

Is There a Place for Libraries of Things in Irish Public Libraries?



ALISON HUNTER HECA 2024

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LiBRARY of THiNGS

Why buy when you can borrow?



What is a Library of Things?

“A library of things is any collection of objects loaned, and any organization that practices such loaning.”

(Wikipedia, 2024)



LIBRARY OF THINGS

LiBRARY of THiNGS

Why buy when you can borrow?



LIBRARY OF THINGS

What is a Library of Things?

“..any collection of physical objects that serve a utilitarian purpose as tools, equipment or goods; that circulate beyond the walls of the library; that provide a cost-saving benefit to patrons by supplying something for which they have an existing need; that have an inherent appeal to patrons; and that defy standard processes for acquiring, cataloguing and circulation”

(Robison & Shedd, 2017)

Why a Library of Things?

- National Public Library Strategy
- UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Circular/Sharing Economy
- Cost of Living
- Lifelong Learning
- Community



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

The Library is the Place: Information, Recreation, Inspiration

National Public Library Strategy
2023-2027



Prepared by the Department of Rural and Community Development,
the City and County Management Association and
the Local Government Management Agency.

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1. No Poverty
3. Good Health & Wellbeing
10. Reduced Inequalities
11. Sustainable Cities & Communities
12. Responsible Consumption & Production
13. Climate Action

Aims & Objectives

Investigate whether Irish Public Libraries are moving in the direction of offering Libraries of Things (LoTs)

Understand the strategy behind these decisions

Discover barriers/drivers to offering LoTs in Irish public libraries

Consider adaptation of LoT format to suit Irish public library model & what frameworks might need to be implemented to facilitate that



Literature Review

Themes:

Community

Sustainability & Green Libraries

The Sharing Economy

Makerspaces



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Literature - continued

The library as a **community** space

- Third Place / Affinity Space
- Crisis response – resources & education
- Addressing the needs of the local community
- Inclusivity & accessibility

Sustainability & Green Libraries

- UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Libraries as “good examples” and “agents of change”

Literature - continued

Sharing Economy

- Access to underutilised goods
- Cost of living
- Sharing via libraries takes the “emotion” out of person-to-person sharing

Makerspaces

- Reuse / Repair
- Skills for Life
- Tools / DIY
- Craft and traditional skills

Methodology

Qualitative Research

Interviews

- Eight senior public librarians
- One USA library
- Five local authorities in Ireland
(two rural, three urban)
- Five in-person & one email interview

Thematic Analysis

- Braun & Clarke

Themes

1. A Library of Things is not “simply” tools!

- Definition of a Library of Things
- Risk

2. Infrastructure

- Space & Storage
- Cataloguing
- Staff

Themes

3. Funding

- Budgets & Investment
- Grants

4. Sustainability

- Climate and the SDGs
- Strategy & Continuity
- Making a Place for a Library of Things in Ireland

Discussion

Irish public libraries are already offering much in the way of Libraries of Things (DVDs, CDs, Home Energy Packs, Sensory toys and tools).

No national strategy (as yet!).

Interviewees expressed reservations around the practicalities of offering LoTs (space, time, funding, staffing).

Discussion

Participants expressed opposing views of Libraries of Things, when considering them as a librarian (hesitant), or as a patron (supportive).

Workshops and practical information for public library and local authority staff would be useful to support a proposal to introduce Libraries of Things.

If new ventures in public libraries are to be housed in newer buildings in urban centres, how are rural/smaller communities to access them?

Discussion

Future-proof the next national LMS to include options to catalogue non-traditional items (requirements to be included in the next tender).

Staff time and training?

Discussion

Funding – start with smaller items.

Alternatively: *“you’re investing in things that are quite expensive, so that the community doesn’t have to invest..”*

Grants – precarious funding model.

Funding for LOTs will need to be built into strategic planning, as building infrastructure and Makerspaces have been recently.

Making a Place for a Library of Things in Ireland

Status Quo?

“Siloed” Local Authority initiatives

Depots?

- Brooklyn Toy Library – stored in main library and circulated by library van deliveries
- Interviewee 1 (Ireland) – Library of Things (toys & games) circulated in the same way.

Partnership model?

- Music Generation
- Fritidsbanken Leisure Library (Sweden)

Leabharlann na nEarraí?

- A national, centralised Library of Things “hub”.
- Funded by contributions from Local Authorities/LGMA.
- Resourced with trained and experienced staff.
- Dedicated cataloguing system (linked to national public library LMS)
- Dedicated, tailor-made space for storage of the Things
- Regular, reliable deliveries and collections from Local Authorities to ensure circulation.
- Provision of safety videos, training courses.
- Public liability concerns mitigated by the hub’s own insurance, not that of Local Authorities

What can *you* do?

- Laptops & chargers.
- Ebook readers.
- Whiteboards.
- Noise-cancelling headphones.
- Teaching tools.
- Medical models.
- Sports equipment.
- Board games.
- Projectors.
- Craft kits.
- “Explore our local area” kits (backpack, map, café voucher, treasure hunt).
- A Ryanair-suitable cabin bag.

The possibilities are endless!

Thank you!

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Full dissertation available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10788/4620>



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