

Mapping trends for the third-place public library concept through systematic review and co-occurrence analysis

Néstor Mir-Planells; Nicolás Robinson-García; Marie D. Martel

Citación recomendada:

Mir-Planells, Néstor; Robinson-García, Nicolás; Martel, Marie D. (2026). "Mapping trends for the third-place public library concept through systematic review and co-occurrence analysis". *Infonomy*, 4(4) e26021. <https://doi.org/10.3145/infonomy.26.021>

Artículo recibido: 29-04-2026

Artículo aprobado: 10-06-2026



Néstor Mir Planells

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3992-9020>

<https://directorioexit.info/ficha7395>

Conselleria de Cultura, Educació i Esport

Direcció General del Llibre, Arxius i Biblioteques

Servici del Llibre i Biblioteques

Valencia, España

nestormirplanells@gmail.com



Nicolás Robinson-García

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0585-7359>

<https://directorioexit.info/ficha1592>

Universidad de Granada

Facultad de Comunicación y Documentación

Campus Cartuja, Edificio Máximo

18071 Granada, España

elrobin@ugr.es





Marie D. Martel

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3162-5794>

<https://www.crihn.org/membres/martel-marie>

Université de Montréal

École de bibliothéconomie et des sciences de l'information (EBSI). Pavillon Lionel-Groulx

3150, rue Jean-Brillant

Montréal (Quebec) H3T 1N8 Canada

marie.martel.1@umontreal.ca

Abstract

This research investigates contemporary trends in the discourse surrounding public libraries and the third place concept. Employing a systematic review coupled with co-occurrence analysis, it aims to identify the most relevant documents on this topic, categorize them by relevance, and extract thematic areas from their titles and abstracts. The goal is to understand the evolving nature of the public library concept in today's context. Two primary research questions guide this study:

- 1) What new terms are emerging to describe public libraries today? and
- 2) To which thematic areas do these terms belong? The first section outlines the process of document identification and classification based on relevance. This classification utilizes a controlled vocabulary developed during searches using terms found in the titles and abstracts of the documents. The second section presents a proposed co-occurrence data analysis. This method enables the detection of trends in the literature on the studied concept and offers a qualitative interpretation of the data, revealing emerging thematic lines that may diverge from the traditional understanding of the public library.

Keywords

Next library; Bibliometrics; Public library; Third space; Public sphere; Third place; Change of library paradigm; Semantic areas of library thinking; Trends; Future.

1. Introduction

While the concept of the "third place" was initially introduced by Oldenburg in the 1980s (Oldenburg, 1989), his primary goal was to stimulate discussion and action surrounding a novel approach to public spaces—distinct from commercial and private spheres. He aimed to provide a framework (see the eight characteristics below) to foster the development of spaces that encourage social connections and innovative community uses.

However, it wasn't until the late 2000s that this concept began to be explicitly applied in specialized library science literature in relation to public libraries (**Audunson et al.**, 2007). This application served as a means to explore new avenues for action and understanding within the context of public library services.

The connection between the third place concept and public libraries is a compelling one. As public libraries evolve in terms of their usage and purpose, they increasingly embody the characteristics of a third place. This paper will demonstrate how this shift is paving the way for innovative approaches that extend beyond the traditional confines of a library. For instance, these new ideas encompass dynamic, multipurpose spaces and expanded social roles, such as serving as hubs for the exchange of experiences and knowledge (**Einasto**, 2015).

Several scholars, including **Ragnar Audunson et al.** (2007), **Alistair Black** (2006), **Brian Campbell et al.** (2009), and **Mathilde Servet** (2010), have incorporated the third place concept into their discussions to stimulate reflection on the evolving nature of public libraries. They suggest re-examining the traditional conception of the public library in light of the eight defining characteristics established by **Oldenburg** (1989):

1. **Neutral Ground:** Third places are spaces where individuals have no obligation to be present.
2. **Leveler:** Third places disregard social status.
3. **Conversation as the Main Activity:** Playful and enjoyable conversation is the primary focus, though not exclusive.
4. **Accessibility and Accommodation:** Third places must be open and accessible to all.
5. **Regulars:** Third places have a core group of regulars who contribute to the space's atmosphere.
6. **Low Profile:** Third places are generally unassuming.
7. **Playful Mood:** The atmosphere in third places is free from tension or hostility.
8. **Home Away from Home:** Third places offer a sense of warmth, belonging, and ownership similar to one's own home.

The need for innovative research approaches to understand the evolving role of public libraries underscores a significant debate surrounding a perceived crisis in their core mission. This crisis is rooted in the technological revolution of the 2000s, marked by the widespread access to the internet (**Audunson**, 2018; **Cuca**, 2018). Coupled with growing citizen participation, social innovation movements (**Block**, 2003), and increased migration (**Krueger**, 2018), the public library has faced a diversification of audiences and a demand for greater community involvement and decision-making

Ray Oldenburg (1989) introduced the concept of "third space" with the primary goal of stimulating discussion and action surrounding a novel approach to public spaces—distinct from commercial and private spheres. He aimed to provide a framework to foster the development of spaces that encourage social connections and innovative community uses

power (**Pateman; Williment, 2013**). Additionally, the imperative of environmental sustainability has emerged as a key concern (**Oyelude, 2018**).

Historically, the public library has been defined by its role in preserving and providing access to books. However, technological and social shifts since the 2010s have fundamentally transformed this traditional conception (Figure 4). As reflected in scholarly literature, public libraries are increasingly viewed as more than repositories of books; they are catalysts for community building, dialogue, and collective knowledge (**Lankes, 2016; Elmborg, 2011**). This evolving understanding challenges the traditional definition of the public library in light of contemporary information consumption and production patterns.

While these references highlight the potential of public libraries as third places, this perspective remains largely absent from mainstream library practice. The traditional conception of libraries as spaces centered around books as knowledge vehicles hinders the adoption of a broader understanding that extends beyond facilitating reading and study (**Gallo-León, 2019**).

However, emerging trends suggest that the third place concept offers a valuable lens for exploring new thematic areas within the public library research landscape.

Our research aims to contribute to the ongoing debate by addressing the following questions:

1. What new terms are emerging to describe public libraries today? (RQ1)
2. To which thematic areas do these terms belong? (RQ2)

To answer these questions, we combine traditional systematic review methods with co-occurrence analysis to examine the relationship between the third place concept and public libraries. Our goal is to assess how this emerging perspective has been integrated into scholarly and academic literature and to identify the key themes and ideas shaping a new framework for understanding the public library.

As we will demonstrate in this article, research on the third-place public library reveals a new thematic landscape where public libraries are increasingly associated with concepts such as social capital (**Wojciechowska, 2021**), public sphere (**Wood, 2021**), citizen participation (**Stadler, 2011**), and collective creation (**Filar-Williams; Folkman, 2017**).

Our objective is to contribute to a broader understanding of how researchers are rethinking the concept of public libraries and their role in contemporary society, using a vocabulary and thematic approach that departs from traditional public library research.

The compelling need to preserve, define, and understand the contemporary public library has spurred an increase in related research. Our study leverages the third place concept to explore a broader perspective beyond the traditional definition of public libraries.

Beyond the original scope of this article, our research seeks to achieve the following broader objectives:

1. **Highlight Emerging Research:** We aim to bring visibility to new research in this field.
2. **Develop a Framework:** We propose a controlled vocabulary and thematic areas to categorize these theoretical trends (public sphere, social capital, citizen participation, and collective creation; see Table 2).

By doing so, we hope to stimulate future research on these trends. This can involve periodic systematic reviews and co-occurrence analyses, adapting the results to evolving realities and theoretical perspectives. Ultimately, this approach can contribute to expanding our understanding of the contemporary public library.

2. Analysis process

To clarify the objectives of this article, it's important to note that our research team was divided into two groups:

1. **Theoretical Group:** This group focused on the theoretical aspects of library science, including defining search terms, reviewing resources, establishing a conceptual framework through a systematic review, and developing a controlled vocabulary (RQ1).
2. **Evaluation Group:** This group was responsible for evaluating search results using co-occurrence analysis to identify thematic areas related to public library research (RQ2).

As illustrated in Figure 1, this collaborative approach allowed for a comprehensive and rigorous investigation of the research topic.

3. Systematic review

In this section, we will present how the theoretical group conducted the document selection process to address the first research question: What new terms are emerging to describe public libraries today (RQ1)? This was achieved through a systematic review.

The systematic review design of this study follows the *PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)* guidelines commonly used in the medical field (Moher et al., 2009). This approach ensures a systematic, evidence-based review, while also promoting reproducibility and transparency in reporting the study's findings. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the document search, selection, and screening process outlined below.

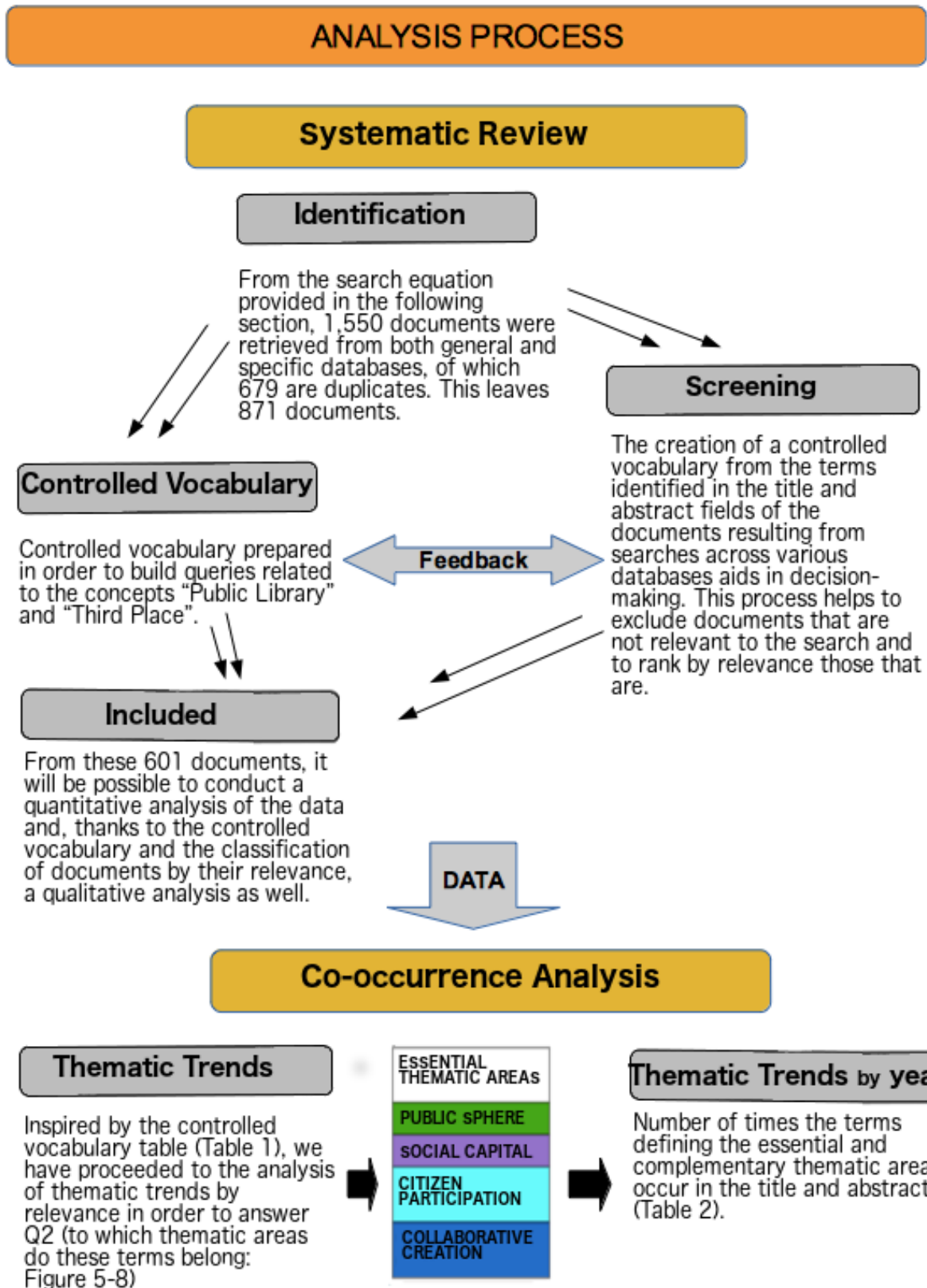


Figure 1. Workflow followed to conduct this research.

To ensure a comprehensive review, we utilized eight bibliographic information sources:

- **Library and Documentation Sources (Specialized):** *LISA*, *LISTA*, and *Érudit*
- **Multidisciplinary Search Engines and Databases:** *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, and *Google Scholar*
- **Social Sciences and Humanities Sources:** *WorldCat* and *Cairn.info*

This selection provides a broad scope, encompassing specialized library databases alongside multidisciplinary resources and relevant platforms for the social sciences and humanities.

Furthermore, to capture research from different regions, we conducted searches in three languages: English, Spanish, and French. Initially, we employed search terms specific to each language (e.g., "public library & third place" in English, "biblioteca pública y tercer lugar" in Spanish, and "bibliothèque publique & tiers-lieu" in French). However, we discovered that Spanish and French documents often included English titles and abstracts. Therefore, we primarily relied on English search terms for all languages throughout the review process.

Our initial search strategy focused on the core concepts of "public library" and "third place." While we initially used "third place," we subsequently included "third space" due to its interchangeable use in relation to public libraries. To ensure a comprehensive search, we targeted the title, abstract, and keyword fields of the bibliographic records.¹

Following initial searches, we expanded our search terms to enhance the comprehensiveness of our query. Key concepts such as "social capital," "public sphere," "citizen participation," and "collective creation" were incorporated into a controlled vocabulary of interconnected terms with varying levels of specificity (Table 1).

This controlled vocabulary was instrumental in addressing the first research question (RQ1). Furthermore, it inspired the formulation of the second question (RQ2), leading us to conduct a co-occurrence analysis on the retrieved documents to delve deeper into the organization of this terminological universe and identify its thematic areas.

Figure 3 illustrates the relationships between the various terms employed in our research. By analyzing these visualizations, we were able to establish different levels of relevance. Additionally, we identified terms to be excluded to minimize search noise. Terms such as "academic," "schools," "cultural heritage," "books," "reading," and "marketing" were excluded from our search criteria.

1 We have not been able to use the full texts of the collected documents since the bibliographic information was exported in .ris format.

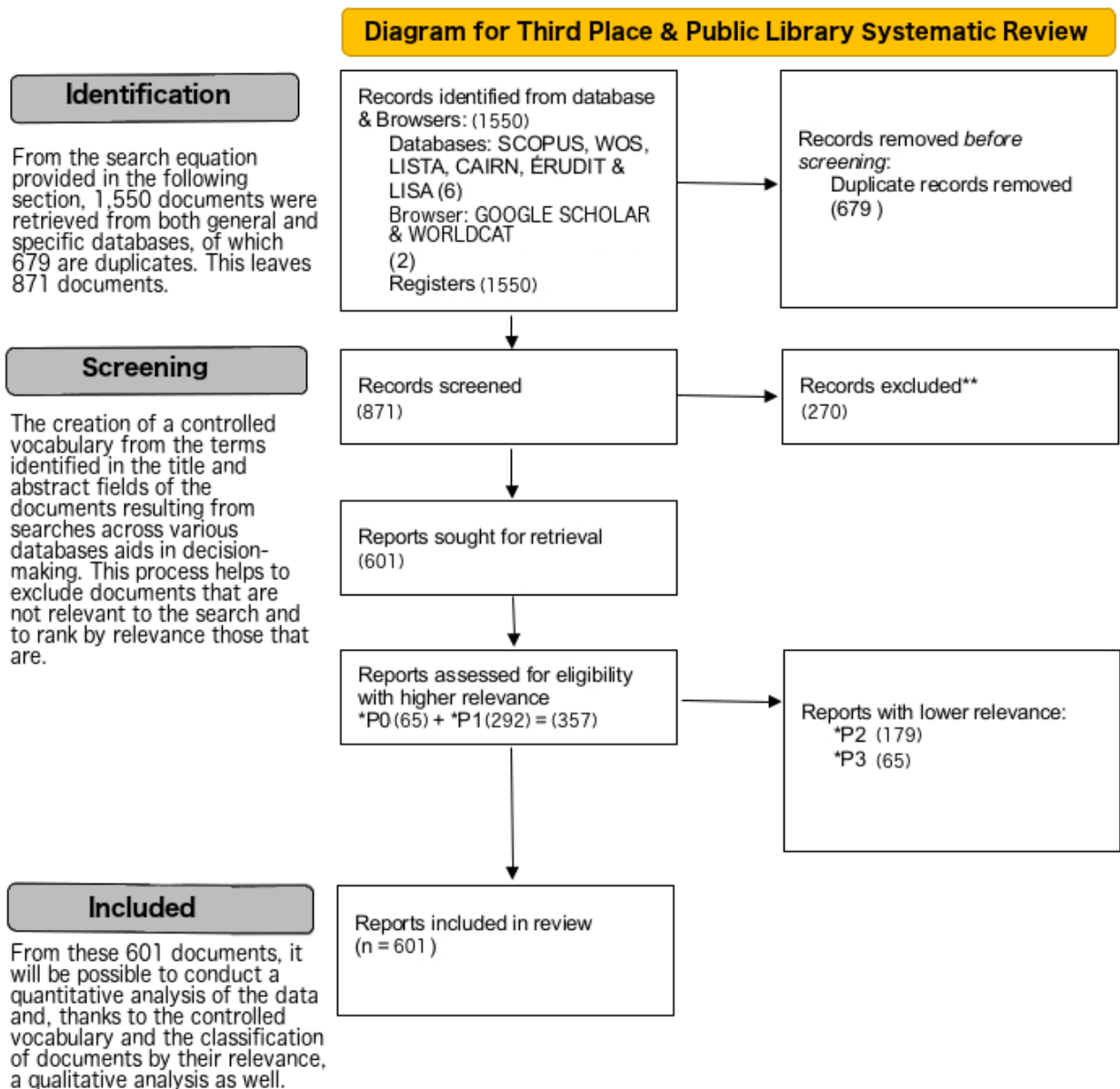


Figure 2. Flowchart based on the *PRISMA* model for the search and selection of documents. P0, P1, P2 and P3 correspond to the degree of relevance of the documents according to the terms extracted, P0 being the most relevant and P3 being peripheral documents.

Table 1². Controlled vocabulary prepared in order to build queries related to the concepts “Public Library” and “Third Place”

General	Concrete terms	Specific by inclusion	Specific by exclusion
P U B L I C L I B R A R Y	Architecture		Archives
	Challenges		Bibliographic
	Citizen		Books
	Community	Engagement – Design Thinking – Development – Involvement – Network – Participation – Resilience – Space	Collection
	Democracy		Heritage
	Education		Marketing
	Environment		Reading
	Empowerment		School
	Green transition		Students
	Maker Space	Fabrication – Making	University
	Meeting place	Social capital – Public Sphere – Community	
	Public service		
	Public Sphere		
	Social aspects		
	Social Capital	Social inclusion – Social justice – Interculturality	
	Social innovation		
	Sustainability		
	Technology		
Third space/place	Social Capital – Youth – Reading		

This controlled vocabulary was developed by carefully examining the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the first 25-30 articles retrieved from initial searches using the terms "Public library" and "Third Place" in *Scopus* and *WoS* databases. These initial readings provided a foundation for a conceptual framework that was refined and expanded as we incorporated new terms into subsequent searches across the aforementioned databases and platforms. By creating this controlled vocabulary, we aimed to offer a structured terminological framework for navigating the vast landscape of library knowledge. This organized cloud of terms not only facilitated the retrieval of highly relevant documents for our research objectives but also enabled us to rank them by relevance.

² While the initial search focused on "Public Library" and "Third Place," subsequent exploration revealed a broader landscape of public library-related research. To organize and delimit this expanding universe, we identified "Public Library" as the General Term. Concrete terms were extracted from the titles, abstracts, and keywords of retrieved documents and used to refine our searches. This process enabled us to establish specific inclusion criteria, creating a hierarchy of document relevance that would be crucial for the second part of the article and addressing RQ2.

Our initial search yielded a total of 1,550 documents from all sources. Duplicate publications were eliminated using *Covidence.org*, resulting in 871 unique records. After a manual review of titles and abstracts, the number was further reduced to 601 documents.

Leveraging our controlled vocabulary, we manually tagged these documents based on their content. The number of assigned tags determined a document's relevance level. Documents with the most tags (P0 - Pillar Documents) were considered the most relevant, followed by P1 (Priority Documents), P2 (Potential Documents), and P3 (Peripheral Documents)³. No single tag was assigned to the most relevant documents; they received multiple tags reflecting their strong thematic connections.

A detailed list of the tags used is provided below.

Library social aspects – Citizen library – Public service library – Public sphere library – Library as space – Library and democracy – Library as meeting place – Community participation – Citizen involvement – Challenges of libraries – Library and social capital – Third space library – Third place library – Library and green transition – Library and social innovation – Library and technology – Library and social inclusion.

As illustrated in the following section, research on the topic of this paper emerged in 2008. Consequently, this temporal limitation was relevant when concluding the document selection process.

This left us with a total of 601 documents: 65 pillar documents, 292 priority documents, 179 potential documents and 65 peripheral documents.

4. Data Analysis and Visualization of Results

We conducted a co-occurrence analysis of the content of the selected works to examine how research in this field is structured. To do this, we mapped the terms in the titles and abstracts of our set of bibliographic records based on the number of times they co-occurred in the various works. Co-word visualization is a mapping technique widely used in bibliometrics (**Callon et al.**, 1983), consisting of creating word co-occurrence matrices, which are then transferred into a word network. In this network, each node represents a word. The size of the node represents the number of times it co-occurs with other word, i.e. the relative importance of the word in the network. This type of analyses allows to examine terminological similarities within a specific field to identify and detect topics (**González-Valiente et al.**, 2021).

³ The “Ps” method was developed by Christine Dufour, notably in the context of producing the literature review reported in the following paper: **Dufour, C.; Martel, M. D.; Lacelle, N.; Kiamé, S.; Garneau-Gaudreault, L. A.; Poulin, T.** (2021). Littératie communautaire: analyse de la production documentaire et revue de la littérature. *Revue de recherches en littératie médiatique multimodale*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1086911ar>

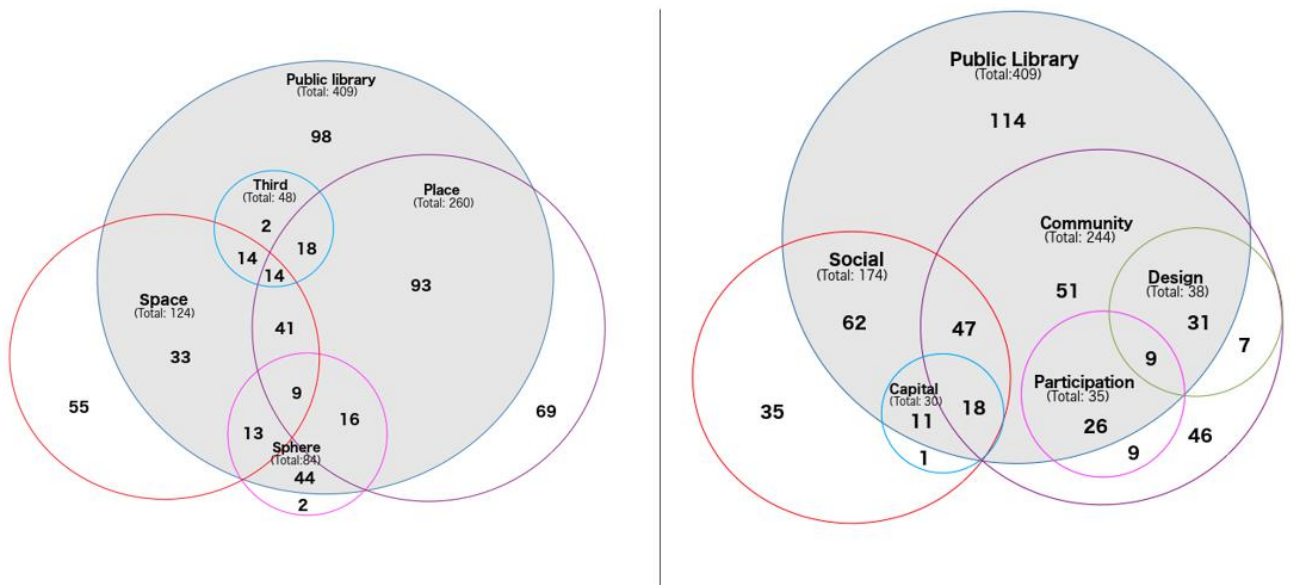


Figure 3. Interrelation between terms related to the concepts “Public Library” and “Third Place”. The number of documents retrieved is shown for each combination of terms, as well as for the total number of documents retrieved per term.

Finally, the nodes are connected by edges with varying weights, representing the strength of their co-occurrence. Heavier or stronger edges indicate more frequent co-occurrence between terms. The position of the node in the network is determined by its relative weight in relation to the other nodes. Finally, the color of the nodes is determined by a clustering method, in this case, the Leiden community detection algorithm (Traag et al., 2019). These clusters allow the bibliographical review to be structured into thematic blocks. We identified two types of thematic areas: essential areas, directly linked to the concepts of “public library” and “third place”, and complementary areas, which correspond to themes more closely linked to a conventional conception of “public library”.

5. Results

Increase in publications by year and relevance

As explained in the previous section, the documents found were classified by order of relevance, from the most relevant, Priority (P0), to the least relevant, Peripheral (P3).

As Figure 4 shows, although the number of publications covered by this study increased sharply between 2005 and 2009, reaching 10 publications a year, the number really began to grow from 2010 onwards, reaching 20 a year, and 30 in 2015. From 2016 onwards, production is not only consolidated, but is never below 60 publications per year, with 2019 being the most productive year with a total of 67 publications.

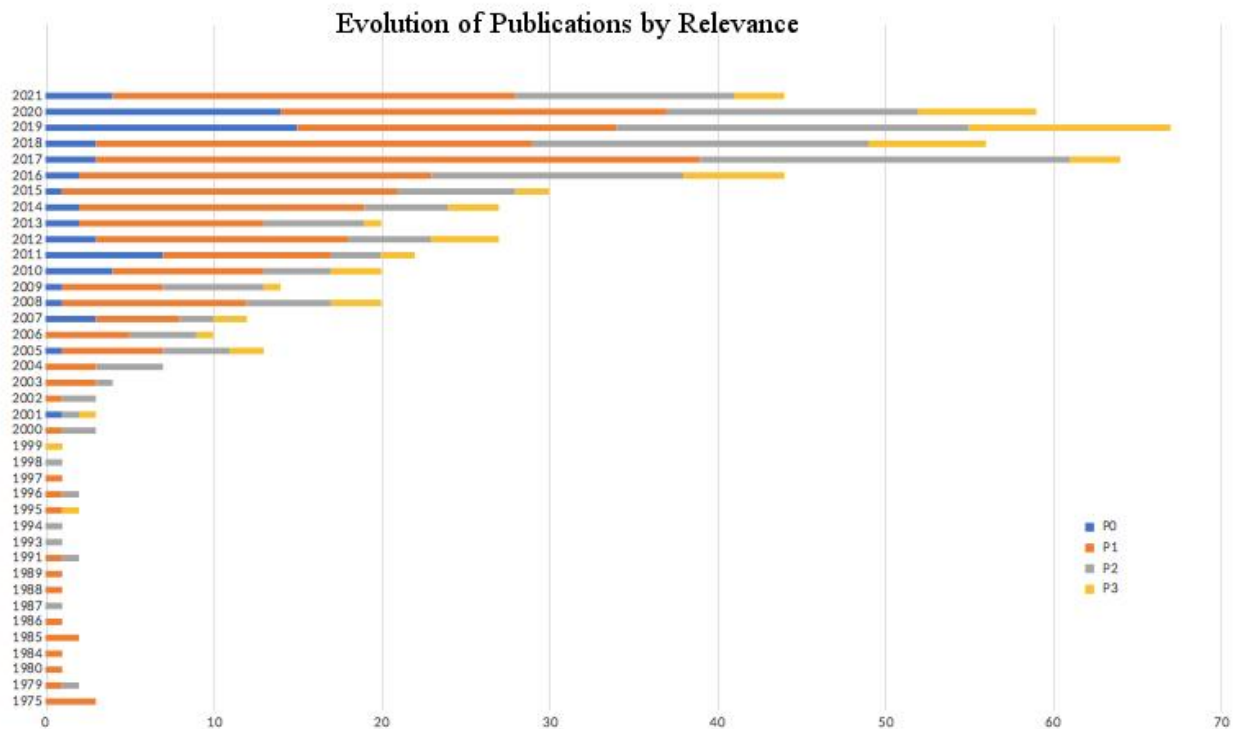


Figure 4. Increase in the number of publications by degree of relevance.

Regarding the relevance indicators, Figure 4 clearly shows that annual publications only began to exceed 30 from 2017 onwards, by adding the indicators for Pillar (P0) and Priority (P1) publications, although this trend does not seem to have stabilized completely. Furthermore, 2019 and 2020 are the years with the highest production of Pillar (P0) publications, i.e., those with the greatest relevance, reaching 15 and 14 publications respectively. It will be noted that Priority publications (P1), with 48.36% of total production, is the most representative indicator (292 documents) and that from 2015 onwards, it did not fall below 20 publications per year, with the exception of 2019 when there were 19.

Finally, we note that 40% of the total production of documents took place between 2017 and 2020, with 14.22% of Pillar (P0) publications, 42.27% of Priority (P1) publications, 31.7% of Potential (P2) and 11.78% of Peripheral (P3) publications.

Thematic trends by relevance

Inspired by the controlled vocabulary table, we analyzed thematic trends by relevance. We distinguished between essential areas, which directly address the research question 'What new terms are emerging to explain public libraries today?' (RQ1), and complementary areas that align with the traditional understanding of the public library. These complementary areas are represented by specific exclusion terms within the controlled vocabulary.

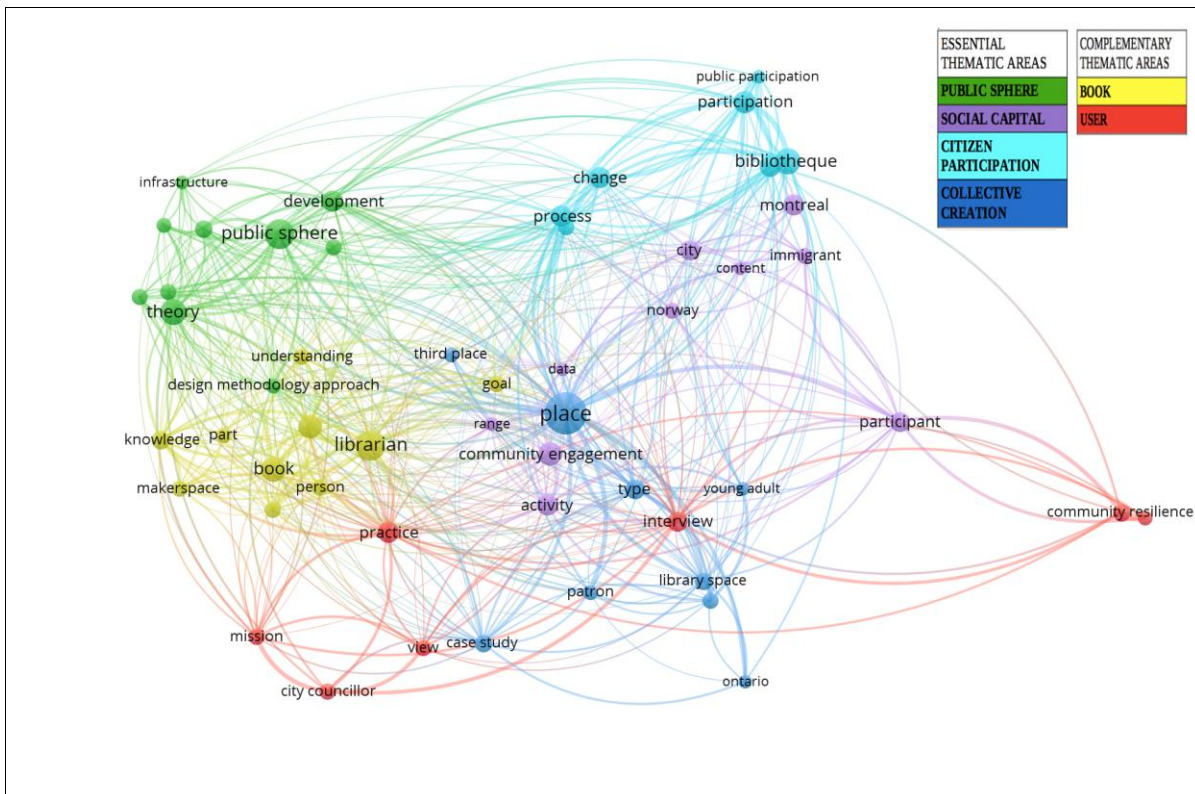


Figure 5. Map of co-words in document titles and abstracts extracted from search terms in Pillar publications. Minimum occurrence threshold 5.

Figure 5 presents the content analysis by word in Pillar publications, highlighting the most important keywords for retrieving Pillar documents (P0). As we can see, six thematic clusters are identified.

The six clusters are strongly connected to each other, the word *place* bridging all of them (*blue cluster*). In parallel, terms such as *public sphere* (*green cluster*), *participation* (*light blue cluster*) and *participant* (*purple cluster*) are also highlighted. These four clusters point to the existence of a set of thematic areas that are essential to the study and another set of complementary thematic areas represented in Figure 5 by the slightly more distant terms, *librarian* (*yellow/blue cluster*) and *mission* (*red cluster*).

Figure 6 shows the content analysis by word in Priority documents (P1). The minimum number of occurrences of a word was set to 7 to generate the figure composed of five clusters.

Again, we can observe that four of the five clusters are highly connected to each other, repeating the concentration of words around all the essential thematic areas: *public sphere* (*green cluster*), *third place* (*dark blue cluster*), *participation* (*purple cluster*), *citizen participation* (*light blue cluster*), and also the complementary thematic area: *user* (*yellow cluster*), which is slightly removed.

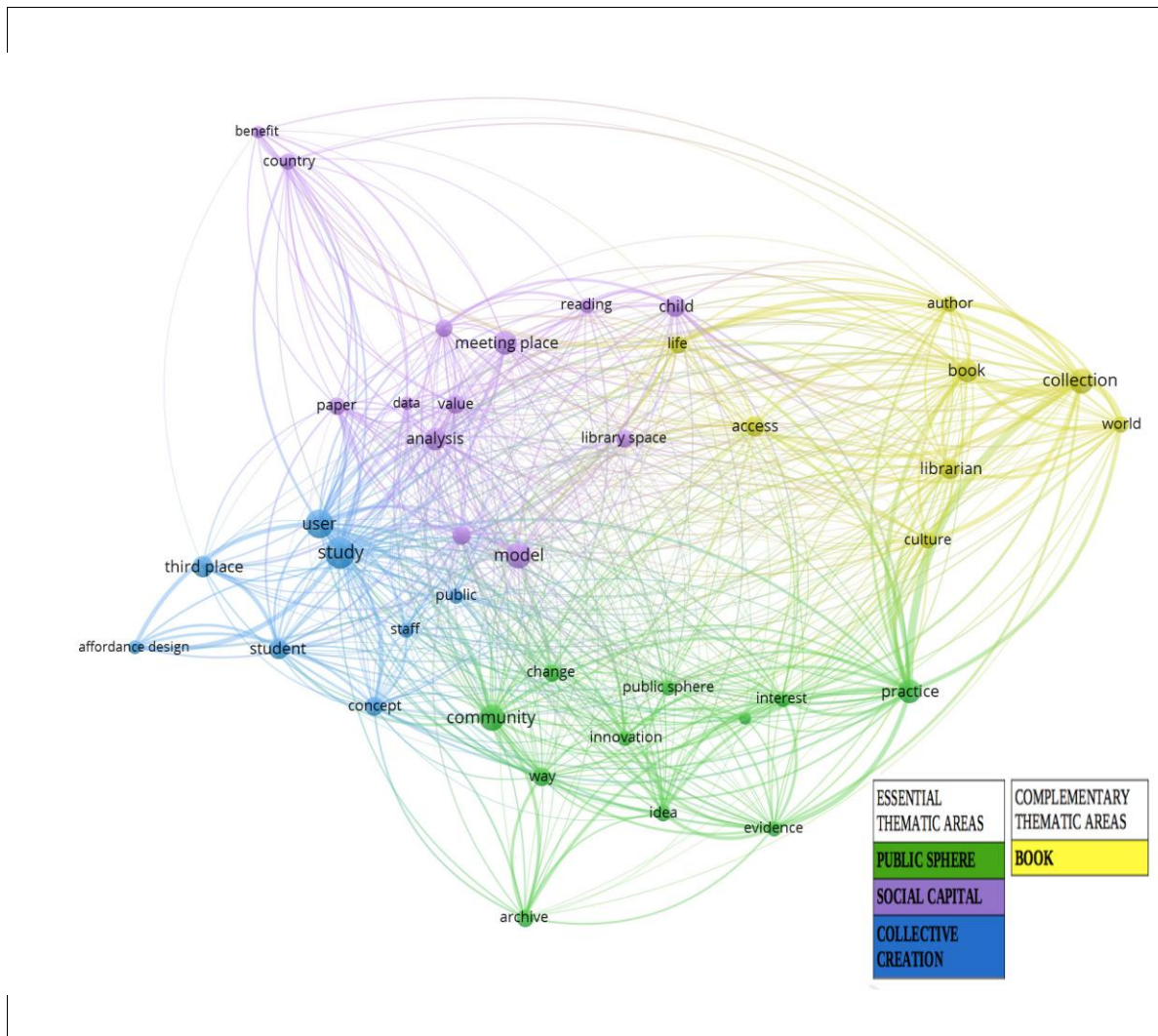


Figure 7. Map of co-words in document titles and abstracts extracted from search terms in Potential publications. Minimum occurrence threshold 10.

This trend is accentuated in Figure 8 below, which shows the map of co-words in document titles and abstracts extracted from search terms in Peripheral publications. We can see that the trends are reversed and that the thematic areas are complementary: *copyright* (yellow cluster) and *service* (red cluster) are central, and the essential thematic areas develop around them: *public sphere* (green cluster), *democracy* (light blue cluster) and *person* (purple cluster), which have a much reduced weight.

Figure 8 presents the content analysis by word in Peripheral documents (P3). The minimum number of occurrences of a word was set to 5 to generate the figure composed of five clusters.

Thematic trends by year

From the foregoing analysis of thematic trends by relevance, we were able to make the key finding that there are four essential thematic areas: public sphere, social capital, citizen participation, and collective creation; and two complementary thematic areas: book and user.

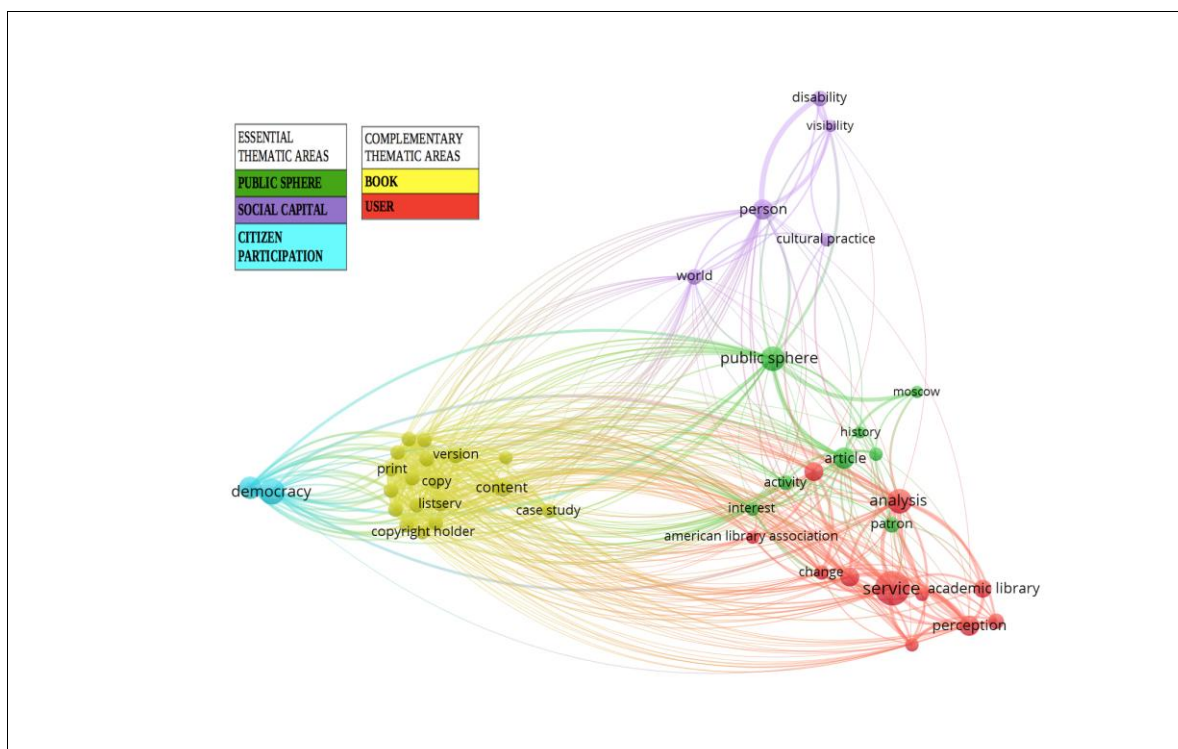


Figure 8. Map of co-words in document titles and abstracts extracted from search terms in Peripheral publications. Minimum occurrence threshold 10.

Based on this classification by areas, formed in turn by the keywords that occur in each of the corresponding clusters represented in Figures 5 to 8, we wanted to draw attention in this section to the change over time (occurrence of terms in the document titles and abstracts) in these words for the analysis.

As shown in Table 2, a change in trend seems to arise from 2016 onwards. Three of the terms that constitute the essential thematic areas, *community*, *public sphere* and *participation*, exceed the central term of thematic areas considered by this study as complementary: *book*. It should also be noted that the term *community* was retrieved 192 times, becoming the symbol of this change in trend, closely followed by the term *public sphere*.

Use of the terms *third space*, *social capital*, *third place*, *democracy* and *maker* also increased, although more moderately.

Our analysis confirms a shift in the trends surrounding the public library concept. This shift began between 2001 and 2010 and solidified between 2016 and 2021, particularly in relation to the third place concept.

In response to RQ2 ('To which thematic areas do these terms belong?'), we can conclude that new thematic areas have gained prominence since 2016, overshadowing more traditional public library themes.

Table 2. Number of times the terms defining the essential and complementary thematic areas occur in the title and abstract. The four highest values per period are highlighted in bold.

	Areas	Total per Area	Terms	1975-2000	2001-2010	2011-2015	2016-2021	Total per year
Essential areas	Public Sphere	229	Public Sphere	4	31	24	145	204
			Third Space	0	2	8	15	25
	Social Capital	413	Community	16	82	65	192	355
			Social Capital	0	21	16	21	58
	Citizen Participation	190	Democracy	0	8	24	40	72
			Participation	9	7	32	70	118
	Collective Creation	88	Third Place	0	18	0	28	46
Maker			0	3	0	39	42	
Complementary areas	Book	298	Book	4	50	92	62	208
			Collection	3	40	16	31	90
	User	166	Mission	1	22	17	34	74
			Patron	0	11	40	41	92

6. Discussion

This study seeks to answer the following fundamental questions:

1. What new terms are emerging to describe public libraries today? (RQ1)
2. To which thematic areas do these terms belong? (RQ2)

By addressing these inquiries, we aim to shed light on the evolving discourse surrounding public libraries.

Beyond these two initial questions lie deeper challenges and debates regarding the future of public library research. These questions encompass various dimensions: who should be involved, how research should be conducted, where it should take place, and what methodologies should be employed. Ultimately, these questions converge into a single, overarching inquiry: What constitutes a public library in today's context (Lankes, 2016)?

To answer the complex question of what constitutes a public library today, we propose a specific perspective: What if we temporarily set aside the traditional understanding of public libraries and focus on emerging trends? Do new terms exist to describe these developments (RQ1)? And if so, to which thematic areas do they belong (RQ2)?

The first research question stems from the need to organize and systematize the information that has emerged regarding the public library and third place concept since

the early 2000s. Through a systematic review of the existing literature, we aimed to identify the new terms shaping the evolving concept of the public library, to provide a controlled vocabulary, presented in Table 1, that could be used to organize, classify, and arrange the information and documentation gathered during the review process by incorporating more specific terms. Subsequently, we classified the numerous retrieved documents based on their degree of relevance.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the most relevant documents are often found at the intersections of various terms. The relationship between public libraries and third places is a prime example, providing a concrete, tangible, and visible answer to RQ1.

Moreover, since the controlled vocabulary is rooted in these intersections, it follows that the thematic areas can also be identified within them.

Beyond the controlled vocabulary, this study aims to offer thematic guidelines and address RQ2: 'To which thematic areas do these terms belong?'. This second question was explored in the Data analysis section through a co-occurrence analysis of the documents retrieved in the systematic review. By analyzing the word cloud associated with the main keywords in Table 1, we sought to offer a more nuanced and specific understanding of scientific production in the field of public libraries. This analysis enabled us to propose a conceptual framework emerging from these key terms.

Drawing upon the controlled vocabulary and insights from Figure 3, we classified the 601 documents by relevance. Subsequently, we proposed a thematic classification based on the most frequently occurring terms within the document titles and abstracts.

These thematic areas, inspired by Figure 3 and presented in Table 2, represent the research trends that have emerged over time. They encompass four essential categories: Public Sphere (**Buschman**, 2020), Social Capital (**Wojciechowska**, 2021), Citizen Participation (**Bertrand**, 2020), and Collective Creation (**Abutayeh**, 2021), along with their associated terms (Table 2 and Figures 5-8).

A significant outcome of this research is the development of a structured terminological framework that highlights the potential for bridging different thematic areas that serves as a foundational step toward developing a theoretical framework for addressing the new challenges (who, how, where, and in what way public libraries are built in

Three of the terms that constitute the essential thematic areas, *community*, *public sphere* and *participation*, exceed the central term of thematic areas considered by this study as complementary: *book*. It should also be noted that the term *community* was retrieved 192 times, becoming the symbol of this change in trend, closely followed by the term *public sphere*. Use of the terms *third space*, *social capital*, *third place*, *democracy* and *maker* also increased, although more moderately

the 21st century) faced by researchers seeking to understand the current state of public libraries.

This set of conceptual trends emerged as a result of our analysis opens up possibilities for future studies to explore connections between communities, particularly for interdisciplinary researchers. This future researchers can easily leverage the information obtained in this study by allocating it to the various thematic areas proposed in Table 2.

As exploratory research, this paper can serve as a foundational step towards a broader public policy initiative. Such an initiative should consider integrating the emerging trends in public library terminology with the need for a multidisciplinary framework for library action (**Skarstein, 2013**).

The significance of this study lies in its ability to bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and the practical realities of public library operations. The terms identified in the selected documents reflect the evolving nature of public library activities, extending beyond the traditional focus on book storage and dissemination. By utilizing this terminological framework, public libraries can gain concrete and actionable insights to enhance their capacity for innovation and effective service delivery. This framework can provide clearer guidelines for addressing contemporary societal needs, promoting the public library's role, and maximizing its impact.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and the practical realities of public library operations. The terms identified in the selected documents reflect the evolving nature of public library activities, extending beyond the traditional focus on book storage and dissemination

Finally, a significant contribution of this study in Information Science is to highlight that, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the terminology and thematic areas shaping contemporary public libraries, it would be beneficial to focus on concrete initiatives implemented within these institutions.

This would provide valuable insights and a deeper understanding of their evolving role. Additionally, access to internal reports on the operations of public libraries would provide valuable insights into their practices, actions, and management procedures. This information could contribute to greater visibility and understanding of these institutions. Research projects, particularly case studies, that delve into the internal workings of prominent public libraries worldwide could foster a tangible connection between theory and practice, bridging the gap between terminology, thematic areas, and concrete actions.

It's important to note that the study's results obtained do not yet allow for a definitive and clear classification of the theoretical trends underlying the terminological network

that emerged from our analysis and that despite this study's efforts the debate surrounding the definition of a contemporary public library remains ongoing. However, our findings, derived from the systematic review and co-occurrence analysis of the retrieved documents, provide valuable insights and potential answers to the two research questions posed in this paper: in Table 1 and Figure 3, we present the emerging terms that describe public libraries today (RQ1), additionally, Table 2 and Figures 5-8 illustrate the thematic areas to which these terms belong (RQ2). Such a classification could be solidified through continued growth in the number of published studies on the topic, as observed since 2016, and then, in the coming years, provide a clear and concise answer to the question: what is a public library today?

7. Conclusion

A significant finding of this study is the substantial increase in scientific publications on public libraries since the early 2000s. This trend is evident in the search results presented in the Data analysis and visualization section.

This study analyzed a total of 601 documents published between 1975 and 2021. Our findings indicate a significant increase in article production within the terminological framework defined by the search equation. This trend became particularly pronounced after 2010, with the number of publications rising from 14 in 2010 to 67 in 2019, the peak year.

While our study found a significant increase in publications since the early 2000s, this trend is further supported by the broader study *Global research trends of public libraries from 1968 to 2017* (Heshmati et al., 2020). Although less specific about thematic changes, this study confirms a substantial rise in document production, from just four publications in 1968 to 97 in 2017.

The growing body of literature on public libraries justifies a co-occurrence analysis of scientific production. This approach enables us to identify, if not a comprehensive vision of the 21st-century library, at least a set of emerging conceptual trends.

Given the significant increase in research on public libraries, we sought to analyze emerging terminological and conceptual trends within this field. Our starting point for this investigation was the 'third place' concept owing to the fact that its definition inherently proposes a shift in the use and understanding of public space (Oldenburg, 1989), including public libraries (Wood, 2021)

As demonstrated in the Systematic Review and Data analysis and visualization sections, our study identified a comprehensive network of terminology surrounding the 'third place' concept in relation with public library. This suggests that the public library concept has evolved significantly since the early 2000s. The interconnectedness of this terminological network with the public library concept encourages us to re-examine public libraries and their functions from a more expansive perspective.

While this study has yielded valuable insights, further research is needed to establish a definitive classification of the theoretical trends underlying this new terminological

network. However, we were able to identify several interconnected areas, united by the common theme of 'community': *public sphere, social capital, citizen participation, and collective creation*. These areas are explored in greater detail in the Data analysis and visualization of results section. While these trends are indicative and subject to change, they align with the premises of this study. By examining the emerging terms and their associated thematic areas, we have contributed to answering the questions: Which new terms are emerging to explain public libraries today? (RQ1) And, to which thematic areas do these terms belong? (RQ2).

In conclusion, the terminology surrounding the contemporary public library concept is extensive and continually evolving. While this study provides valuable insights, it's important to acknowledge that the identified trends may be subject to change in the future. Instead of viewing this situation as a limitation, this study aimed to provide a structured terminological framework and a foundation for research and reflection on contemporary public libraries. This framework is adaptable and capable of offering both descriptive and flexible insights in a rapidly changing environment.

As such, this study serves as an exploratory starting point that could be integrated into a broader research program. It can inform future discussions on the public library and third place concepts, expand the terminological spectrum, and facilitate a more comprehensive reflection on the potential of public libraries beyond traditional perspectives.

8. References

Abutayeh, N. (2021). The Library as an Inspiring Space for Learning and Innovation. *Library Philosophy and Practice*.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/6354>

Audunson, R. A. (2018). Do We Need a New Approach to Library and Information Science?. *Bibliothek Forschung und Praxis*, 42 (2): 357-362.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/bfp-2018-0040>

Audunson, R.; Vårheim, A.; Aabø, S.; Dokk-Holm, E. (2007). Public libraries, social capital, and low intensive meeting places. *Information Research - an International Electronic Journal*, 12(4).

<https://hdl.handle.net/10037/6445>

Bertrand, A. (2020). Inclure par l'empowerment: L'hypothèse du tiers-lieu culturel La Bulle. *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France*, n. 2.

https://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/BBF-2020-2_Bertrand.pdf

Black, A. (2006). The Past Public Library Observed: User Perceptions and Recollections of the Twentieth-Century British Public Library Recorded in the Mass-Observation Archive. *Library Quarterly*, 76 (4): 438-55.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/511100>

Block, M. (2003). How to Become a Great Public Space 2003. *American Libraries*, 34 (4): 72-74, 76
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25648708>

Buschman, J. (2020). The public sphere without democracy: some recent work in LIS». *Journal of documentation*, 76 (3): 769-83.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-06-2019-0115>

Callon, M.; Courtial, J. P.; Turner, W. A.; Bauin, S. (1983). From translations to problematic networks: An introduction to co-word analysis. *Social science information*, 22 (2): 191-235.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/053901883022002003>

Campbell, B.; Singh, S.; DeFaveri, A.; Smith, E.; O'Donnell, J. (2009). *Trousse d'outils pour des bibliothèques à l'écoute de la communauté*. Working Together Toolkit, 2009.
http://bv.cdeacf.ca/RA_PDF/140109.pdf

Cuca, J. (2018). Development of Public Libraries as Open Spaces in the Digital Era and Their Role in Democratization of Society". *Čitalište: naučni časopis za teoriju i praksu bibliotekarstva*, 17 (32): 61-66.
<https://scindeks.ceon.rs/article.aspx?artid=2217-55551832061C>

Di Domenico, G. (2020). Sustainable. Libraries in the time of ecological crisis (notes in the margin of Going Green). *JLIS.it*, 11 (1): 36-55.
<https://doi.org/10.4403/jlis.it-12604>

Dufour, C.; Martel, M. D.; Lacelle, N.; Kiamé, S.; Garneau-Gaudreault, L. A.; Poulin, T. (2021). Littératie communautaire: analyse de la production documentaire et revue de la littérature. *Revue de recherches en littératie médiatique multimodale*, 14.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1086911ar>

Einasto, O. (2015). Transforming library communication: from Gutenberg to Zuckerberg. *New Library World*, 116 (5/6): 247-263.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/NLW-05-2014-0055>

Elmborg, J. K. (2011). Libraries as the spaces between us: Recognizing and valuing the third space. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 50 (4): 338-350.
<https://doi.org/10.5860/rusq.50n4.338>

Filar-Williams, B.; Folkman, M. (2017). Librarians as Makers. *Journal of Library Administration*, 57 (1): 17-35.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2016.1215676>

Gallo-León, J. P. (2019). Crítica y ratificación del modelo del tercer lugar para las bibliotecas. *Anuario ThinkEPI*, 13.
<https://doi.org/10.3145/thinkepi.2019.e13b01>

González-Valiente, C. L.; Costas, R.; Noyons, E.; Steinerová, J.; Šušol, J. (2021). Terminological (di) Similarities between Information Management and Knowledge Management: A Term Co-Occurrence Analysis. *Mobile Networks and Applications*, 26 (1): 336–346.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11036-020-01643-y>

Heshmati, B.; Hashempour, L.; Saberi, M. K.; Fattahi, A.; Sahebi, S. (2020). Global Research Trends of Public Libraries from 1968 to 2017: A Bibliometric and Visualization Analysis. *Webology*, 17 (1): 140-157.

<https://doi.org/10.14704/WEB/V17I1/a213>

Krueger, S. (2018). Norwegian Public Library Language Cafes Facilitate Discourse Between Immigrants and Norwegian-Born Citizens. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 13 (1): 18-20.

<https://doi.org/10.18438/eblip29330>

Lankes, R. D. (2016). *Expect more: demanding better libraries for today's complex world*. 2nd edition.

Moher, D.; Liberati, A.; Tetzlaff, J.; Altman, D. G. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: the PRISMA statement. *BMJ*, 339, b2535.

<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.b2535>

Oldenburg, R. (1989). *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts and How They Get You through the Day*. New York: Paragon House.

Oyelude, A. A. (2018). Placemaking and technology as tools for greening libraries. *Library Hi Tech News*, 35 (10): 9-11.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/LHTN-09-2018-0061>

Pateman, J.; Williment, K. (2013). *Developing community-led public libraries: Evidence from the UK and Canada*. Roudledge, 256 pp. ISBN: 978 1 315576817

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315576817>

Servet, M. (2010). Les bibliothèques troisième lieu. Une nouvelle génération d'établissements culturels. *Bulletin des bibliothèques de France*, 55 (4): 57-66.

<https://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/bbf-2010-04-0057-001>

Skarstein, V. M. (2013). The Library Space. "The library of our dreams". *Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly*, 46 (2): 3-3.

https://slks.dk/fileadmin/publikationer/publikationer_engelske/splq/SLQ2_2013.pdf

Stadler, H. (2011). The Citizens Will Decide: The Library as a Subject of Debate Between Politicians, Local Government, and the Citizenry. *BuB Forum Bibliothek und Information* 63 (6): 450-453.

Traag, V. A.; Waltman, L.; Van Eck, N. J. (2019). From Louvain to Leiden: guaranteeing well-connected communities. *Scientific reports*, 9 (1): 5233.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-41695-z>

Wojciechowska, M. D. (2021). The role of public libraries in the development of social capital in local communities – a theoretical study. *Library Management*, 42 (3): 184-196.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-10-2020-0139>

Wood, E. (2021). Libraries Full Circle: The Cross Section of Community, the Public Sphere, and Third Place. *Public Library Quarterly*, 40 (2): 144-166.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2020.1737491>