as too strong an approach on factual and fact based research techniques and methods and offered only infrequent opportunities for imaginative work or for taking an imaginative role in the library. His view portrayed the professional librarian as a person with a great deal of general knowledge, someone able to retain an enormous amount of factual knowledge but unable to use it in a creative way, which is in fact exactly what is demanded of professionals who distinguish themselves from routine occupations by demonstrating that they possess intellectual ability and creativity, that is, the ability to examine problems in the abstract. Indeed the request that librarians, like other

professional figures, should ideally distance themselves from the professional model, as experts of a specialised knowledge based on self-regulation and a lengthy training, and identify with the broader role of professional employee of the City council emerged quite clearly from the Chairman of the elected members, who stated:

> *"What I dislike about librarians, not just librarians, there is a tendency for people to see their role very narrowly and I would like them to see that they're employed by City council first, and then by Leisure services second and so then they have a wider understanding of their service."* (Chairman of the Committee)

This view was echoed by the Head of Strategy Planning who pointed out that looking at a wide range of divisions gathered under the same department, one of the major hurdles to overcome is people thinking of themselves as, what he termed, "narrow" professionals. Therefore, while it is recognised that librarians should be first and foremost professionally qualified librarians, they should also perceive their role as much wider than a traditional library role. Finally, all respondents expressed the view that the "faults" of the traditional librarian that should be definitively abandoned are those associated with the caricature of somebody who is very serious, quiet, conservative and authoritarian. Moreover, it was added that librarians should get rid of not just those "faults" but also the stereotype of the middle class white male or female and to a certain extent libraries should be staffed by younger people and by people who represent all the ethnic communities.

TABLE N. 8.2 Perceived Librarians' Traditional Characteristics

Positive	*Negative*
Ability to research	Limited imagination
Able to identify people's needs	Quiet
Capacity to relate	Narrow professionals
Cheerful	Fear of change
Committed	Parochial
Concerned with literacy and value of reading	Non pro-active
Empowering	Stressed
Friendly	Precious
Have an analytical approach	Fear of computer
Helpful, pilot, guide	Routinier
Informed	Authoritarian
Integrity	Too reserved
Interested in people	Shy
Knowledgeable	Overloaded
Professional	Serious
Provide access to information	Gate keeper
Sense of order	Conservative
Sensitive	Not dynamic

When the group of interviewees was asked to indicate the "ideal" characteristics of a librarian perfectly suited for today's society, the majority of them stressed librarians' need to improve their capacity to relate to a large variety of library users, in terms of different social, cultural, economic and physical status, both as individual users and special or organised groups of users. Furthermore, it was stressed, that they should also improve their capacity to relate to other community service professionals and be open to establish partnerships both internally and externally to the library. To this purpose the Head of Adult Learning insisted on the matter that librarians should *"be able to relate to the public, every part, every type of person and open to partnership, because they are the type of people who want to give and see where the opportunities are so it is about being friendly and open as well as knowledgeable"*.

This was in line with what was felt by other respondents, who stressed the important new role of librarians in participating and helping to generate income. The Ass. Director of Economic and Development Department, for instance, emphasised that librarians must be able to relate very easily to people as well as to different types of organisation, whether that is a voluntary community based organisation, or a very well managed business or a very disorganised business. To fulfil these tasks you need to be very open, be approachable and yet take a firm line with someone. Therefore librarians, the Assistant Director argued, *"need to be almost like a bit of a psychoanalyst at times in order to squeeze out what is required and meet those requirements, understand and outgoing, but still keeping a strong sense of integrity"*.

This view was echoed by the Councillor of the Library Committee, who pointed out that a librarian should be a person sufficiently critical and informed in order *"to appreciate the breadth of perspectives, whether they are ones to do with arts and culture, whether they be political, social and also now somebody able to feel comfortable with different groups and different forms of communication"*. In order to better serve the community as a whole, librarians should, therefore, be knowledgeable about books and other sources of information but also about the local community in terms of cultural, social and educational needs. In order to fulfil these duties they should build an inquiry and research approach and, at the same time, keep a friendly and cheerful attitude. These characteristics were emphasised by numerous respondents and are well summarised in the words of the Principal Officer of the Education Department:

"Ideally I would want people who knew and are familiar with the culture of children, families and teenagers and who knew the advances that have been made in learning and techniques of learning, how we are moving towards being a learning society, not just a learning society for a few people, for many, for the majority of the population, I suppose I would be looking for the librarians who would understand the social change that is happening as well as all the virtues that librarians have had in the past." (Principal Officer of Education Department)

In order to better focus on the respondents perceptions of librarians work the sample was, then, asked how they would characterise the profession of librarian. The image portrayed was one of a two faceted profession: on the one hand, it was perceived as very interesting, attractive, dynamic and directed toward the outside world, and, on the other hand, as very boring, parochial, even stressful and directed in on itself. One puts the service at the centre of the profession; the other puts the profession itself. This latter view emerged from the Head of Arts Museum and Arts Gallery' words who claimed that it was important for librarians to *"characterise precisely their work, they have to be clear when they are dealing with the public and when they are not because when they are dealing with the public, the public has to come first and not doing introspective activities like cataloguing or so on."* The negative side of library work is also stressed by the Head of Adult Learning who felt that librarians sometimes looked *"overloaded, stressed, parochial, precious. If someone's protective of something we can describe them as precious, so protective, they're friendly, helpful where they know they can help."* Along the same lines, the Ass. Director of the Economic and Development Department pointed to some negative aspects librarians' work, seeing it as *"stuffy, boring"*, but at the same time, *"challenging. When you've got a piece of information where to put, who's going to be using it and how easy are they going to find it, they're an organiser, a listener but I don't think they talk enough about what they do and why they do it."*

For the Director of the new department in which the libraries are now located, the most negative aspect of librarians' work is their resistance to change, it is this attitude which, in his view could become a hindrance to individual professionals' career and development. What is essential in the City council, he stressed, is that librarians are people who have to be in touch with communities, who listen and adapt. *"So it doesn't matter over time if libraries move away from the importance on books"*, he argued, *"because books will always be important ... but librarians who don't adapt to understanding that information*

can also be imparted through CD ROM or other media, will be the ones who are left behind". Therefore the Director of the Department suggested that librarians will have to update themselves and if we *"look 20 years ahead for the people going into the profession now they're going to see considerable changes over that 20 year period, which will be based on that"*. This view, which came across as a mixture of advice and admonitions, is thus emphasised:

> *"So I think the essence of certainly what is practised in here is this one of the quality to listen and see and change and adapt, there may well be again lots of people who don't want to do that but by and large what I am describing is, from an officer who has worked in this city for 12 years, these are the changes I have seen externally from outside the library service and which I would very much want to sustain and continue in the library service."* (Director of Leisure and Community Services)

Despite the general emphasis the respondents put on librarians' personal characteristics, however there were some people who felt that also competence and responsibility were important features of librarians' work. This perception was emphasised by the Principal Officer of the Education Department who stressed that librarians to be successful ought to be flexible, imaginative, as well as systematic and committed to service. In his view librarians have to go beyond the call of duty, be sensitive and definitely cheerful, and need to make the people they deal with feel more empowered as a result of meeting them rather than less empowered. This more positive view is shared by other respondents who had a vision of librarians' work as a very interesting one because of the contact with people. The whole system, argued the Head of Youth and Community Services, *"works on people coming in to the library for information, books, tapes, to read newspapers, have meetings, for this reason it's a very people job, but it's also characterised by their special knowledge"*. For the Head of Strategy and Planning *"the library is viewed as a safe place, sympathetic to problems or anything that people might come in to ask,"* Thus the library profession comes across as being characterised mainly by the functions of giving information, being available, helpful and knowledgeable to people.

8.3 Librarians' cultural legitimation in a time of change

In this section, opinions on librarians' work, professional knowledge and competence are analysed. To the purpose of this phase of the research it was considered particularly important to link decision makers' views about librarians' professional knowledge and

practice to librarians' ability to maintain or to defend their intellectual claim for legitimacy as professionals. The views of people external to the profession yet very much involved in determining public library policy become fundamental in evaluating librarians' hope of maintaining control over work arrangements and performance. Librarians' cultural image, as elicited from the chosen group of respondents, reveals the extent to which the relation between librarians' education, professional training and qualifications and the actual work that librarians carry out in the library was acknowledged.

8.3.1 Specialised knowledge or "specialised" aptitude?

In order to examine the perceived correspondence between librarians' own definition of their body of knowledge and non-librarians' expectations of the knowledge needed by librarians' to better fulfil their duties, the interviewees were asked to express their opinion on librarians' professional knowledge, education, qualifications and competence. In answer to the question as to whether, in their view, librarians needed to apply a specialised body of knowledge to carry out their tasks, the majority of respondents argued that librarians do need a high level of formal education and training but that they do not need a specialised knowledge as such in their job. Rather they need to enhance the practical side of their training because it is experience and attitude to work acquired on the job that, more than anything else, give shape to their professional knowledge.

This position emerges quite clearly from the Head of Arts Museum and Arts Gallery who affirmed that in his view librarians need a degree and professional training, but not as specialised knowledge, rather as *"specialised aptitude"*. In specifying the concept of aptitude the Head of Museums argued that it is not actually knowledge, but it is *"something either you have or you do not have and that you bring it into the job"*. He continued by saying that he didn't think that librarians need a type of knowledge acquired in postgraduate courses. This is because the specialised knowledge that librarians need, is that of the subject area with which they are dealing, the books for which they are responsible, which clearly they acquire in the course of doing the job. Therefore in the Head of Museums' opinion librarians need an academic degree and they also need training in the skills of librarianship, but whether training in those skills are to be acquired in the library or in an academic institution is not clear. From his words it could be assumed that librarians do not need to be trained in an academic institution, because in his opinion it is *"more of a vocational training, than an academic training"*. The conviction that the

essential skills of librarianship have to be acquired in practical library work was also stressed by the Director of Leisure and Community Services who expressed the view that there are *"plenty of people with university degrees who would be completely unsuitable as librarians"*. What should be looked at, he argued, are communication skills, but this is *"not just about giving out information, it is about listening and giving back information as well"*. Communication, therefore, is an important skill, but he specified, not one you can learn through a degree.

Other respondents leaned more favourably toward the professional model of librarianship and expressed the opinion that it is not sufficient that librarians' base their job on the possession of general knowledge acquired in universities and then learn how to do the job in work. Among those who favoured this opinion was the Head of Youth and Community Services who defined librarianship as professional knowledge, arguing that librarian's work is *"not just around the skills of running libraries and library systems but it is also around community needs, reading needs in literacy skills, in assessing the sort of books that somebody might want or need"*. In accomplishing these tasks, he stressed, librarians have to be able to advise people on the sort of books they need, and *"certainly when it comes to reference books, they need a good knowledge of where to find things in libraries"*. It was assumed that librarians' expertise is not just made of general knowledge, it is a body of knowledge and skills that they need to acquire through formal education and training. "Certainly", the Head of Youth and Community Services continued, *"the wider role now brings in other things it would be useful for librarians to have, like the counselling and the listening skills as well as the community skills, therefore a good professional training would include all those things starting from the base of a good general education"*.

The view that librarianship is a specialised knowledge base profession was obviously shared by the Head of School of Information Studies who, however, stressed the fact that a distinction should be made between professional tasks, which need a higher degree of training, and non-professional tasks. Both dimensions belong to every profession; therefore, an internal stratification is to be accepted also by librarians:

> *"I think we've become bogged down in what is professional and we don't always use professional staff effectively. If they could be used properly for the higher-level professional skills, much of what in the past has been seen as professional has been*

fairly low grade professional and I'm not sure that's helpful in the efficient use of staff. I do believe we are in a high level professional area and need proper professional training and ongoing professional training but there's also a lower level where a trained non professional can perfectly adequately carry out a lot of tasks." (Head of School of information Studies)

8.3.2 Is there a link between formal knowledge and occupational tasks?

Once the general trend in perceiving librarian's professional knowledge as being of a non-specialised nature and one to be mostly acquired on the job, with the exception of those few librarians carrying out higher level functions, was ascertained, the selected group of respondents were asked whether or not they would agree with the statement that librarians no longer require a specifically distinctive professional education to take on their tasks. The view that was mostly expressed was that a specific specialised education is not required for librarians' work, on the contrary, the Head of Arts Museum and Arts Gallery argued that librarians only need quite a good general education *"what is distinctive about the education I would expect a librarian to have, is absolutely that it's general not that it's narrow and specific"*. This view was supported by the Chairman of the Committee who, quite in keeping with what he had expressed previously, affirmed that also those who did not have the specific education or academic background in librarianship, should be allowed to enter the profession, through training in the profession itself. In other words, the Chairman sustained that:

> *"just because you haven't completed a course, it does not mean that you cannot enter a chosen career path. Academic qualifications show that you are very good at theory and we all know that a service like the library is a practical thing and you've got to be able to demonstrate you can do both"*. (Chairman of the Committee)

It emerged again from the comments elicited that to undertake their tasks, librarians require more practical skills than abstract knowledge, consequently professional qualifications could in some cases be devalued. In reply to a specific question on this topic the Director of Leisure and Community Services commented:

> *"Would I appoint a non-fully qualified librarian? It would depend what for. I'm not a qualified librarian and I'm in charge of the whole service! But then I'm not expected to run the service in a detailed way on the ground so I think it probably depends*

where, in what role in the library service". (Director of Leisure and Community Services)

The Councillor of the Committee, while showing slight criticism of librarians' insistence on possessing special knowledge in order to claim professional recognition, took, however, a very different view and stated that he disagreed with the very notion and construct of professions and professionalism, arguing that, in his opinion, it has to be seen as a tactic that occupations use to monopolise and also to create power. Therefore, whereas the Councillor would define a librarian's work as one which does have a unique knowledge base and should be at university degree level, the question of whether or not librarians should strive for the professional status enjoyed by the traditional professions was, for the Councillor, quite a different matter. In line with this trend the Chairman of the Committee strongly emphasised a definite aversion to the notions of professions and professionalism when they are considered in the context of public institutions. To his view, he stressed, *"the term professional is meaningless ... one of the city park rangers, one of the sports developers, one of the museum staff, ... they all work for the same department and I give them all equal credibility".* Indeed, according to the Chairman, it would be misleading for him to categorise people into professionals and non professionals as he believed that everybody should *"be treated the same and just because you work in a library rather than working in a factory, I think it's the service you provide, and how good you are at your job that matters to me".* The notion of profession in the eyes of the Chairman is old fashioned and he, on the contrary, would *"rather talk about making the job more relevant to today's society and reaching out and involving more people in the service delivery".*

When respondents were asked to express their opinion on whether or not librarians have in the past paid too much attention to their professional status rather than to the quality of customer service, the majority answered that this has been true during a certain period of the public library history. It was sustained that particular insistence on professional status was certainly a feeling in Birmingham in the eighties with the then Director of the Library Service who was very professionally driven but much less so for customers. The Director was described as seeing materials held by the libraries as being held for librarians rather than for the benefit of customers and as seeing librarians more as depositories of information and knowledge rather than acting as a means of bridging information gatherers or suppliers with people who are information needers. However, this was a general trend for all professions at that time, both the Principal Officer of Education and the Head of

Youth and Community Services pointed out. It was stressed how important it was in those early years for the profession to be established and that people should look upon librarians and youth workers as professionals, because they were being compared to teachers who had always been considered as professionals. It was emphasised that social workers and librarians had to establish their profession because they were not naturally looked upon as professions unlike doctors, lawyers or accountants:

> *"It's not just the personal satisfaction of having people regard you as someone who knows what you are doing in the professional sense but for the service that you are often seen to be a professional service run by professionals. I think that's most important."* (Head of Youth and Community Service)

Today, the Chairman of the Committee argued, that has changed and customer service has become very important to libraries and to librarians. Librarians are more interested in the service delivery and an indication of this and of a lessening of professional power was described by one respondent as being the fact that the amalgamation of libraries with the other elements of leisure services had gone ahead with relatively little protest from the professional librarians, whereas, it was claimed, the same initiative 10 years earlier would no doubt have provoked *"a big professional battle"*. This was interpreted as evidence of a greater commitment to *"service delivery than ... getting recognised as professionals"*

For the Head of Information Studies the problem is another one, because quality of customer service and professional status need not necessarily be seen as opposites. The fact is that librarians have failed to pursue either. They have not considered possession of professional status as terribly important, nor have they paid much attention to the quality of service. At times librarians have become bogged down in professional tasks, allowing themselves to remain remote from the public and unconcerned about individual customers under the strain of the routine and everyday management of the library. Thus concerns with quality have not been foremost in librarians' thoughts.

Table N. 8.3 What do librarians need to carry out their tasks?			
	Specialised Knowledge	*Formal Education And Training*	*Experience On The Job*
Head of School of Information Studies	Only for higher grades	Yes	Only for lower grades
Principal Officer of Education Dept.	No	Yes	Yes
Head of Youth and Community Services	No	Yes	Yes
Head of Adult Learning	Yes	Yes	Yes
Head of Museums, Arts and Entertainments	No	Yes	Yes, very much so
Head of Strategy and Planning	No	Only for higher grades	Yes
Assistant Director of Economic Department	Only for higher grades	Only for higher grades	Yes
Councillor	No	Yes	Yes
Chair of the Committee	No	Yes, but not fundamental	Yes, very much so
Director of Leisure and Community Services	No	Yes, but not fundamental	Yes, very much so

8.3.3 Perceived validity of librarians' skills and knowledge

In order to draw a clearer and complete picture of the perceived value of librarian's professional knowledge, interviewees were asked to express to what extent they considered that an initial period of formation, qualifications and approved training would provide a secure indicator of professional competence. Almost unanimously they expressed the opinion that formal education and training no matter how broad and in depth were not sufficient to render a librarian a competent one. For the Head of Strategy and Planning, formal education, qualifications and training *"... are the building blocks ... they give you a chance. Just because you've got that doesn't mean to say you're competent. You've got to demonstrate that you can put all that into practice."*

This view was echoed by the Head of Adult Learning who argued that every professional should have an on the job assessment as well: *"they can be the best student in the world, but when it comes to putting it into practice ... if they are being assessed while working, as part of the initial training, the package is adequate"*. The Head of Adult Learning also stressed the fact that you cannot successfully interview and appoint and put into place ready-made people without first assessing them in the workplace because you don't know what their personal skills are with the public. *"Everybody can turn the wick up at an*

interview", the Head of Adult Learning argued, *"but it is how you deal with the public, how you relate to colleagues, that is vital for an efficient and motivated worker, and you cannot get it unless you see people working and seeing how they relate to people"*.

The emphasis respondents placed on professional practice disclosed the view that librarians' professional knowledge should be acquired mainly in the work place. At first this view could be interpreted, as indicating that apprenticeship, for librarians, is more important than formal knowledge. In reality, it expresses the need for librarians to find the right balance between formal knowledge and working knowledge (Freidson, 1986) because on that balance depends the successful control over work by an occupation. The Principal Officer for the Education Department was obviously sufficiently aware of this problem for him to say that professional training should be planned and developed throughout a person's career. In his opinion the perfect pattern of training for every profession would be to have an initial period of training and then expect people to take a further qualification, perhaps at masters level, that they complete perhaps at 5-7 years into the profession. The picture drawn was that professionals should continue to learn and reflect on their practice and in order to do this they probably need a short period out of the profession as well to complete that task, which could be part time while they are in full time work but that they would complete with a month or 2 of sabbatical leave in order to complete the writing up of a masters dissertation. Furthermore, the Principal Officer of the Education Department suggested using professional development interviews so that people could be perpetually expected to have a personal professional development plan on an annual basis, *"that might be only attending three or four courses or might be they have a personal development that is engaging them as a learning person even only remotely connected with their work"*.

The traditional way of asserting professional status according to the model of professionalism was finally reinstated by the Head of Youth and Community Services who stressed that initial training is an important part as long as experience on the job is part of it. He maintained that training in itself is not enough,

"you can train to be a teacher in a university, it doesn't make you a good teacher, what makes a good teacher is learning the skills of teaching and practising the skills linked with your subject knowledge. It's the same with most professional training, you can learn in an abstract way, away from people, the skills of being a librarian, but to be a true professional you have to practise those skills as well with people". To become a

professional, he suggested that the ideal process should be the following steps: *"good education, good professional training and good supervised experience of doing the job with someone who knows how the job should be done"*.
(Head of Youth and Community Services)

If the idea that all professions are based on a body of knowledge that is half standardised in technical skills and half rationalised in abstract principles is understood, it appears evident that professionals, in order to achieve a high level of competence, should also refer to their abstract knowledge. On this issue the Head of School of Information Studies stressed the point that a broad theoretical awareness and in depth knowledge of information work and the wider information profession helps an individual to perform at a professional level and that has to be done at university level and can't just be learned in a workplace. The university professor observed that this is the problem she had with the NVQ courses because they do not look at issues theoretically, but are purely about what you do on the job, which is good at the lower levels, but is not sufficient at professional levels. Looking at the part time students coming from 'The Public Library System', the respondent pointed out that they were patently very good, competent paraprofessionals, they had learned a lot of skills in the years they had worked and were high quality, reliable staff. However whereas they may have been competent to work in that particular public library system, many of them didn't know much outside it and certainly didn't know much about the wider professional field and were very inward looking.

The assumption that a profession, to be successful, should find the right balance between its formal and working knowledge base is not new and has been emphasised by many authors (E. Freidson, 1986; Sarfatti Larson, 1977, A. Abbott, 1988) as discussed in the theories chapter. What could be seen as new from this study is the fact that this relationship is not a fixed one, but changes over time, therefore the terms of this balance have to be reinstated through a process of continual professional development. According to the Head of School of Information Studies, library and information schools ought to have a role in continuing education, however to do that they have to overcome problems of cost and develop better coordination with professional associations which do organise training courses themselves, but perhaps less systematically. It was described how in the past the School of Information Studies used to run short courses for local librarians, even one day courses, whereas today, the Head of School stressed, this is more difficult because of other competitors, the LA, ASLIB and free lance library consultants and Birmingham library

authority itself which does a lot of training internally. The current problem, it appeared, was that in general the library system no longer spent a huge amount of money on professional training outside, consequently it had become difficult for the School of Information Studies to get sufficient numbers. It was felt that to change this situation for the future, library schools *"need to work more closely with professional librarians to find out what the needs are. It's a pity if the library schools are not involved with ongoing professional development"*.

8.4 Librarians' political legitimation in a time of change

The concept of political legitimation is used here as defined by Abbott (1988 pp.184-195) that is to indicate formal and legal recognition of a profession's activity and policy. This legitimation allows professionals working in organisations to have a high level of discretion in determining service aims and objectives and to exert a prevailing degree of control over work and forms of recruitment. It has already been explained that librarians may exercise a particular form of occupational authority under favourable working conditions, that is when, in the worksetting where they are employed, there is a collective orientation on the part of both librarians and non-librarians towards occupational standards and procedures defined by professional institutions rather than by administrative or political choice. Therefore the legitimation of the validity of professional library services can be guaranteed to a considerable extent through the traditional phases of professionalisation: recognised validity of formal education, Chartership, disciplinary committees, approved training and ethical codes. A change in values, Abbott argues, can recast the meaning of a profession's arguments for legitimation, thus the social structure of a profession. The rise of competition, efficiency and accountability as a legitimating values, predicted by Lyotard (1984) and confirmed by Abbott (1988), was considered, in this phase of the research project, to be an important factor affecting the status of public librarians by possibly forcing them to become more bureaucratically organised. In order to investigate further the variation of the means traditionally used by librarians to legitimate their status, the selected group of respondents were asked to express their opinion regarding the relationship between professional qualifications, a self-regulated code of conduct and standards of service quality and performance.

8.4.1 Perceived validity of librarians' competence

Quite unanimously the whole group of interviewees agreed that, although important, professional qualifications and the respect of a code of ethics did not provide sufficient guarantee that library work is carried out properly, therefore other systems for the assessment of the quality of the provision of services were needed. It was emphasised that individual users, the local authority, the professional body, library managers and central government should all have a role in evaluating standards of quality of librarians' work. The majority of respondents argued that to achieve this goal, first of all, library users should be surveyed in order to see how they rate librarians' standards of competence and conduct and that this should be done on a regular basis. To this purpose the Principal Officer of Education Department suggested that librarians, like other professions, should be perpetually engaged in improving against their previous best. The principle of trying to improve on what you have done before, he explained, is very important because it stimulates learning. Furthermore, this principle can be reinforced through accountability so that instead of comparing the standards of one library to those of another, you encourage those libraries and those services to compare standards of their own performance over time.

The view that library users should be involved in determining criteria for establishing quality service standards was shared by the Ass. Director of Economic and Development Department who, however, seemed to shift this perspective towards the Government's idea of "customer choice" arguing that professional self-regulation is not sufficient and *"there should be other ways, this is true of all professions and true of public services generally, we should be making more use of and obtaining views of customers and doing regular quality checks, basically its a form of market research. You need experts to organise for something to happen but once it's happened, you can't assume the expert knows best, you need to test out people."*

The conviction that the principle of "confidat emptor", trust the professional who knows best is no longer valid, was emphasised by other respondents who pointed out that the "caveat emptor" (let the customer watch out!) principle should regulate assessment of quality service through consultation with customers who have the right to a view as to whether the service librarians are providing corresponds to what they, the customers, want. For the Head of Youth and Community Services this is particularly true in the public

sector, because the services are provided by public money therefore the people who pay those rates and taxes have as much right as the people who provide the service to say whether it is good or not. The Chairman of the Committee and the Director of the Department also agreed with this view. From his perspective, the Chairman added to what had already emerged, that it is important not only to have the quality of the service assessed by the people who use the service but also by the people who do not use libraries. It is essential, he continued, to seek to involve non-library users about why they don't use the service. Therefore, he concluded on this topic: *"rather than just the self regulated code of conduct, I want to see surveys done to find out whether we are meeting people's needs".*

Carrying on the same line of thought the Director of Leisure and Community Services argued that competence and performance should be tested not just through self regulation but by consumer feed back because the approach that the librarian takes to the customer needs to be assessed and it can't be regulated by the profession, *"that is something which is quite important and needs to be assessed outside the profession".*

8.4.2 Establishing standards of competence and performance

On the question of who should provide the machinery for testing standards of competence and performance, and how this system should work, different opinions emerged from respondents, who, nevertheless, seemed to find a sort of convergence on two issues: the view that the use of national performance indicators could raise the level of very poor quality services and that these very indicators should be necessarily integrated by added local indicators if a higher standard of quality is to be achieved. National performance indicators set up by Central government were, however, regarded as problematic as they are mainly based on a quantitative logic being mostly devised to assess efficient use of finances rather than quality. The monitoring of library service, argued the Head of School of Information Studies, is a system which is not restraining development but

> *"taking on board needs of clients as well as the local community, the actual providers in this case local government, therefore ... It's useful to have a broad range of indicators of quality which is broadening out understanding about what public libraries are about but central government controls are problematic and quite a lot of quality control measures are similarly so restricting as to be dreadful. There's a danger in that kind of imposition which is monitoring the wrong kinds of quality."* (Head of School of Information Studies)

Similarly the other respondents argued that librarians' standards of performance should not only be measured by "customers", but at the same time by local authorities, as users are not always best placed to make that judgement. The Councillor emphasised that also politicians should be able to measure whether or not their policies are effective, are meeting the targets they wish to meet,

> *"the electorate themselves can then make a decision as to whether or not those policies are the ones they want by looking at the service, but I think external auditing is useful, but at the end of the day, you've still got to recognise that what we choose to measure is a judgement in itself, therefore, it is difficult to have objective measurement".* (Councillor)

On the contrary, the resort to external assessment was seen more positively by the Head of Adult Learning who argued that such a system could be more far-reaching than internally conducted schemes. External scrutiny had been found particularly helpful by adult education, it was explained, as since April 1993 half their work had been funded by central government not by local authority. *"Being then on a contract means having to respect it otherwise you don't get the money and that helps so much to focus people and the quality has shot up wonderfully".* The Councillor of the Committee also admitted the need to have external measurements as well, arguing that it is not sufficient for any occupation to ensure it is providing an adequate service by relying on people having sufficient qualifications and a code of conduct that they self regulate. *"It's a great opportunity for anybody to stitch anything up if you do it that way, you've got to have external measurements as well, external observations".* To enforce this argument, he then went on to express his view on the notion of expertise: *"some of it is to do with the unique knowledge base, technical skills etc. but some of it is also value judgements and anybody can make those value judgements".*

The Head of the School of Information Studies, while agreeing that library services and individuals in the service need to be monitored in the sense that they can never be complacent about what is happening, and therefore they cannot just rest on a professional qualification or a code of conduct, also introduced a new element. She maintained that librarians, like all other professionals, need to be constantly engaged both in upgrading through continuing professional development and also in making sure there are mechanisms for continuing to improve the quality of service. While not sure of what

should be the best system to monitor professional work, she pointed out that she "*wouldn't particularly want systems that are terribly regulatory but you still need a self critical approach or something that's criticising the service and able to stand back and check up on this.*"

The need to refer to a set of standard indicators defined at a national level to measure the standards of performance and competence of librarians was agreed by the majority of respondents who, however, identified not in central government but in a professional body, the institution best suited to this purpose. The role of this external body is described in the words of the Principal Officer of the Education Department:

> "*There are professionals own standards, I assume that there are professional bodies within librarianship and that to belong to that association, you have to meet certain standards they've got a very proper role. It seems to me the other proper role in maintaining standards is the democratic role, so for me it would be the city councillors who in the end have to answer for the provision of public service and that is a proper political interface with any professional body, including libraries.*"
> (Principal Officer of the Education Department)

This view was reinforced by another respondent who stressed that:

> "*External audit commissions do exist and do do investigations but it's always looking at the finances and the processes rather than the core quality side of it, you need that but you would need professionals experienced in library services to be a sort of watchdog body, in education you've got Offsted, which used to be the HMI's but it was privatised, I imagine government will go along that route for libraries, it would have to be external from professional associations, I know there's quite a solid body behind libraries, you would need one of these departments, offices to be able to look at it from a clearer point of view, it's easier looking in, than looking inwardly from within and I always value that sort of assessment, I think it's very helpful. It's about quality processes; you can do an assessment about whether you're reaching your target. Performance indicators for a citizen's charter are one way of skimming. In libraries you would have to look deeper than numbers through the doors, I don't know how you would assess it but it would have to be looked at professionally.*"
> (Head of Adult Learning)

Individual users, professional bodies, local authority and external audit all appeared to be very important to the interviewees. They all have a role in defining, monitoring and evaluating the quality of librarians' standards of performance, argued the Head of Youth and Community Services, thus to different degrees and at various levels of the assessment process.

> *"Most of the checking on a day to day basis of whether your service is good or not can be done by the staff of the service themselves as long as you have agreed criteria to measure those against. The criteria should ideally be established together with the customer, getting direct feed back from the service, particularly from library users because they come in regularly, that could be done".*
> (Head of Youth and Community Services)

It was explained how the whole process is really a two fold one. Local authorities are required by audit commissions to provide for measurement of services, although the actual assessment is carried out within the services themselves. On the other hand, it was quite pragmatically pointed out, that *"any organisation will want to measure what it's doing anyway, if it's a good organisation, it will want to know that what it is doing, if it's doing it in the most efficient, economic way and the way which most suits its users or customer. Any good organisation would want to do that, otherwise you might be out of business.*

The backlash effect of heeding public needs and expectations has been to broaden the scope of library activities, one respondent explained, *"At one time, you went to a library for a book or to read a newspaper but these days you go to a library for lots of things. That's a growing organisation which has been built up on what the customer wants and needs"*. The real problem, it emerged, was not so much harnessing librarians' energies and efforts to improving the quality of service, as having the actual resources to do what you know should be done and is expected.

> *"I think we're all accountable and if we're doing our job properly we have nothing to fear. What gets in the way of that is the resources you have to do the job properly because the resources are not there to do it, be it resources or staff, so sometimes you find that the expectations wherever they come from are greater than the resources you have to meet those requirements. So there's no difference of opinion between us and them (external assessors) about what we ought to be doing, the*

frustration is we haven't enough money or staff to do what we know we should be doing." (Head of Youth and Community Services)

As has been revealed by the comments exemplified, ultimately the major concern comes full circle, not to problems of performance assessment but to financial resources.

8.4.3 Is there a need to review libraries' mission statement?

Whatever system for monitoring and assessing librarians' work is chosen, if the quality of performance is to be measured, it was agreed, that first a definition of library effectiveness should be provided, since librarians' activities are an integral part of the overall organisation of library services. Individual librarians' activities are, in fact, undertaken within the framework of the priorities and objectives that the library authority determines according to political perceptions, available resources and identified needs of the community. This means that the starting point for any attempt to define library effectiveness must be a broad statement of purpose and philosophy, i.e. what is it that a library is supposed to do? What is its role in the community and in society? Only within this broad statement, and in support of it, is a library service able to make decisions about those key activities it wishes to pursue. Therefore, it appears evident that establishing a general statement (or a mission statement) and selecting and prioritising key activities, as service aims, are essential prerequisites to the identification of service objectives within which professional tasks and roles are assigned. Since the statutory obligations to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" library service as they appear in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 seem too broad and vague to set up distinct service aims and objectives, the group of respondent was asked to express their opinion as to whether this general statement should be reviewed and legislation changed.

A significant number of the respondents argued that in most services, a pause for reflection on the exact purpose of the service and precisely what it ought to be doing, should be taken periodically. One interviewee observed that although general statements are useful

"like 'public libraries should be free', that is a good general statement to make, but on top of that you need to say regularly why are we here, what is our job now, what should we be doing to fulfil these aims and objectives, a regular review of those is needed. I think today you need much more precise description of what the standard

of that service should be. On a regular basis there should be a restatement of what that level of service should be". (Head of Youth and Community Services)

The same view was expressed by the Head of Adult Learning who stressed that too broad a definition of the library service statement inevitably leads to a detriment of the service provided:

"*... it's all right to be all things to all people but you can't do it, you're increasing the opening hours and reducing the closing hours, people aren't getting the service they want, if you look down the list of hours the libraries are open, a lot of them close at 5 o'clock, they're open on Saturday, but what happens if you work on Saturday? You couldn't take part in libraries, there are loads of things that need looking at individually and I don't think that's acceptable*". (Head of Adult Learning)

Both the Head of Museums and Arts Gallery and the Principal Officer of the Education Department, while stressing the need to seek a more precise definition of the library service statement, also emphasised the fact that this should not necessarily change legislation. Rather the definition of service aims should be left to local authorities.

"*I think there does have to be a slightly more precise definition although I'd want it to be achieved by a methodology that would guarantee it had a reasonable degree of inclusivity about it. It is important to anchor the thing firmly in the resources of information and imagination and services that are not about one of those two things ... I think it would be perfectly possible to set up performance measurement arrangements for a library service that has built into them a clearer notion of what the library service is there to do without needing an act to do that, there are sufficient instruments at the Secretary of state's disposal to do that*".
(Head of Museums and Arts Gallery)

The desire to leave central government out of the task for defining a precise service statement for public libraries was expressed by another interviewee who showed his perplexity in introducing more legislation and felt that service aims have to take into account, above all, the local situation, so that each authority would:

"think creatively about what it is doing, what it's done in the past and how its different and how it ought to be different in the future and not keep on introducing more and more legislation". (Principal Officer of Education Department)

Doubts that legislation is the right means through which a service should be defined was emphasised by two other respondents who recognised that the present legislation is in any case somewhat unclear given the obvious difficulty in integrating the two concepts of 'comprehensiveness' and 'efficiency'.

"Does the legislation define what a library is and therefore what a service is? It assumes there's a consensus about what a library service is in the first place. If you try and define things too much, you create problems of what's included and excluded. It's probably better to have a broader definition.
(Ass. Director of Economic and Development Department)

This view was echoed by the other respondent who pointed out that the vagueness of the broad statement allows for many interpretations, which could be in certain cases an advantage:

"a local authority could choose to interpret it with great enthusiasm about the sort of service they're going to provide, they could also go back to a minimum type of level of service and indeed they could be steered by national government who say comprehensive and efficient but our emphasis is on efficient or ... it's a case of getting the balance ...but if you do that (have something more detailed), it may be so prescriptive, you cannot do other things. That statement is difficult but you'd have to take care in replacing it with something more descriptive". (Councillor)

Other respondents argued that a broad definition of the library service statement was not only favoured by local government but was also convenient for central government. This view, which at first appears in contrast with the central government initiative to control and scrutinise local authorities activities and an example of this can be seen in the National Review of Public Libraries, found a convincing foundation in the words of the Director of Leisure and Community Services who pointed out:

"I think again, like a lot of other legislation, that what we have, although we have a duty that refers to comprehensive service, the reality is that the legislation is an

enabling legislation and it has to be so simply because there is no explicit standard and if there were an explicit standard embodied in the legislation, it would be incumbent upon the government to provide the resources to enable that standard to be achieved; so I think the only reasonable interpretation is that the legislation is enabling and that local authorities must use their discretion to interpret the legislation according to their own circumstances".

(Director of Leisure and Community Services)

This interpretation about central government's attitude towards changing the present legislation was then further enforced by another respondent who added to what the Director said with the following comment:

"My feeling is that its sufficiently broad to give flexibility of response and to try and reduce that flexibility at this time, and particularly given the attitude of the government to flexibility, I think it would be a bad thing ... but for the local authorities who provide the service to then start to define the service a bit more precisely and set the issues about how we set about measuring the performance, but not to enshrine it into the legislation or not to modify the legislation in such a way that it gives the Secretary of state the right to what's called a paving legislation, a very general right which enables the secretary of state to bring in statutory instruments within parliament, I'd keep the act".

(Ass. Director of Economic and Development Department)

The information gathered from respondents on this particular topic showed the existence of two separate positions, those in favour of keeping a broad statement which gave flexibility to local authority on the actual delivery of service, and those who envisaged a more precise definition of the core activities that libraries are expected to do. However, both group of respondents, from apparently different positions, revealed they were in favour of leaving the public library service under the direct control and responsibility of local government. This is explained by the fact that, on the one hand, if the mission statement remains broad, the potential flexibility for local authority in setting priorities and objectives is in reality frustrated by the lack of resources with the risk of being shown up as inefficient under central government's scrutiny, a defensive tactic one respondent referred to as government's strategy of "guarding their backs", or perhaps worse, of being transformed into a business-like activity in the attempt of making sure the accounts add up. On the

other hand, if the statement were to become more prescriptive, local authority would lose that flexibility yet adequate resources would be have to be made available accordingly, and therefore, given the current political situation, it would be easier for local government to set out its priorities and objectives and manage the service in a more 'efficient' way.

Indeed, as resulted from the outcomes of the National Review of Public Libraries which stated categorically that public libraries must remain under the democratic control of local government, the real aim of central government was perhaps not so much to change the legislation, which is, after all, convenient as it stands for its purposes, but rather to bring local authorities to conform to its idea of good management practice, that is to adopt a market culture and establish a different relationship with the 'customer'.

8.4.4 Is there a market for public libraries?

Financial constraints was one of the problems that central government suggested that public library authorities should learn to cope with, without counting too much on public funding. The acquisition of an entrepreneurial culture, the ability to generate income and a business-like attitude in managing the service are some of the solutions proposed in order to face the situation of economic scarcity. To this purpose it was considered significant, at this point, to draw interviewees' attention to the issue, so frequently raised in that period, regarding the need for librarians to become better attuned to market values. This topic was particularly delicate because the idea of introducing market principles into the government of public service was presented, on the one hand, as a means of improving internal efficiency and, on the other hand, as a hypothesis of privatisation and deregulation of public services. The idea that the criteria for measuring efficiency had to be gauged against what was value for money, or cost-effectiveness, created some apprehension in those librarians who feared that this idea could lead to the introduction of charges and therefore undermine the core principle of free access in public library services.

It was generally agreed that librarians *"should not be driven by market values"*, nevertheless they cannot *"close their eyes to the fact there are changes which may be uncomfortable for them"*, and therefore they have to understand them in order to be able to operate within that environment. What was important for the Chairman of the Committee is that librarians should *"understand the competition that goes on internally for resources ... they should be aware of where they fit into that total package of local authority services but* [he] *would rule out the need for them as individuals to become attuned to market*

values, they should look at ways of improving the service but they should do that anyway, they don't need to have the threat of competitive tendering to force them to do that".

Continuing along these lines the Principal Officer of the Education Department stressed that looking at improving the quality of the service does not necessarily mean introducing a market principle in the public sector; "*it is wrong to say that a customer to get a quality service, needs to pay for it*". He emphasised the need to draw a distinction between the forces that emerge with a market economy which are *privatising everything and everybody* and the forces that ought to be there anyway to demand that public servants are accountable for what they do in order to demonstrate that they provide a better service to the users. *"Quite often the manifestations of those two distinct lines end up with common activity ... I understand we live in that world and we've got to live with it, it doesn't mean to say you have to approve of it."*

This view was paralleled by an other respondent who maintained that free access to the sources of information and knowledge is such a fundamental human right as to prevent libraries from ever functioning as a market place, rather he stressed *"it is important to introduce notions of customer care and user values, user friendliness to which it may be helpful, in measuring performance, to attach some indicators."* However, the introduction of market values was not always perceived as something to be a priori discarded, the Head of Strategy and Planning for example argued that:

> *"If it means being slightly commercial, in terms of contracting out, like contracting out the bookshop in the central library to Dillons, well let Dillon's run the shop and just take the money off Dillon's and let them worry about what they're good at and we concentrate on what we're good at, if that's what you mean then yes we've got to be attuned, money is scarce and we've got to use what we've got as wisely as possible, and generate as much money as possible because that helps to underpin the rest of the service."* (Head of Strategy and Planning)

Less worried about accepting market principles in the organisation and in provision of public services, both the Head of Adult Learning and the Director of the Leisure and Community Services pointed out that because of budget reductions and the continuous increase in service demand *"you can't put more into a situation unless you are getting value for money"*. Therefore, an understanding of the market culture will, according to the Head of Adult Learning, equip librarians with the ability to cope with change and solve

problems a lot quicker. What was found interesting in the notion of market economy by the Director of the department was the decisions that this necessarily involves. If funds are tight, then choices have to be made, priorities have to be established so that the right cuts within the service can be made on the basis of informed judgements, whether it concerns maintaining the number of service points, cutting back on resources, cutting back on staff or carrying out less maintenance work to buildings. For the Director, librarians, with their expertise, have a decisive role to play in this scenario:

> *"there's a trade off between certain aspects of the service, accessibility being a very important one, against other aspects to do with the quality of the service which is provided and the same thing probably applies (to handling the book fund) ... and I think that's probably ... a part of the essence of what librarians' skills are, about how to make those judgements as well, ... it's something where value for money has a somewhat different meaning."* (Director of Leisure and Community Services Department)

The Assistant Director of the Economic and Development Department appeared to find a compromise on the dilemma of maintaining libraries as a free service and the ever present need to generate income and reach at least some degree of economic autonomy, by suggesting that library services could be provided free of charge to certain sections of the community, whilst others would be charged – a kind of means tested service.

> *"I think it comes down to who the customers are, not necessarily what the service is, we've got a very rudimentary price policy for some of the publications we issue, we basically say that, it's a small market place, those organisations that make a profit, they get charged ... it's a very crude rule of thumb, but we are distinguishing between those who can make profits an those who can't."*
> (Ass. Director of Economic and Development Department)

Obviously here, the respondent was referring to the business sector of the community although this issue also in relation to the community at large was one, which proved very close at heart to many of the library staff interviewed. The Director of Leisure and Community Services also commended the possible benefits from serving the business sector, in terms of funding, by exploiting such relations for sponsorship. This was, in his opinion, an avenue that was yet to be fully explored, although recourse to such strategies to find funding for libraries was, for this interviewee, inevitable.

"...how the public sector can be supplemented with private sector information and resources as well and that's something that perhaps we have to try and do more ambitiously, going into the future, it's impossible to imagine a library ... that doesn't have other types of resourcing as well, running parallel or as part of it, it's a question of how ... the library service attracts private investment."
(Director of Leisure and Community Services)

8.4.5 Should library users be given what they want?

One theme, which has constantly recurred within professional debates, is a concern for the users of library and information services, and the need to organise library systems around the user rather than for the convenience of library staff. The recent emphasis placed on the concepts of 'customer choice', 'customer focus' and 'customer charters', has brought further attention to this theme concerning whether the best way to serve library users would be to give them what they need, want or demand. Before reporting interviewees' opinion on this topic it may be useful to briefly sketch a definition of these terms. To accomplish this task the description provided by M.B. Line (1988 p.67) regarding the library and information service is used here.

- ***Need*** *is what an individual ought to have, for his work, his research, his edification, his recreation, etc. There may be an implied value judgement in the way the term is used, need is usually conceived of as contributing towards serious rather than frivolous ends. The whole concept of need is inseparable from the value of society. A need is a potential demand.*
- ***Want*** *is what an individual would like to have, whether or not the want is actually translated into a demand on the library. Individuals may need an item they do not want, or want an item they do not need. A want, like a need, is a potential demand.*
- ***Demand*** *is what an individual asks for; more precisely, a request for an item of information believed to be wanted. Individuals may demand information they do not need, and certainly need or want information they do not demand. Demand is partly dependent on expectation, which in turn depends partly on existing provision of library and information services. A demand is a potential use.*
- ***Use*** *is what an individual actually uses. A use may be a satisfied demand, or it may be the result of browsing – information recognised as a need or a want when received, although not previously articulated into a demand. Individuals can only*

use what is available; use is therefore dependent on provision and availability of service. Uses can be partial indicators of demands, demands of wants, and wants of needs. Identification becomes progressively more difficult, from the 'hard' ***use*** *to the often nebulous and unstated* ***need****.*

- ***Requirement*** *is a useful bridging term; it can mean what is needed, what is wanted, or what is demanded, and can therefore be usefully employed to cover all three categories.*

The question posed was what, in the respondents view, librarians should do to best respond to library and information users' requirements: to have a 'professional approach' and decide what the users need, to have a 'managerial approach' and measure what the users demand, to have a 'consumerism approach' and empower the customers, giving them what they want, or have a 'democratic approach' and achieve common goals in the interest of the community as a whole. The majority of respondents stressed that to get library policy right, it is necessary to use both professional knowledge as well as interaction with the users. Professional librarians, it was emphasised, need to be aware of the complex differences within society, therefore their expertise is necessary to meet everybody's need yet, at the same time, reach out and to some extent involve users in that choice. The 'Consumer choice' approach, stressed the Chairman of the Committee, is misleading:

> *"I'll give you an example, sometimes when I get up in the morning, I switch on the TV on and I'll press channel 1, there's cartoons for children, 2 cartoons for children, press 3 cartoons, so it's on every channel so you've got no choice. You've got 4 different cartoons, that's the choice but the format is the same and we've got to be very mindful that that doesn't happen with libraries".* (Chairman of the Committee)

Moreover, the Director of Leisure and Community Services added that this approach is counterproductive for librarians themselves because *"if you gave the customer all they wanted all the time, you would probably never be a very good librarian, because you would never be stretching your imagination."* It was agreed that the right balance should be found to give the public what it can reasonably 'require' without any hint of personal interference in that choice but

> *"also not being slavishly led by that and so in situations where a librarian can see that a kind of literature, writing, service is something that in his professional judgement is the way of the future, he or she should be encouraged and able to*

provide that service without needing to produce evidence of an already existing demand ... it's an important role ... in the provision of the public library service ... to offer to the public through the source of public funding ... services, facilities and experiences beyond those that the public are yet in a position to know they demand." (Head of Arts and Museum and Arts Gallery)

Quite differently the Head of Learning and the Ass. Director of the Economic and Development Department took a position much closer to 'managerial' and 'consumerism' approaches by pointing out that it is not possible to discover what is needed in the community just from the people who come to the library, rather it is necessary to network and operate at a corporative level using:

"the resources within the department, like community development workers, youth officers, all sorts of people who can help you map the profile of the community, so to get equity within the library, you would do that exercise and provide the service which is perceived as needed by those community groups but you can't define it unless you're getting individuals coming in and commenting as to whether its appropriate or not, but if you're not accessing the community, if you're not getting people coming in from the whole range of the local community, then you've not identified those needs properly, you haven't done the groundwork. They're both inextricably knitted together". (Head of Adult Learning)

Similarly the Ass. Director of the Economic and Development Department seemed to be more in favour of the 'managerial' approach, rather than the 'expert' approach claiming that *"the professional knowledge is applied to work out how things should be provided once the need has been identified, you can only measure the need by looking at customer satisfaction and doing some fairly basic research at times."* The one person who seemed to be thoroughly convinced of the validity of professional judgement was the Head of Museum and Arts Gallery who stressed that, although he would expect a professional to take into account individual needs, he would not:

"expect from a [professional] a completely didactic, autocratic style nor a ridiculously over participatory style... Librarians have skill and knowledge and abilities in particular things that I don't and I expect them, therefore, to be better able to construct models of service and arrangements than I am, because they have that specialist knowledge so I don't wish to be empowered to run a public library

that's what we employ people to do but equally I do expect some responsiveness to local needs and local service that I think 30 or 40 years ago people did not expect." (Head of Museum and Arts Gallery)

In sum, almost the whole group of respondents was more inclined to avoid trusting solely in professional judgement, although they seemed to prefer this to purely managerial judgement, for the definition of users requirements. In fact, respondents rather favoured a mixture of the expert and democratic approach. This perception emerges well from the words of the Head of Youth and Community Services who pointed out that this mixture:

"*is the best way to operate and there will be technical and professional skills that you will need, to be able to do that but I would still come back to the fact that a library is an accepted and important part of a community and so it should have the culture and community commitment and know about the community that surrounds the library and know about the customers that are coming to use that library.*" (Head of Youth and Community Services)

Finally, one comment is particularly worthy of note as it stood out from the other views expressed. The interviewee in question described an approach to this problem, which might be called the 'technocratic approach', a sort of post-modernist view according to which social and cultural needs could be met through technology while abandoning the idea of public service as a social commitment. What is important, it was argued, is not so much the librarian's expertise in defining social and cultural needs, which could be seen as a value judgement, but rather librarian's technical expertise in facilitating democratic access to knowledge and information through computer systems

"it's not one or the other. Some social and cultural needs could possibly be met through technology ... I veer towards the social and cultural end of that but I believe that a professional librarian with some technological skills could provide a better service in terms of the social and cultural commitment than one without those skills. As far as the public library is concerned, I would want the social and cultural area to dominate but not to cut off the technological end." (Head of School of Information Studies)

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter the traditional means used by public librarians to maintain their claim to legitimacy as professionals have been confronted with an external audience of key players, directly or indirectly associated with the Birmingham public library services. Variations in both principles and means for legitimating the validity of what librarians do and how they do it emerged clearly from respondents views and perceptions. Traditional professional values and definitions had not, however, been completely dismissed by the interviewees who, although referring frequently to professionalism as an 'old fashioned' and 'meaningless' concept, revealed no clear-cut preference for pure managerialism as a new form for institutionalising expertise. Rather the audience of decision makers and influencers emphasised the need to adopt a more eclectic approach to the organisation of library services where professional judgement should be supported by other systems of evaluation of librarians work and performance, as for example, user surveys, managerial and political assessment. Nevertheless, attempts by central government to introduce systems of monitoring and assessment of library service outputs was seen by the majority as an undesirable interference.

In all three areas used to test the degree to which the external audience acknowledged librarians' occupational position - social, cultural and political status - expectations of librarians' personal and professional characteristics emerged as contradictory. On the one hand, librarians were described as needing more flexibility and practical aptitude than specialisation and qualifications; on the other hand, they were required to maintain traditional values and professional judgement. It appeared, however, that the sole use of traditional professional credentials for legitimating librarians' work were no longer considered sufficient to validate quality of competence and performance. The data collected in this phase of the research produced significant findings, the salient features of which have been analysed and interpreted throughout this chapter. It is now time, therefore, to confront these findings with those discussed in the previous two chapters and with the research questions in the final conclusive chapter of the thesis.

Conclusions

Introduction

This research has dealt with a very ambitious task, a task which has few precedents in sociological studies of the profession of librarians and of occupations in general to date, as these have mainly concentrated on theoretical and historical analyses. This research has, on the contrary, attempted to investigate circumstances of professional change using an empirical model and at the same time suggest theoretical insights into the processes observed. The method chosen, by focusing on a case study within a spatially and temporally defined context, has made it possible to document and describe how the occupation of public librarian has responded to fundamental changes primed by the impact of external political and economic forces. Through the analysis of administrative and legislative documents, the observation of behaviours and the gathering of stories and experiences of those directly involved in the processes, an attempt has been made to understand how and where changes took place by linking them to theoretical concepts.

The real challenge in this study has been to make sense of the processes examined at a micro-level by linking them to those processes taking place at a macro-structural level. Therefore, without attempting improbable cause and effect explanations of the phenomena observed, an attempt has been made to grasp the sociological significance of structural changes for the development of the profession of public librarianship. The theoretical conviction, which has assisted the researcher in undertaking such a challenging task, has been to consider it insufficient, for the analysis of social changes, to focus only on the professional/organisation relationship, for this very relationship can only be fully appraised by placing it in the wider ideological and political context. Consequently, the main sociological problem, which the research aimed at clarifying, was to discover to what extent political actions generated at central government level could determine changes in a profession, in this case that of public librarians. Research findings have shown that, within the case studied, central government political reforms and initiatives aimed at introducing a market economy culture in the public sector, have created circumstances such as to

drastically modify the way in which the provision of library services is organised and assessed with a consequent change in the content and status of the library profession. Let us now consider the outcomes of the case study in relation to the research questions identified at the end of the third chapter by summarising them within the three main areas already used in the data analysis. Changes will thus be accounted for in the organisational context, the worksetting context and the institutional context.

Changes in the organisation of public library services

One of the questions that the research wanted to explore through the empirical research was to evaluate the existence of a link between political pressures and changes in the division of professional labour in the organisation of the public library system under investigation. Evidence for the consequential effect of this link has been provided by describing how local authority, under central government political pressure, had reacted by introducing a more hierarchical managerial structure and changes in the decision-making process of the library service. Findings presented in the sixth chapter emphasised the progressive interference in the control of the library service by the local authority, which was in turn increasingly subject to central government control. In the sample chosen, more significant, far-reaching changes were introduced in the nineties, particularly so in the period in which the actual research was conducted, when financial constraints and political pressure became more stringent.

After a long period of stability in Birmingham public libraries, re-organisation and re-structuring of personnel took place in successive waves, sometimes overlapping with stages of different processes. During the two years (1994-1995) of field research, two major changes, were identified, which, although similarly driven by concerns for saving money, proved to have a different impact on the profession of public librarians. The first restructure took place in the years 1990-1993, and aimed at introducing a new service philosophy, adopting a managerial culture, ensuring better exploitation of resources and enabling more efficient use of professional staff. The whole process culminated with the implementation of a management team structure where professional librarians were asked to take on managerial responsibility and pass down traditional technical tasks to non-professional staff. At the same time a new career structure was created where librarians were no longer linked to libraries or service points but to teams.

These changes introduced a new definition of professional work, together with greater differentiation between professionals and greater standardisation of professional skills. Nevertheless changes were implemented and managed within the profession, which continued to be the leading occupation in the division of labour. Part of the professional work was devalued and classified as routine, whereas professional expertise was attached to new managerial functions. Despite job losses and the increasing importance of managerial skills, professional librarians maintained authority and control over work. With this first restructuring the library system became a professional-management organisation, however the processes of service planning and budget allocation were still in the hands of professional-managers, who, at the higher level, functioned as advisers and interfaced with the political power. Within the limited powers of an organisational-profession, public librarians continued to be regarded as respectable professionals and trusted as the most competent experts in advising the decision process and in defining service standards and performance.

The second reorganisation (1994-1995), more significant for its impact on librarians' professional status, was led directly by the city council, which, urged by central government policies, decided to undertake major restructuring at the centre of the council organisation. In this period, local government became, in fact, increasingly accountable to central government not merely for the provision of service but also for its efficient management. Local authority was required to demonstrate that resources were spent wisely and in the interest of the 'customer'. In order to conform to central government guidelines for 'good management' practice in April 1994, it was decided that libraries could no longer remain an independent service and had to merge into a larger department together with the Recreation and Community services and the Museums. The council's aim was to acquire more direct control of finance spending and of service plan development, which had now to be based on efficient management systems, rather than on a professionally informed organisation. Consequently a new and more hierarchical managerial structure was created in order to co-ordinate and control the activities of the former three departments, and at its head an executive manager was placed who became the prime interface with the political authority, acting also for library interests.

Research findings show that the library management found itself with less power and in a submissive position in the new structure. The whole library service changed status, lost its autonomy and was incorporated into a large-scale organisation, where power and control

were moved higher up in the hierarchy of political management organisation of the city council. It was at this point that dangerous processes of deprofessionalisation started to affect public librarians who were now subordinated to external bureaucratic authority. The separation between management and practice became sharper with the former risking assignment to non-librarian managers and the latter to non-qualified librarians, which would have increased fragmentation and undermined occupational unity. These negative effects of changes on the professional work of librarians were confirmed in the more detailed analysis of individual roles and tasks.

Changes in professional practice

From the research findings discussed in chapter seven, it emerged that increasing political control over the processes of finance allocation and service planning brought about changes in the whole labour process of the library service in order to permit a more 'efficient' use of resources and professional staff, as intended by politicians and administrators. Above all, with the amalgamation of the library service with the other two service departments, librarians' professional work changed insofar as those now considered the most important tasks became those related to the new conception of 'good management', now based on the principles of accountability and value for money, rather than on professional judgement and values. With the separation of routine/technical tasks from abstract/professional tasks, professional librarians were mainly deployed to undertake managerial functions in all three areas of library service management: planning, implementation and monitoring. Only the tasks of reference and selection were left to professional responsibility, even though individual discretion had to fit within the confines of general acquisition and stock management strategy. All other traditional professional tasks were considered routine and devolved to non-professional staff who had responsibility for the provision of library service at the point of delivery. Major decisions about the service were taken in a highly structured way based on the work of different teams where management techniques and customer surveys were used to identify objectives and priorities, which were carefully targeted according to the resources available. Work procedures and regulations were mostly standardised in order to conform to other council service organisations and to allow performance reviews and a flexible use of staff. The system for monitoring and evaluating standards was also defined in order to permit appraisal at local as well as national level.

The definition of library services, work arrangements and occupational practice referred to a highly structured managerial system to which individual librarians had to conform if they wanted to pursue career advancement, but the price they had to pay was the abandonment of their professional identity by becoming 'service provider managers'. To remain with traditional professional skills would have meant being relegated to devalued technical tasks, which were assigned to non-professional staff, as was already happening in other similar library authorities in the country. The separation between management and monitoring functions and operational and technical ones finally had an impact on the career prospects and educational patterns of librarians. Research findings have shown how, within the general immobility of the labour market, the possibility of recruitment and career advancement were linked to the possession of skills other than traditional public librarianship skills. Furthermore, the progressive devaluation of professional qualifications was followed by a growing crisis in educational credentials, since professional qualifications were no longer considered 'essential' to access both lower and higher grades of the profession. As a consequence students started to turn away from courses in librarianship, preferring to specialise in other more marketable areas of library and information science. The weakening of the normative foundation of librarians' professional status was also highlighted by librarians' detachment from the activities of the professional association and by their interest being diverted towards other forms of training mainly organised by the city council itself. On this particular aspect, the research has shown how the degree of professional cohesion and solidarity was very low, thereby exposing professional librarians to external bureaucratic control.

The shift from a professional-managerial organisation to a purely managerial one undermined the previous balance between occupational authority and external bureaucratic authority within the library service and between local government and professional librarians. Within the work setting, the form of occupational authority based on normative standards had given way to forms of administrative authority, based mainly on economic and bureaucratic principles. Professional judgement and values were no longer sufficient to establish the needs of the library user, nor to define the strategies and priorities of library services. In its place a system of external control and scrutiny of library activities had been introduced, testifying the move from trust to accountability and determining profound changes in the structure of authority or decision making in the library service.

In the last instance it is professionalism itself, as an instrument to guarantee the policies of library services that had lost its certifying power to external forms of control and assessment of standards of efficiency and quality. Thus the relationship between local politicians, who had the statutory duty to provide the library service to the public, and expert librarians who were responsible for the fulfilment of this duty, resulted profoundly destabilized because of the changing values and principles underlying a new idea of public service function itself. The last chapter of data analysis aimed at addressing the third research question: whether changes had produced a variation in the perceived validity and legitimacy of librarians' claims to competence and status.

Changes in legitimating principles

The research outcomes concerning the investigation as to whether traditional means of legitimating librarians' status and competence had been affected by external changes in the ideological and political climate confirmed a fracture, already emphasised by the librarians interviewed, between educational and professional credentials and librarians' authority in the work setting and in the administrative and political environment. Professional librarians were perceived as needing more personal qualities, like enthusiasm, initiative and flexibility, rather than specialised skills in the execution of their job. The possession of a positive attitude to change and the ability to adapt to new situations were considered more important than the possession of specialised knowledge. Furthermore, formal education, qualifications and approved training were no longer perceived as being sufficient indicators of competence and quality of performance. Emphasis was placed on the importance of job experience rather than lengthy periods of formal education, insofar as the knowledge needed in librarianship was judged as being more vocational than abstract and its application more practical than theoretical.

One element, which emerged unexpectedly from the findings, was an apparent diffuse aversion to professionals and the concept of professionalism, which was labelled as 'old fashioned', narrow-minded and counterproductive for the correct functioning of the whole organisational machine, where all employees, regardless of their specialisations, were considered firstly and foremost as council servants. The crisis in the system of professional education and recruitment highlighted by the findings on occupational cohesion and identity was confirmed by the general view expressed by the 'external audience' who stressed the need for a different, and more integrated, educational and vocational process

for the training of librarians. The most relevant repercussion of this lacuna is that the proposed solutions did not seem to include universities in the provision of continuous professional development courses. In-house courses or external free-lance training organisations specialised in service or business management seemed preferable to universities in order to acquire a homogeneous workforce deployable in a more flexible way throughout the macro-areas of council service departments.

Instead of relying exclusively on professional qualifications to recognise quality and competence, the establishment of external systems of assessment involving user surveys and performance reviews, in conjunction with professional judgement, was suggested. However, if a national set of performance indicators and quality standards had to be introduced for the assessment of local services, the research findings highlighted that for their definition the involvement of professional bodies rather than central government agencies would be preferable. The research outcome confirmed the reluctance of local authority managers to accept central government intrusion in the administration of their activities, which should remain, as stated by the legislation, under the domain of local authorities. However, research findings are not at all clear if central government had failed to extend its control over local government autonomy, insofar as this was not a central question of the study. Nevertheless, on the basis of the material gathered, it is possible to put forward the hypothesis that central government, in reality, did not want to increase its direct control over the administration of local services, but simply wanted to have them adopt a system of government which conformed to its values and policy. Perhaps, central government had succeeded in its aim, by bringing local government to 'autonomously' adopt an efficient system for managing public services, in-line with its political ideology.

Research problem: the relationship between expert and political authority

As insisted throughout the thesis, new socio-political and economic circumstances demanded not only a general reconstruction of the organisation of the delivery of services, but also a redefinition of the boundaries between public library professionals and the political sphere of society. We have seen how, in a large public library system, traditional judgement and value criteria governing decision making in service policy had moved from a more technical and professional realm to one, which is decidedly more bureaucratic and administrative. In simple terms, this could be described as the erosion of the power of professional librarians to control library work in favour of managers. In more precise terms

it is a question of the loss of legitimisation of that occupational authority (as opposed to bureaucratic authority) which made it possible for professional librarians as a group to claim the right to control their technical work. That authority derived from a former general acceptance of professional definitions, principles and standards of work by administrators and politicians. The form of legitimisation, which made the institutionalisation of this situation possible, was the acceptance of professionalism as a model for reference and as an instrument for the certification of service policies of local authorities.

As explained in the historical chapter, librarians lack the legal authority and economic power of the established professions to enforce occupational standards on the job. However, from the end of the fifties onward, public librarians had managed in certain authorities, like Birmingham, to achieve social recognition and authority in the work setting, at least for their elite group. Therefore the chance of gaining legitimate professional status for librarians, rested on what W. Reeves (1980) called the 'normative foundations', as opposed to 'structural foundations', of occupation authority. While structural foundations of occupational authority are formed by the legal and market status of a profession, normative foundations are made up of beliefs and values articulated by library schools and associations which also provide professional cohesion and identity to the occupational group.

As pointed out by Freidson (1986), for the established professions, the power to control and regulate work arrangements, standards of practice and access to the occupation lies in some licensing authority established by the state which provides an occupational monopoly over learning structures and the performance of certain tasks. Differently, for the library profession, which has not gained that sort of state protection in the labour market, the power to control library work derived from the 'collective occupational orientations' of administrators and others in the work setting, which indicated that there was a general acceptance of occupational status, practices and service standards by non-librarians as well as librarians. Many library authorities, including Birmingham, were not, therefore, under any real obligation to employ professional librarians, yet the alliance between local politicians and professionals had been well established. It was this type of alliance that had been eroded by pressures from new political and economic circumstances, with a consequent devaluation of professionalism as a means for institutionalising librarianship.

That is explained, according to T. Johnson (1982, 1993, 1995), by the particular relationship between the administrative apparatus of the state and the expert occupations, particularly the service professions. As long as occupational definitions coincided with official definitions of library service needs and provision, local Birmingham politicians, in order to implement their policies, counted to a very considerable extent on professional judgement. Once ideological changes created new definitions of library service, the relationship between professionalism and politics was destabilised. Whereas E. Freidson (1986) would differently suggest, that in Birmingham the structural reorganisation of library service was able to take place without any changes in the formally established division of labour, because librarians did not have an "economically and politically secure market shelter" unlike, for example GPs and solicitors, thus leaving public librarians unprotected at a time of political and economic change.

The shifting boundaries between the political and expert relationship allow us to make two final considerations: the first concerns the determinant role of the state as a regulating force of the relationship between a profession and its task area, or of the profession's jurisdiction as A. Abbott (1988) would call it; the second concerns the ideological nature of professionalism as an instrument to legitimise expertise over a particular area of work. The classical definition of professionalism talks of high socio-economic status achieved by those occupations, which enjoy autonomy in the control of their work. This autonomy in the control of work is often seen as opposed to state intervention, although the history of British public librarians could add some arguments to demonstrate that professions appear to be more an integral part of the state rather than entities external to it. The theoretical problem is to establish whether professionalism is determined by the ability of occupational groups to achieve autonomy in the control of their work or whether professionalism is a means of establishing occupational groups' accrediting 'weapons' in sustaining their autonomy from external evaluation.

The public library profession provides a good case for the current theoretical debate. At a time when sociologists were engaged in assigning professional status to occupations according to the stage reached in the process of professionalisation, librarians were trying to improve their economic and prestigious position and were striving to seek recognition of their role in society (N. Roberts and T. Konn, 1991). Although librarians could claim to possess many of the required characteristics of the established professions according to the analysis of the American sociologist W. J. Goode (1961, 1969), librarianship could never

aspire to the status of real profession. The reason for this failure was to be found in the librarians' lack of professional authority and in the absence of a specific body of abstract knowledge to apply in practice. Nevertheless, it was at this time that the alliance between local government bureaucracies and professional librarians was established. For example, people appointed in many British libraries in the sixties were awarded grants by local authorities to attend library schools and get professional qualifications. Moreover closer links with universities were established by library authorities for training library personnel.

Up to the end of the seventies qualified librarians had, therefore, *de facto* achieved recognised professional status and in many worksettings enjoyed a certain autonomy since they were directly involved in the decision-making process and controlled work arrangements and procedures. Not all of them, but certainly the elite of the profession, occupied posts of responsibility and command in the organisational structure of public libraries. Although they could not claim to have full legal authority, like doctors and lawyers, they often possessed a form of occupational authority derived from the general acceptance of professional definitions and standards in the worksetting, which allowed librarians to achieve an informal collegial control (T. Johnson, 1972) over their work. Yet, if we look at how librarians had reached this position, we notice that very little was due to the 'power' of their professional knowledge, which never gained full cultural legitimisation.

The case of British librarians strengthens the argument that professional status does not mean autonomy from state intervention but is, on the contrary, the product of state intervention in which the library profession, together with other service professions, has been an integral part of the functioning of the state itself. The problems which arose for Birmingham public libraries because of central government reforms, do not show that the state has become bigger, rather that the form of the state has changed and with it its methods and "instrumentalities" to govern and to gain legitimation of its policy. Moreover, the present position of public librarians also shows that where an occupation is not firmly based on a state enforced license, and is based at best only on certification by the occupation itself, or on an educational credential unsupported by state mandates, its status is very vulnerable to change when either the state or the employer finds it convenient to do so. Therefore, as stressed by A. Abbott (1991 p. 35) the only possibility at the disposal of public librarians to resist deprofessionalisation is to consolidate their collective cohesion and solidarity as an occupational group. Given the situation highlighted by the research

findings, it appears advisable that librarians' professional associations should, in the future, take action in order to regenerate the necessary links between universities, qualifications and professional practice, as only through the legitimation of the normative foundation of the profession can librarians be given an opportunity to re-establish forms of occupational authority and recognition of status.

Implications for theory

Librarians' collective actions to seek and defend social status provide important elements for a theoretical reflection regarding certain crucial concepts to which explicatory importance is normally given in determining the professional status of an occupation. According to E. Freidson (1970, 1986), the minimal criterion for a profession to achieve control over work arrangements and the labour market lies in some state licensed authority, based on formal higher educational credentials and which provides an occupational monopoly over learning structures and the performance of certain tasks. However, for the librarian profession, which had gained professional recognition in the sixties and seventies, the power to control library work depended on the general acceptance of occupational status, practices and service standards by administrators and political authorities in the worksetting. Therefore, if, on the one hand, it is inaccurate to state that, in that period, librarians had attained the sort of monopoly over training structures and professional tasks discussed by Freidson, nevertheless, on the other hand, it is not possible to deny that they achieved social recognition and formal control over professional knowledge, both technical and organisational, on the basis of externally sanctioned expertise. Paraphrasing Abbott's (1991 p.29) reflection on the failure of engineers to achieve *"true professionalism"* or *"effective monopoly"* it could be said that *"failure* (of librarians) *to achieve a medicine-like dominance should not blind us to its inherent interest as an expert occupation"*. Furthermore, it should be taken into consideration that British regulation of professions, differently from Continental Europe, has remained, as observed by Abbott (1988), a *legislative affair* since Parliament has registered only few professions, preferring to legally protect professional titles while leaving professional practice to direct interprofessional competition and discipline to qualifying associations. The crucial variable here seems then to be not so much the condition of monopoly enforced by a secure market shelter guaranteed by state licensed authority, a condition increasingly difficult to find, rather it seems to be the profession's ability to establish a favourable relationship with the state,

since the political orientation and administrative organisation of the state seem ultimately to determine the level of professional power to control and regulate professional activities.

Final considerations

As stated at the outset, the general aim of the research was to provide a contribution to the sociological understanding of the circumstances in which an occupation is formed and institutionalised under specific and accepted social structures. This aim has been pursued by investigating the effect of structural changes on the profession of librarianship, chosen as a case study in the context of a large city public library system. It is, therefore, to be recommended that future research should take into account the outcomes drawn from the direct individual stories and experiences identified by this research as a starting point to undertake further investigations in order to attempt a generalisation of the findings. Similarly, further research on the same topic would be of great heuristic value if undertaken in other regions of the country, especially now in the light of the changed political leadership of central government. Moreover, research findings have highlighted numerous issues that need further and more targeted inquiry, as for example, the politics of the Library Association, the cultural authority of the education and training of public librarians, the relation between professional knowledge and professional tasks and the degree of cohesion and solidarity between public librarians. Finally, it is to be hoped that investigation into the nature and development of the professions by considering both the micro- as well the macro-dimension of sociological analysis will continue to interest researchers, otherwise the study of the professions may risk being relegated to the domain of social-psychological studies of occupational contexts.

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APPENDIX

Interview schedule Phase A

Questions to be addressed decision making influencers and to opinion formers.
Elected members, educators, council managers

Interviewee:

Address:

Date/Time:

Place:

Cassette:

Comments:

A. Area of occupational image and status
B. Area of occupational competence and expertise
C. Area of occupational role and policy objectives

A1. Can you tell me about the nature of relations, contacts, or interests that you as ... have with Birmingham Public Libraries?

A2. In considering the particular relations or interests you have with the Public Libraries, how significant are the activities of individual librarians in shaping such relations or interests?

A3. There is no doubt that our society is changing rapidly under socio-technical and economic pressures. Do you feel that librarians have also changed, or perhaps that they have not kept pace with the socio-technological progress?

A4. Librarianship is a very old profession, for this reason the figure of the librarian is quite a familiar one in our society. However positive the image of the librarian is, we sometimes feel that there is a gap between the librarian and the world outside the library. Which of the traditional characteristics of the librarian would you maintain - his virtues - and which would you get rid of - his faults ?

A5. What should be, in your opinion, the 'ideal' personal characteristics of a librarian perfectly suited to today's society?

A6. How would you characterise the work of the librarian? As many adjectives as possible.

A7. Statistics say that the large majority of people employed in libraries are women; do you think that is because the work of librarian is more suitable for women than for men? How do you explain this?

A8. How much do you think a librarian (working full-time) earns approximately a year?

A9. How much do you think he should earn?

A10. What are the main factors that determine the social status and credibility of a profession?

B11. Would you agree that librarians in carrying out their tasks need to apply a specialised knowledge, or do you think that they only need a university degree and an initial professional training while at work?

B12. Would you agree with the statement that an initial period of professional formation, qualifications and approved training provide a secure indicator of professional competence? If not, what are the factors that make a given work a professional one?

B13. It is not unusual to encounter arguments based on the idea that librarians no longer require a specifically distinctive professional education to take on their tasks. Do you agree or disagree with this?

B14. Do you think that in the past librarians have paid much more attention to their professional status than to the quality of customer service?

B15. Professional qualifications and a self-regulated code of conduct have been so far considered sufficient to assure that the job was carried out properly. Do you think that this view is still valid or should there be other ways of assessing the quality of the provision of library service?

B16. Who should provide, in your opinion, the machinery for testing and regulating standards of competence and conduct (performance)? Individual clients, customers associations, professional bodies, local authorities, library managers, central authority or external audit commissions?

B17. Let's consider the two aspects of librarians' work separately; professional skills and professional performance. Do you think that there is a gap between the librarian's skills and the skills that the present society needs?

B18. Competition, cost-effectiveness, consumer-choice, accountability are some fundamental principles of market economy. To face the new situation and to acquire a

more dynamic role in society do you think that librarians should become better attuned to market values?

C19. So far, the traditional helpful and user-oriented attitudes of the librarians, especially in public libraries, have been sufficient to ensure the efficiency of his service. Do you think that in the present situation these characteristics are still as exhaustive as they were?

C20. More and more often we hear of the need to introduce a system of measurement of performance in public libraries, in order to evaluate the quality of the services and the execution of them. Do you think that the application of set national standards of performance indicators could increase the quality of librarians' work?

C21. Do you think that if we want to define performance standards of library service we should first need to define more precisely the nature of public library service - since the statutory obligation to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service which appears on the 1964 Museum and Public Library Act seems to be too broad and vague to set up distinct aims and objectives?

C22. What could be, in your view, the best way for librarians to meet the needs of their users: to use professional knowledge to decide what is needed, to measure customer satisfaction, to empower the customer, giving the customer what he/she wants, to serve the community as a whole or something different?

Interview schedule <u>Phase B</u>

Questions to be addressed to professional librarians

Interviewee:

Address:

Date/Time:

Place:

Cassette:

Comments:

AIMS:
A) To gather information about the work setting
B) To identify those working as library professionals by reference to the functions they perform.
C) To elicit perceptions on change in professional practice
D) To look for evidence of professional cohesion
E) To gather profiles (personal data, education, training, career pattern)
F) To gather information concerning interviewee's position in the organisation, attitude to work, perceptions of professional work etc.

General information about your library/Division/Department/Unit

A 1. Name of the library/unit you work for?

A 2. Total book stock?

A 3. Total staff (in post)

A 4. Number of opening hours?

A 5. Library/unit usage?

Information about the functions performed by the interviewee

B 1 Can you describe in general terms the duties you carry out in the library services and the general purpose they serve?

B 2 Can you tell me to what extent the activities you undertake in carrying out your tasks are in relation to the following?

1. financial control and establishing budgets and allocation of resources
2. making plans and policy regarding library services
3. forming, implementing and promoting services
4. stipulating job description, and recruiting and promoting library personnel in terms of those classifications
5. establishing regulations and guidelines for work carried out by library personnel
6. designing and implementing operating procedures
7. supervising or directing the supervision of assigned work
8. surveying users to establish service needs
9. reference and selection of new materials
10. evaluating the performance and output of library personnel
11. examining laws, theories related to library services
12. educating and training of library staff

B 3 Do you mostly determine how you do a particular task or is it defined for you?

B 4 Is your work dependent on that of others in the library services?
If some individual or some department in the library services fail to do their job would you be unable to do yours?

B 5 Does your job contain a high amount of routine type clerical work?

B 6 Can you say what sort of skills and competence are needed in carrying out your tasks?

B 7 Do you have any other responsibilities or commitments?

Interviewee's perception of change in professional practice

C 1 From your perspective, could you identify two or three of the most important changes in public library practice that have occurred in the past five-ten years?

C 2 What are some of the issues/concerns that will face public librarians in the next decade? Why these?

C 3 What changes would you like to see happen?

C 4 How do you consider the public library service compared to the past five-ten years and what do you expect in the future?

C 5 Do you think that today librarians have less autonomy in their professional work?

C 6 Do you feel that, in the present situation, bureaucratic values of efficiency tend to displace professional values of service ?

Professional culture and cohesion

D 1 Can you recall attending a professional meeting which influenced your thinking about the profession? (Example)

D 2 Have you addressed a professional meeting recently? What was it about?

D 3 Can you recall having informal discussion with colleagues (by telephone, at meetings, etc.) in which you talked about changes in the field?

D 4 Can you recall reading a valuable journal article recently (valuable to you in the way you think about the profession or professional practice)? (Example)

D 5 What professional journal do you most regularly read? Other journals?

D 6 Have you contributed to the literature yourself? (what are your articles about?)

D 7 Can you recall a professional training course which was particularly helpful for your job? Who or what had organised it?

Personal data

E 1 How long have you been in the field? What is your background in library work?

E 2 Where and when did you qualified as professional librarian? Other degree? Are you a chartered librarian?

E 3 Are you a member of a professional association and/or trade union?

E 4 Why and how did you enter the profession?

E 5 Do you consider yourself primarily an administrator, librarian, manager, information professional, other?

Position in the organisation and attitude toward organisation

F 1 Where are you located in the organisational structure? (What subunit?) What is your position in the library services organisation?

F 2 What is your job title and grade?

F 3 How many years have you held your present position?

F 4 Who do you report to?

F 5 What do you think about the structure of authority or decision making in the library services?

F 6 With the present economic climate and the cutbacks in staff and services do you feel that your job chances or prospects have been reduced?

F 7 Do you expect to remain in the library profession as long as possible?