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Libraries in a changing society: resourcing value propositions for viability and societal relevance

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ABSTRACT

In the age of rapid societal change and resource constraints, public service organizations must revise their value propositions to remain relevant. Although prior research emphasizes practice-based learning and adaptability, limited attention has been given to how public service organizations renew their value propositions. This paper addresses this gap by applying the concept of resourcing. It develops a conceptual framework grounded in resourcing and illustrates its relevance through an analysis of public libraries that have successfully redefined their value propositions and societal position. The findings identify five resourcing tactics, demonstrating how public service organizations can innovate despite ongoing resource limitations.

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Introduction

How can a public service organization (PSO) remain viable and generate novel value when the society it is serving changes? Many organizations are experiencing increasing pressures as societal needs change, budgets tighten and perceptions of public value become more contested. For instance, public libraries are increasingly expected to address digital inclusion and community well-being in addition to their traditional educational role (Bertot, Real, and Jaeger 2016; Buschman 2020; Turner and Gorichanaz 2018). Theories of public value stress that to respond to societal needs in credible ways, PSOs need to be able to align their public value propositions with their distinctive competencies and institutional expectations (Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg 2014, 2017; Moore 2013). However, despite this strong argument, current research does not clearly

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explain how this alignment is maintained in a changing society, or how and to what extent PSOs can adapt their value propositions (Bryson 2021).

Recent studies stress the importance of practice-based learning and goal adaptability (Collington and Mazzucato 2024; Ohl 2025), but there is still limited empirical and conceptual research addressing change in the missions or value propositions of PSOs (Kitchener and Ashworth 2025; van Gestel, Ferlie, and Grotenbreg 2024). Specifically, there is a limited understanding of how PSOs actively reinterpret their institutional roles and repurpose their resources to adapt to shifting and sometimes contested societal demands (Dudau, Glennon, and Verschuere 2019; Røhnebæk and Breit 2022). The dominant focus on citizen co-creation often overlooks how organizational capacity and history enables and constrains value creation (Gong and Yang 2024; Hardyman, Daunt, and Kitchener 2015; Huijbregts, George, and Bekkers 2022).

This paper contributes to studies of change by suggesting how the concept of resourcing, drawn from routine and practice studies (Feldman 2004; Sewell 1992; Wiedner, Barrett, and Oborn 2017), can be applied to address this question. This framework starts from the premise that resources – often described as PSOs' distinct competences or capabilities for creating public value – take on different meanings as societal and institutional expectations evolve. Therefore, societal change may render some resources obsolete, while others increase in importance and enable new ways to create value. Similarly, as novel resources are put into use, actors may become aware of new needs and opportunities to reshape their roles and the institutional expectations guiding them (Feldman 2004). By focusing on the dynamics between resources, value propositions, and institutional expectations, the resourcing perspective helps to concretize how value propositions and underlying configurations of resources and practices change (Skálén et al. 2018), and how a PSO may position these propositions within the society it serves.

To concretize the argumentation, we illustrate the framework in the context of public libraries. Public libraries are examples of PSOs that have actively revised their value propositions to respond to new societal needs while staying true to their role as supporters of literacy and cultural heritage (Hernández-Pérez, Vilariño, and Domènech 2022; Jaeger, Shilton, and Koepfler 2016; Nicholson 2019; Potnis et al. 2020). We draw on the vast literature, including 66 empirical publications reporting new library services, to explore how public libraries align their novel value propositions with societal needs, institutional expectations and resources. This illustration addresses two questions that inform further conceptual development: first, what types of novel value propositions and services public libraries have created to respond to changing societal needs; and what are the key elements in the resourcing processes for developing these propositions?

The findings indicate that a core enabling and limiting feature in the renewal of libraries' value propositions is the manner in which they can repurpose, stretch and combine resources (such as library spaces) and institutional expectations (such as promoting literacy) with new ones. Through such matching process, they have extended the channels for serving the citizens, enlarged their domains for citizen education, started to support self-expression among citizens, occupied a role in facilitating interactions between citizens and enlarged co-production with citizens.

This study makes two contributions to the public management literature. First, the resourcing view clarifies how PSOs can develop novel value propositions while maintaining their credibility. It demonstrates that by consciously and creatively paying attention to resourcing opportunities, PSOs may find means to innovate without letting go of assets or discharging personnel whose potential is currently underutilized. Second, the study contributes to the discussion on multidimensionality of value (Cui and Aulton 2023) by illustrating how public libraries integrate several value dimensions, including public and private, to their value propositions in a synergistic manner. The review concretizes how the same resources are applied to co-create private value together with users, which subsequently generates public value at a societal level (Alford 2016).

To develop this argumentation, we first review previous literature on PSOs and elaborate on the resourcing framework in relation to earlier discussions on public value and value propositions. We then present the literature review methodology and findings. The paper concludes by evaluating the contributions and limitations of the developed framework for future research and development.

Theoretical background

The changing role of public service organizations

Public service organizations operate in an increasingly complex environment, shaped by shifting societal expectations, political and economic uncertainties and pressures from multiple stakeholders (Johnston and Fenwick 2025; Røhnebæk and Breit 2022). They must balance the principles of transparency, accessibility, inclusion and efficiency while responding to emerging challenges such as budgetary constraints, digital transformation, security threats, demographic shifts, climate change and the professionalization of public management (Johnston and Fenwick 2025; Rooney-Browne 2008). Furthermore, the integration of public and private sector partnerships, along with the evolving role of governance, demands a reconfiguration of operational structures and service delivery (Bason and Austin 2022; Rautakivi 2016; Sekwat and Tacuara 2024).

To navigate these challenges, PSOs create multifaceted strategies. They innovate to improve efficiency and adaptability, adopt values-based governance to guide ethical decisions and adopt participatory and human-centred designs to build trust and ensure accessible and relevant services for diverse groups (Farr 2016; Hou 2024; Osborne et al. 2022; Rautakivi 2016; Rubalcaba et al. 2022). Across all sectors, they also implement data-driven technologies to enhance operational efficiency, decision-making and service outcomes (Dickinson and O'Flynn 2021). All such changes require leadership development and continuous learning and training (Dickinson and O'Flynn 2021).

Public libraries exemplify these adaptive processes. Public value creation is at the core of their missions: they are known as repositories of knowledge and symbols of intellectual freedom, serving a critical role in upholding democratic values and providing citizens with equitable access to essential resources (Field and Tran 2018; Hernández-Pérez, Vilariño, and Domènech 2022). Public libraries also exemplify services that are rarely outsourced and thus enable grass-roots level learning between public managers and citizens (cf. Collington and Mazzucato 2024).

Learning capabilities have become increasingly important in public libraries, as they have had to adjust their role over the past decades. Due to the changing financial and political climate, libraries need to justify their value to their stakeholders (Huysmans and Oomes 2013). They now focus more on lifelong learning and serve as hubs for social integration that promote diversity, mental health and civic education (Field and Tran 2018; Pateman and Pateman 2017; Pedersen 2016). In disadvantaged areas, they help reduce social and cultural divides by supporting learning and community cohesion (Engström and Dahlquist 2020; Gorichanaz and Turner 2017; Wojciechowska and Topolska 2021). They also employ digital technologies to enhance access, community resilience and digital inclusion (Bertot, Real, and Jaeger 2016; Buchanan et al. 2012; Jaeger et al. 2020; Snead 2014). Through these efforts, public libraries are increasingly recognized as spaces for community transformation, dialogue and collective problem-solving (Kranich 2020; Schlak 2020).

Value propositions as means for concretizing PSO's relevance

Considering these developments, a pressing question is how libraries and other PSOs can engage in these adaptive processes despite financial and resource constraints. Renewed interest in public value and strategy (Benington 2015; Bryson et al. 2017; Moore 1995) has contributed to frameworks that address public value in strategic planning (Bryson 2021; Hartley, Parker, and Beashel 2019; Ingrams and Giest 2025; Kitchener and Ashworth 2025; Ohl 2025). Drawing on Moore's (1995) strategic triangle, this research

argues that PSOs must manage and balance societal and stakeholder expectations to formulate value propositions that are perceived as legitimate and acceptable (Hartley et al. 2017, 2019; Moore 2013; Trischler et al. 2023), while also ensuring they have the capability to realize these promises (Bryson et al. 2017; Moore 2013; Skålén et al. 2015, 2018).

This research has drawn attention to the formulation and implementation of public value propositions, which are described as task-specific formulations of PSO's mission statements, articulated in the light of 'the public's aspirations and concerns as well as the procedural norms and values associated with good public sector governance' (Alford et al. 2017, 590). However, while this research distinctively emphasizes the importance of aligning value propositions, operational capacity and the expectations of the legitimizing environment, there is limited research on how the value propositions are created and changed (Kitchener and Ashworth 2025; van Gestel, Ferlie, and Grotenbreg 2024).

Another approach filling this gap is public service logic (PSL). Drawing on service management theories, it has shed new light on the co-creative aspects of public value (Osborne et al. 2022; Trischler et al. 2023). PSL highlights the systemic, multi-actor character of value co-creation (Osborne et al. 2022; Trischler et al. 2023) and stresses citizens' role in value creation by viewing value as benefits that are created, realized and experienced in the actual use situations involving citizens and citizenry at large (Cui and Aulton 2023; Røhnebæk et al. 2024). This research also directs attention to resources, but instead of highlighting PSO's 'distinctive competences' (Moore 1995), it emphasizes the relevance of users' idiosyncratic resources, arguing that practices enabling resource integration are pivotal for value creation. Researchers have even argued that PSO's role is limited to facilitating citizens' value creation by offering potential value – resources and practices – for their disposal (Eriksson et al. 2020, 2022), while citizens create value when integrating the resources in their lives (Osborne 2018; Røhnebæk et al. 2024).

Studies in this research stream use the term value proposition (Skålén et al. 2018) and service offering (Osborne 2018) to refer to the promises of value creation that build upon configurations of resources and practices (Skålén et al. 2015, 144). A challenge for PSOs is to ensure the creation of both public and private value using these resources and practices. These two types of value may emerge from the same activities but be discerned in different ways and benefit different actors (Alford 2016). Albeit public value is a priority for PSOs, public services may create harmful consequences for some actors while benefiting others (Cui and Osborne 2022; Engen et al. 2021; Skålén, Engen, and Jenhaug 2024). Alford (2016) also notes that citizens may have dual roles in public services as direct users enjoying private value and as co-producers of public value. Like in all services, the citizens

also have different individual needs and different orientations towards and perceptions of public value (Hartley, Parker, and Beashel 2019). PSOs may play a pivotal mediating role in resolving conflicts between competing needs, such as individual freedom and safety or efficiency and equality (Trischler et al. 2023), indicating that they must carefully consider how their value proposition can benefit the citizenry while avoiding harm.

Furthermore, Skålen et al. (2015) note that value propositions need to communicate not only what value will be created but also how – the promise needs to be ‘backed up by plans regarding how resources can be efficiently integrated through practices’ (154). For analytical clarity, we suggest separating value propositions as a (communicated) *idea* of value from the PSO’s *actual* resources and practices. Resources may include material assets, competences, process charts, and so on, while practices include repetitive and reciprocal activities used to integrate resources and co-create value (Edvardsson, Skålen, and Tronvoll 2012; Skålen et al. 2015). We propose viewing these configurations of actual resources and practices as constituting the service, or service prerequisites (Edvardsson and Olsson 1996), that enables realizing value propositions for citizens and society.

Considering these starting points, we use value proposition as a concept that captures the role(s) that a PSO intends to occupy in the society. They may include informal or explicit ideas about how a PSO perceives its potential contribution in value creation (Payne, Frow, and Eggert 2017). In PSL, PSOs are seen to act within public service ecosystems that are coordinated by institutional norms in the society, which again pinpoints that PSOs need to align their value propositions with the (changing) norms and needs that affect their expected and potential roles in relation to citizens and other stakeholders (see also Gong and Yang 2024).

The concept of resourcing and the creation of novel value propositions

Skålen et al.’s study (2018) demonstrate that novel value propositions may lean on creating, developing or integrating practices and resources in new ways. However, there is still limited understanding of how this change takes place (Kitchener and Ashworth 2025; van Gestel, Ferlie, and Grotenbreg 2024) – specifically, how PSOs actively reinterpret their institutional roles and repurpose existing resources and practices to respond to shifting societal demands (Dudau, Glennon, and Verschuere 2019; Rønnebæk and Breit 2022).

This paper argues that the concept of *resourcing*, developed within routine and practice studies (Feldman 2004; Sewell 1992; Wiedner, Barrett, and Oborn 2017), offers a valuable lens for understanding how PSOs can pursue alignment between institutional expectations, value propositions and operational capabilities. Resourcing is defined as a process where potential

resources become actual when they enable action in relation to a particular framework or norm (Feldman 2004), indicating that when norms change, resources may change their meaning, leaving some assets obsolete, while others become increasingly valuable (Feldman and Quick 2009; see also Feldman and Worline 2012; Sewell 1992). For example, books as resources may lose their importance in a digitalized world, forcing public libraries to reconsider their value propositions and relevant resources for the future.

This view supports earlier service studies that consider resources as only potential unless they are put into use (Edvardsson et al. 2014) but extend this view by considering reciprocal development between resources, norms and practices. It indicates that when resources are put into use, their application may reveal taken-for-granted assumptions and inspire a search for further possibilities for challenging and reinterpreting institutional expectations. Feldman and Quick (2009) illustrate these emergent processes in participatory budgeting, showing how the insights gained through new actions revealed needs for further developments in resources, practices and norms. Reaching an alignment between these elements may require multiple iterations and careful attention to emerging opportunities and challenges (Tuominen, Edvardsson, and Reynoso 2020).

While a detailed analysis of micro-level emergence is beyond the scope of this paper, we argue that the resourcing framework is also valuable at the meso level, as it highlights the possibilities – and limitations – for PSOs and other stakeholders to reciprocally adjust the elements of the strategic triangle (Moore 1995), namely value propositions, PSO's distinct competencies and expectations from the authorizing environment. This view indicates that to make use of their competences and other assets in a changing society, PSOs need to identify how to repurpose and recombine their assets for value creation. These insights may emerge through small learnings in daily work (Collington and Mazzucato 2024; Fuglsang and Sørensen 2011) but also involve conscious attempts to shape the institutional expectations (Koskela-Huotari et al. 2016). We will refer to these efforts as *resourcing tactics* that enable the creation of value propositions that are valid and credible.

To illustrate these notions and evaluate the practical relevance of the resourcing framework for the studies of PSO's value propositions, we next investigate public libraries to identify how they have translated changing societal needs and norms for their benefit via resourcing processes. Figure 1 summarizes the conceptual framework advanced in this study. The figure suggests that PSOs may – to some extent – re-interpret and adjust both institutional norms and their configurations of resources and practices to align their value propositions with changing societal needs. For the sake of simplicity, we use the term 'service' to refer to the prerequisites of value creation (Edvardsson and Olsson 1996), including configurations of resources and practices, or distinct competencies (Moore 1995). This

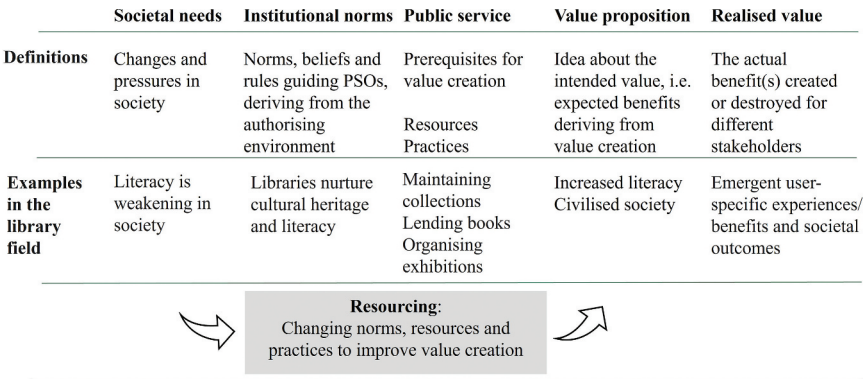


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the study.

alignment allows the PSO to play a meaningful role in value creation, although the realized value depends on evolving user-specific and societal factors.

Materials and methods

To analyze the resourcing processes in public libraries, we conducted a systematic review of empirical articles reporting cases of novel services in public libraries. Literature review as a data collection method enables developing a broad picture of changes in the entire field of public libraries and thus helps us grasp the variety of resourcing processes and novel value propositions through which libraries respond to societal changes.

Literature review method and empirical data

To build an article database that represents a broad range of novel services, we first conducted explorative searches using alternative search strings in Scopus (e.g. *librar* AND innov* OR transit* OR transform**). When comparing the outcomes to an initial reading of library studies, it turns out that these search strings did not capture novel services extensively. This was because the research on public libraries is primarily published in specialized library and information journals, where theoretical concepts, such as ‘services’ and ‘innovations,’ are not common –; instead, novel services are reported using their actual names. Considering these starting points, we decided to manually scan through relevant journals. Since this method involves extensive work related to article scanning, the journals were limited to the most relevant sources of information on services in public libraries.

Based on journal screening and ranking, six journals were selected: *IFLA journal*, *Journal of Library Administration*, *Library Management*, *Library Quarterly*, *LIBRI* and *Public Library Quarterly*.

We focused on articles published between 2016 and 2022, as publications reporting novel services and changes, such as digitalization were more common from 2016 onwards. A total of 1,537 articles were examined using the following inclusion criteria: the articles should 1) focus on public libraries; 2) report an empirical study and 3) discuss services that were implemented in at least one library and that the author(s) of the article considered to be novel. The abstracts were examined rigorously, followed by screening of the entire article where needed. After thorough discussions within the authorship team, 67 articles were selected for the analysis. Supplementary Appendix 1 presents this dataset.

Data analysis

The data analysis was abductive with an intention to specify and verify the framework proposed in [Figure 1](#) (Dubois and Gadde 2002). Therefore, existing theory was used to specify the concepts for the analysis (i.e. societal changes, value propositions and resourcing), but inductive thematic analysis method was used to identify empirical variation within each concept, and the findings were used to elaborate on the framework. The main research question was as follows: How have public libraries responded to changing societal needs and norms? Two sub-questions were defined: RQ1) What types of novel value propositions and services libraries have created; and RQ2) What are the key elements in the resourcing processes for developing these novelties?

Two main analysis tasks were conducted. The first task addressed RQ1. An inductive analysis was carried out for all 67 articles in three phases, using Excel tables to organize the data. First, data related to the key concepts in the theoretical framework were coded using empirical codes that aligned with the terminology used in the articles. We started by selecting manifestations of *the societal needs and changes* that pushed the development of value propositions. Then, we coded *novel services* that libraries had developed and mapped the *value propositions* for each by evaluating texts expressing the goals and expected benefits of the services, and how the service addressed societal needs. We distinguished between private value propositions (expected benefits for library users) and public value propositions (expected societal benefits). Supplementary Appendix 2 shows the resulting code structures in Task 1. In addition to an analysis of these themes, we coded data about the development process to support an analysis of RQ2 (e.g. actors involved and means for developing the novelty).

After this initial categorization, the codes were reorganized into more general categories based on their similarities. For instance, the intentions to develop users' entrepreneurial skills, environmental skills, and science, technology and mathematical (STEM), were all considered to represent 'capability building', which we understood as a private value proposition. Finally, to respond to RQ1, the articles were categorized into types that helped identify patterns between themes. After experimenting with several alternatives, each article was categorized based on the main service type. This resulted in 18 categories of services, bundled into five main types.

The second analysis task addressed RQ2 by detailing the resourcing processes in the development of the value propositions. Drawing on existing theories and the framework in [Figure 1](#), we evaluated how the libraries shaped the norms, resources and practices when introducing new value propositions. The analysis involved two levels of coding: first, central changes in norms, resources and practices were coded and summarized at the level of the 18 service categories and verified by revisiting the articles, after which their common features were analyzed to identify general categories. This resulted in insights about the main types of resourcing activities (stretching and extending norms, repurposing resources, improving/adding resources, new co-creative practices with partners, new co-creative practices with users). Finally, we analyzed whether and how resourcing was different in relation to different services. Supplementary Appendix 3 summarizes these code structures.

Results

The literature review highlights public libraries' role in fostering societal inclusion through equitable access to knowledge, cultural heritage and skill development. Simultaneously, they place considerable emphasis on interpreting societal change and adjusting their roles accordingly. This section summarizes the identified services and value propositions (RQ1), followed by an exploration of resourcing tactics (RQ2).

Novel value propositions in response to societal changes

The review indicates that public libraries consider rigorously how challenges, such as political polarization, disasters and climate change, affect their users and citizenry at large. They also consider how other changes, such as technology development and knowledge-intensification of society, can both support value creation and increase polarization. Furthermore, libraries in the reviewed literature actively responded to emerging trends related to well-being, self-expression and sharing economy and evolving conceptions of public spaces. According to our analysis, these societal challenges and

Table 1. An overview of new services and value propositions in the reviewed articles.

Changes in societal needs and norms*	Development pathway	Novel services exemplifying the pathway	Private value proposition	Public value proposition
Polarisation, technological development, changing public space, disasters	Novel channels for serving the citizens	School literacy New ICT interfaces Self-service solutions Home delivery Outdoor programming	Access to services, capability building, social connections	Inclusion, the development of competency and civilisation of society
Polarisation, technological development, social well-being, equality, changing public space	Broadening domains for citizen education	Health education Digital literacy education Education on societal/ environmental change Social services for vulnerable groups	Capability building, access to services, sense of belonging, social connections	Inclusion, health and well-being in the society, the development of competency and resiliency of society
Self-expression, equality, technological development, knowledge-intensification, polarisation	Supporting self-expression among the citizens	Author services Business services STEM services Makerspaces	Capability building, self-expression, social connections, access	The development of competency of society, freedom of speech, inclusion
Social well-being, changing public space, polarisation, equality	Facilitating interaction among the citizens	Family literacy events Community events Novel culture events Exercise events Social events for vulnerable groups	Capability building, sense of belonging, social connections	Inclusion, the development of civilisation and resiliency of society
Sharing economy	Expanding co-production with citizens	Seed library	Capability building, access, sense of belonging	Inclusion

*This column displays those changes in societal needs and norms that were most frequently mentioned as the drivers of change.

changes led to the development of novel value propositions that were concretized in the form of numerous new services that build on and extend libraries' current activities. We identified five development pathways summarized in [Table 1](#).

First, 15 publications reported cases where libraries *serve citizens in new channels*. These cases include ways to deliver library services to homes, schools in outdoor premises, via novel information and communication technology (ICT) interfaces and via self-service concepts. Several interconnected trends pushed this development. For example, Lenstra et al. (2022)

showed that the Covid-19 pandemic increased social polarization in rural areas. This change pushed libraries to create new services, such as virtual programmes and home delivery for older adults. In another case, technological advances and new ideas about public space led to the rise of self-service libraries (Zhang et al. 2022). A common aim in the development of the new channels was to ensure equal access to services for broader citizen groups (private value propositions) and, at the societal level, support inclusion (public value proposition).

Second, 13 articles demonstrate how libraries *broaden the domains in which they educate citizens*. While enlightenment has always been central to public libraries, the studied libraries also aimed to raise citizens' awareness and skills in domains, such as health, digitalization, societal and environmental changes and the accessibility of public services. The services include training and support events, advising citizens in need of social support, awareness-raising campaigns and information packages (Giesler 2021; Laubersheimer, Ryan, and Champaign 2016; Tanner et al. 2016). These services aimed to reduce polarization, which occurs when some groups cannot access the support or information they need as policies, knowledge requirements and technology rapidly change. For example, when health legislation changed in the US, libraries worked to raise awareness of the new act to help citizens avoid negative economic consequences (Friedman et al. 2016; Tanner et al. 2016). The services aimed to enhance users' capabilities (private value propositions), assuming that such capabilities should be secured for everyone. This was considered to strengthen the inclusiveness, resilience and competences at the societal level (public value propositions).

Third, 14 articles demonstrate how libraries aim to *support users in expressing themselves creatively and developing new and unique skills*. The articles present mixes of services, spaces and equipment that help self-publishing or debuting authors, entrepreneurs and anyone with a desire to learn creative science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills (Bartlett and Bos 2018; Katz 2017; Mehra, Bishop, and Partee 2017). Makerspaces that combine spaces, equipment and services which enable users' own scientific and creative activities and interactions, are typical examples (Li and Todd 2019). These services respond to the technology- and knowledge-intensification of society with an aim to prevent polarization and support citizens' self-expression. They aim to build users' capabilities and support their social connections (private value) which in turn promotes competence, inclusion and freedom of expression at the societal level (public value).

Fourth, 24 articles showed that libraries are transformed from quiet places for learning and reading to *public spaces that enable interactions and dialogue*. While fulfilling traditional roles – such as building literacy, developing

skills and ensuring equal access to culture – these services are designed to be interactive and support user-to-user contact. For example, family literacy events promote early literacy and strengthen family bonds while also helping families share experiences and form connections (Brown, Howard, and Martin 2019; Lopez, Caspe, and Simpson 2017). Other examples include various community and cultural events, exercise classes and social activities for vulnerable groups (Charbonneau and Rathnam 2020; Johnson, Van Haren, and Hjorting 2017; Lenstra 2018). These services respond to trends, such as changing roles of public spaces, polarization and increased attention to social well-being. They promote the participants' sense of belonging, connections and capability building (private value), which also promotes inclusion, health and well-being and the values of a civilized society at the societal level (public value).

Finally, one of the articles illustrated how libraries create *new co-producer roles* for users. This article presents the case of a seed library, where citizens may bring and take seeds for their gardens, exemplifying how libraries may promote access and sense of belonging via promoting such exchange between users (Peekhaus 2018). While active user roles were also encouraged in other co-creative services discussed above, this case exemplified how users take roles usually assigned to the library staff. This case, too, can be seen to create public value by promoting inclusion and equality.

These findings show that public libraries are actively responding to societal changes that involve much more than the decline in physical book use. They have developed a broad number of services, which mark a notable change from facilitating individual reading and learning towards facilitating encounters among citizens (Hernández-Pérez, Vilariño, and Domènech 2022). However, as indicated in Table 1, this change has not radically changed libraries' public value propositions, as many of these novel services strive to tackle polarization by supporting inclusion and competency at the societal level. The change is more radical in terms of the private value propositions and underlying practices and resources. Libraries have invented ways to developing interactive services that integrate capability building and self-expression with social connections and sense of belonging. At an aggregate level, the private value deriving from these services facilitates inclusion and competence in society, thus, strengthening libraries' traditional societal role.

How novel value propositions are resourced

A pressing question is, how has this change been made possible? The reviewed articles imply that libraries reconsidered both the available resources and the norms shaping public libraries to create and legitimize the novel services. We analyzed resourcing as a process where potential

resources become actual when they enable action in relation to a particular framework or norm (Feldman 2004). We identified five types of actions that contribute to such processes: stretching and extending norms, reusing resources, improving or adding resources and introducing novel ways to integrate resources with partners and/or users (see Table 2).

Many of the services described above *stretched and extended the norms* conditioning public libraries. We assume that by stretching and extending norms, libraries could legitimize services that were unusual in traditional libraries. For example, several articles suggest that exercise classes improve inclusion, health and well-being of the population (public value proposition), but extend libraries' typical private value propositions by

Table 2. Types of resourcing in libraries.

Type of resourcing	Empirical types	Exemplary services in the sample*
Stretching and extending norms	Extending fundamental norms conditioning the library to cover new purposes. Stretching the idea of literacy to support users in new areas.	Stretch the idea of the library as an organisation ensuring inclusion and resilience to support economic development in rural areas through a small business toolkit. (Bishop, Mehra, and Partee 2016) Using the concept of “digital literacy” to introduce a web-based series of tutorials, games, and assessments for users to learn digital skills. (Laubersheimer, Ryan, and Champaign 2016) Using the idea of “fitness literacy” to introduce fitness programming in libraries. (Lenstra 2018)
Repurposing resources at the library	Using library premises, tools, and competences for new purposes.	Using library space, as open, neutral space, for social services and other outreach activities for the homeless people. (Provence 2020)
Improving/adding resources at the library	Adding new equipment, training personnel, ensuring that library space serves a specific purpose.	Introducing digital library branch as novel type of library space that enables reaching users in new locations. (Cole 2017)
Introducing new co-creative practices with partners	Initiating new partnerships to co-produce library services. Using partners' resources for value creation in libraries.	Bringing in social workers to libraries to enhance inclusion among people with high social needs. (Garner et al. 2021) Collaborating with prisons to provide literacy programming for imprisoned mothers and their children. (Brown, Howard, and Martin 2019)
Introducing new co-creative practices with users	Changing the ways in which users integrate resources and interact with one another or with library staff/premises.	Introducing services with intensive user-to-user interaction to enhance inclusion, e.g. memory cafes for the elderly. (Charbonneau and Rathnam 2020) Introducing services where users occupy new co-producer roles, e.g. seed library. (Peekhaus 2018)

concretely fostering users' capabilities, sense of belonging and connections (Lenstra 2018; Rubenstein 2016). To enable this development, the idea of 'literacy' has been stretched to include 'fitness literacy' and 'physical literacy' (Lenstra 2018). In a similar vein, the articles mention 'digital literacy' (Julien et al. 2021), 'media literacy' (Rhinesmith and Stanton 2018) and 'environmental literacy' (Lenstra and Campana 2022), when justifying other novel services.

This resourcing tactic was connected to another one, *repurposing resources*, and they together enabled finding new roles for resources that could otherwise become non-functional. In the example of exercise classes, library spaces were recast as spaces for organizing these events (Lenstra 2018). Similarly, 'outdoor public librarianship' exemplifies how libraries use public spaces, such as parks, as resources to offer library services that increase 'environmental literacy' while supporting well-being (Lenstra and Campana 2022). Repurposing resources as a resourcing tactic was evident in most articles, and it targeted spaces and other physical assets, tools and competences. In seed library, old library shelves served as a spot where users exchanged seeds in the spirit of sharing economy (Peekhaus 2018). This example also demonstrates how the norm of 'lending' was extended to reframe users' assets (seeds) as resources, even though they are typically not viewed as such in libraries.

In addition, we identified several tactics to source new resources. First, libraries *improved or increased* their internal resources. For example, they trained personnel on new types of interactions with the elderly (Charbonneau and Rathnam 2020), vulnerable people (Giesler 2021) or queer people (Kitzie et al. 2022), and hired social workers to support homeless people seeking shelter from libraries (Provence 2020). They also purchased digital equipment and introduced self-service spaces (Zhang et al. 2022), as examples. According to the reviewed articles, these activities have changed the library profession and necessitated changes in both internal mindsets and external norms (Brown, Howard, and Martin 2019; Giesler 2021; Kitzie et al. 2022; Provence 2020).

Second, the studied libraries introduced *new co-creative practices* with new or existing *partners* to advance resource integration. For example, libraries collaborated with prisons to extend family reading services for mothers who are incarcerated (Brown, Howard, and Martin 2019) and collaborated with NGOs to provide home-based library services (Lenstra et al. 2022). Third, libraries introduced new co-creative practices with *users* to enable user-to-user resource integration. This is evident in makerspaces (e.g. Li and Todd 2019), exercise events (Lenstra 2018), social activities (Charbonneau and Rathnam 2020) and literacy events (Lopez, Caspe, and Simpson 2017). Ultimately, the services in which users learnt together and shared experiences combined the goals of educating citizens and fostering

a sense of connections and belonging, thus, providing a concrete way to strengthen inclusion at the societal level.

The findings indicate that these resourcing acts were dependent on one another in all five development pathways, which aligns with previous research on resourcing as a cyclical change process (Feldman and Quick 2009). Our analysis suggests that some of the novel value propositions were created using 'lighter' resourcing processes than others. For example, in services that enlarged the domains for citizen education, resourcing involved – as we interpreted it from the articles – was relatively 'light' when the aim was simply to raise awareness of health-related issues or digital literacy (Julien et al. 2021; Osuchukwu and Ukachi 2019). In contrast, providing more extensive support for vulnerable groups required careful reconsideration of the value a public library should generate, how its spaces and competences could be applied, who should be considered as a library user, and how to interact with users (Giesler 2021).

An analysis across the five categories suggests that resourcing processes were more intensive in services which introduced novel user-to-user interactions, such as makerspaces, exercise classes and social activities for specific groups. These services required stretching the idea of library or literacy, active consideration of how to reuse library resources and collaborate with partners, as well as introducing, learning and teaching new ways of interacting with citizens in library premises. These services also exemplify the novel ways of thinking about inclusion and capability building as values that are generated in public libraries through interactions between citizens, rather than user-to-staff interactions or self-service, which exemplifies libraries' strengthened role as community centres (Charbonneau and Rathnam 2020; Lenstra 2018; Li and Todd 2019).

Discussion

This paper examined how PSOs can remain viable and continue to generate value as society changes. To explore this question, we proposed evaluating PSOs' resourcing tactics in the creation of novel value propositions by integrating theories of resourcing (Feldman 2004; Feldman and Quick 2009; Feldman and Worline 2012) to recent discussions of value propositions and public value (Bryson et al. 2017; Osborne et al. 2022; Skälén et al. 2018). We illustrated this framework by analyzing new value propositions in public libraries and showed how they have renewed themselves and stayed relevant despite limited resources and changing demands. Next, we discuss the implications of the study for researchers and practitioners in public organizations.

Elaborating on the notion of resourcing value propositions in PSOs

The empirical insights advance the understanding of value propositions and resourcing tactics within one public service domain – public libraries. The findings reveal several new value propositions that illustrate how libraries have positioned themselves to address societal trends including polarization, technology development, the sharing economy and knowledge-intensification. As response to the RQ1, we identified five development pathways: extending the channels for serving the citizens, broadening domains for citizen education, supporting self-expression among citizens, facilitating interactions between citizens more extensively and expanding co-production with citizens.

The findings show that the novel value propositions within these pathways utilize existing resources, practices and norms, such as library spaces and libraries as literacy institutions but stretch and combine them with new ones to develop new means for generating private and public value. As response to RQ2, we identified five resourcing tactics, including stretching and extending norms, repurposing resources, improving and adding library resources, introducing new co-creative practices with partners and introducing new co-creative practices with users. These activities have helped libraries to redeem their role in helping citizens to cope with recent trends in the society.

These findings allow us to further develop the resourcing framework for future research and practice. [Figure 2](#) presents a general model for PSOs based on the resourcing tactics observed in the review. We propose that iterative cycles of these tactics can enable new forms of resource integration interaction, helping PSO, users and partners make better use of their own and one another's resources. Based on this, we argue that more attention needs to be paid to the cyclical nature of processes through which novel value propositions are created and to acknowledge that change in resources is

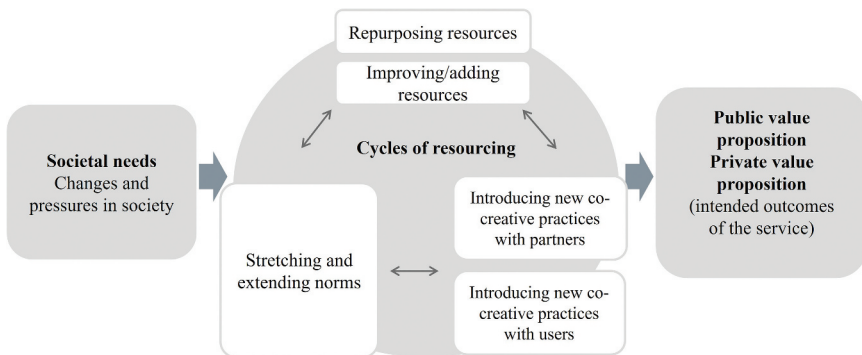


Figure 2. Interrelatedness of resourcing acts in PSOs.

fostered by change in the norms deriving from the authorizing environment and vice versa.

The subtle changes in how libraries interpreted norms in the legitimating environment enabled them to better use not only their own but also users' and partners' resources in value creation. A distinctive feature underlying many novel value propositions was abandoning the norm of libraries as silent place and reinterpreting and strengthening the idea of libraries as inclusive places for capability development. Consequently, many of the novel practices supported user-to-user interactions, which enabled the users to integrate resources directly with one another to give support and advice, create mutual experiences and have fun, as examples. As mentioned earlier, while these novel practices changed users' experiences of libraries and the private value for them, they did not challenge the general notion of the public value that public libraries are traditionally expected to generate.

Research implications

This study develops two research contributions. First, we argue that the concept of resourcing (Feldman and Worline 2012; Wiedner, Barrett, and Oborn 2017) helps further research to capture how value propositions can be renewed under resource constraints. However, it should be noted that possibilities for change are not endless. PSOs inevitably face constraints posed by their capabilities and normative and legislative processes, and these may be more intense in other more strictly regulated public service domains, such as healthcare, education and social services. Therefore, it is likely that their resourcing tactics differ from those identified in libraries. Overall, our review indicates that PSOs may benefit more from subtly stretching and extending norms than from moving beyond the legislative environment. At the same time, however, it is notable that libraries in the literature sample started developing roles traditionally occupied by other types of PSOs, such as social services. This may indicate that they step into a new institutional field in which conflicting demands may arise (Buschman 2017; Giesler 2021).

To address these issues, we propose that further research should explore how different types of PSO can shape expectations and value propositions by linking the resourcing framework with studies on institutional work and institutional entrepreneurship (Bertz, Quinn, and Burns 2024; Furnari 2016; Koskela-Huotari et al. 2016). We also propose developing the notion of resourcing together with frameworks on iterative service development, such as effectuation, which explains how actors develop solutions step-by-step using available resources (Kaartemo, Kowalkowski, and Edvardsson 2018) and bricolage, which highlights how new practices emerge by

creatively recombining what is already at hand (Fuglsang and Sørensen 2011). These perspectives may help to capture the dynamics of change that current public value research has yet to address (Bryson 2021; van Gestel, Ferlie, and Grotenbreg 2024)

Second, these insights contribute to the multidimensional notion of value (Cui and Aulton 2023) by illustrating how libraries have added new public and private value elements to their services while still fulfilling their traditional cultural and educational roles. Co-creative events, such as makerspace workshops, illustrate this well: they educate and build connections between users and subsequently strengthen social coherence and inclusion. The empirical studies of libraries concretize multiple ways in which the co-creation of private value together with users contribute to the emergence of public value at the societal level. These examples also highlight the importance of distinguishing value propositions (the intended outcomes) from the service itself (the resources and practices that enable those outcomes), as this helps clarify how PSOs support value creation and what kind of value they aim to generate.

Limitations

While this study offers useful insights, the research design has limitations that invite further research. First, public libraries represent a distinct type of cultural organization which occupies a central but flexible role in societies. They are typically, loosely regulated, which may allow some autonomy in re-interpreting norms and developing novel services. In other public services, regulations and norms are stricter, which affects the resourcing tactics available. More research is needed in public service domains that vary in terms of the type of resources (physical and immaterial) and beneficiaries (direct interactions with citizens vs. provision of assets, such as road infrastructures).

Second, while the literature review method enabled scanning the library field broadly, the data lacks details on the resourcing processes. Furthermore, except from articles written by the representatives of libraries, the articles represent the interpretations of secondary sources, such as researchers. These issues limit the possibilities to derive theoretical conclusion on two relevant themes that could be addressed in the future research. First, further research could apply process lens to investigate change dynamics in more detail – for example, when and how normative change reveals new use for existing resources, and how novel resources energize further normative change (Feldman and Quick 2009). Qualitative longitudinal studies can reveal the factors that support effective resourcing, helping PSOs respond to changing societal needs in a timely way.

In addition, more research is needed on the capabilities that enable reinterpreting existing norms, the types of actors involved in making these interpretations and possible conflicts in value outcomes. The data from libraries suggest that similar trends occurred in different countries, indicating that library associations and networks may have a central role. More research is needed to understand the prerequisites for these kinds of institutional work and the emerging conflicts across domains of public services.

Practical implications

This study indicates that PSOs could consciously and reflexively combine different resourcing tactics when there is a clearly identified change in societal needs or available resources. This consideration could begin from two alternative viewpoints. The first option is to evaluate the authorizing environment and the extent to which current stakeholder expectations, legislation and habits would allow the PSO some flexibility in deciding their role. The findings from public libraries suggest that interpreting norms broadly – such as expanding the idea of literacy and inclusion – can open up new ways to resource value propositions without moving far from existing expectations.

This approach also requires stepping back from current service routines so that new opportunities can be identified and matched with suitable resources.

The second option is to look creatively at existing, underused resources to see how they could meet new societal needs. The libraries repurposed centrally located and familiar library spaces to introduce new activities that promote inclusion. They also used other underutilized public assets, such as outdoor spaces, for value creation. Such tactics are relevant for many PSOs (Hasu et al. 2015). A key issue is whether the new combinations of resources and practices can be justified and aligned with institutional expectations, as resourcing processes face limits related to societal legitimacy and the capabilities of users and staff (Skålén, Bankel, and Kaluza 2025; Williams 2022). In our cases, retaining core elements of the libraries' identity as inclusive and democratic organizations likely helped make this renewal possible.

Conclusions

This study has contributed to research on public innovation by analyzing resourcing tactics that enable leveraging and repurposing public resources. The findings encourage cross-sectoral learnings between public service organizations and explicate innovative capabilities in the field of public libraries, which has been understudied in the development of public service logic so far. It shows that libraries

have been able to adjust their services to societal changes while maintaining their traditional role. The findings encourage further studies on resourcing processes and their enablers and limits in a multitude of public service contexts. Amid rapid societal change and broader transitions affecting public services, PSOs' ability to proactively make better use of existing resources is likely to be a key competence benefiting everyone.

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