What are public libraries for? Culture as a determinant of conceptualizations of public library services for forced migrants

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ABSTRACT

Public libraries offer important services for newcomer populations, including forced migrants. They help facilitate the integration of forced migrants into the host country, increase their levels of trust within new communities, and build social capital. To date, however, the determinants of forced migrant engagement with public library services has been left unexplored. Here the impact of culture on conceptualizations of public library services, and the role of this on the adoption and use of public library services, is investigated using the *Theory of information worlds*. The analysis is based on data collected in semi-structured interviews with 30 UK service gatekeepers for forced migrants. Thematic analysis identified three conceptualizations of public library services as: (1) leisure services, that (2) offer information services, (3) as part of a larger system that includes other functions such as immigration and policing. These conceptualizations impact service use and, importantly, non-use. Further contributions of the work include the proposal that Maslow's (1943) *Hierarchy of needs* may serve as a moderating variable for the five societal elements of the *Theory of information worlds*, and practical recommendations for public library staff keen to increase forced migrant engagement with the services that they offer.

KEYWORDS

asylum seekers; forced migration; information behavior; public libraries; refugees

INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with culture as a determinant of forced migrants' conceptualizations of public library services in the United Kingdom (UK). The term 'forced migrant' refers to refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons whose migratory movement is caused by force, compulsion, or coercion (e.g., Lloyd, 2017, p. 37; Van Hear, 2012, p. 10). "Culture" encompasses the values systems, patterns of behaviors, practices, and accepted norms derived from historical traditions that are passed down to the next generation within a group (drawing on Brady *et al.,* 2018, p. 11406 and Shoham and Rabinovich, 2008, p.22).

It has been established that forced migrants need to adjust their known ways of accessing information when they settle in a new host country (Lloyd, 2017 p. 39), and cultural factors may play a role in their information behaviors (Martzoukou & Burnett, 2018 p. 1116). There is an opportunity to contribute further to this nascent area of Library and Information Science (LIS) research (Lloyd, 2017 p. 35) through consideration of fundamental understandings of the notion of a public library service amongst a defined population of newcomers. Findings from studies of this nature have high societal importance at a time when populations across the globe flee regions of conflict and crisis – for example, most recently from Afghanistan and Ukraine - and those offering public services in host countries need to prepare appropriately for the arrival of these newcomers.

The study reported in this paper is an exploration of findings from ongoing research that covers the broader topic of culture as an explanatory factor of public library use by forced migrants. Three conceptualizations of public libraries are generated: (1) "Public libraries are for leisure"; (2) "Public libraries are not primary information sources"; and (3) "Public libraries are part of "the system"". This work is a novel contribution to LIS because, to date, the relationship between cultural factors and conceptualizations of public library services has not been explored in depth (Salzano *et al*, 2020).

First the research context is established with an overview of the broader literature on the information behaviors of newcomer populations (including forced migrants), with a focus on public library services for meeting information needs. Here it is established that perspectives on newcomers and public libraries are usually generated from analyses of data collected from those who provide (rather than use) public library services, and that forced migrants have rarely been considered a distinct population of newcomers for detailed consideration in this context. Then follows a description of the theoretical framework adopted for the study, and the research approach implemented to address

two specific research questions. The results demonstrate that cultural factors, such as social norms and information value, influence forced migrants' perceptions, and also their use, of public libraries. This research is significant because it reveals the ways in which forced migrants understand the relevance of public library services to their needs, and indicates how an appreciation of the cultural backgrounds of forced migrant communities can underpin decision-making to contribute to the provision of appropriate library services. This, in turn, helps build a resilient society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

LIS studies on the information behaviors of newcomers in public libraries, and the role of culture

The information behaviors of newcomers, i.e., forced migrants, immigrants, international students, and migrant workers, is an established topic of research in the LIS literature (Sin, 2015 p. 466). Sub-populations of newcomers may be considered separately, for example immigrants (e.g., Adekanmbi, 2019), international students (e.g., Oh & Butler, 2019), and forced migrants (e.g., Martzoukou & Burnett, 2018). Within these sub-populations, however, there is overlap. For example, work with immigrants may include migrant workers (e.g., Fisher *et al.*, 2004a; Fisher *et al.,* 2004b) and forced migrants (e.g., Shepherd *et al.*, 2018). It has been argued that much of the research on the information behaviors of newcomers inappropriately conflates the experiences of immigrants and forced migrants, and that this practice decreases the generalizability of research findings (Marshall *et al.*, 2020 p. 850). It is therefore important to acknowledge that not all findings from the current literature can be directly applied to distinct populations.

The information behaviors of newcomers covered in such work ranges from everyday information behaviors (e.g., Khoir *et al.*, 2015), to perceptions of resources (e.g., van der Linden *et al.*, 2014), and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) (e.g., Borkert *et al.*, 2018). Some of this work is undertaken in the context of public libraries (e.g., Aabø & Audunson, 2012), but this is not always the case (e.g., Fisher, 2018; Hassan & Wolfram, 2019). Indeed Fisher *et al.* (2004a) found in a study of immigrant workers in New York that they placed heavy reliance on their personal networks for information, rather than other information sources. Equally, in a later overview of research on the information behaviors of forced migrants, Fisher (2018, p. 86) reports the primacy of accessing information from people, attributing this in part to higher trust in sources that are not associated with official channels. Similarly, in their exploration of the use of ICTs by forced migrants in Europe, Borkert *et al.* (2018 p. 6) also found that libraries were rarely used due to a preference for accessing information from community members.

In the extant work that makes direct reference to the information behaviors of newcomers and public libraries, attention is paid primarily to the community role of such services (e.g., Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Audunson *et al.*, 2011; Caidi & Allard, 2005; Grossman *et al.*, 2021; Johnston, 2016, 2018; Khoir *et al.*, 2017; Martzoukou & Burnett, 2018; Shepherd *et al.*, 2018; Vårheim, 2011, 2014), encompassing societal and epistemic aspects (Appleton *et al*., 2018). More specifically, resource provision is a focus (e.g., Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Burke, 2008; Johnston, 2016, 2018; Khoir *et al.*, 2017; Shepherd *et al.*, 2018). Such research may identify the most used resources (e.g., Shepherd *et al.*, 2018), although the context of such use is often left unexplored (Fisher, 2018 p. 102). More detailed analyses consider the function of resource use as means of support for newcomers (e.g., Johnston, 2016), particularly for their integration. For example, newcomers may access public library resources to connect with the culture of their host country (e.g. Audunson *et al.*, 2011; Caidi and Allard, 2005; Grossman *et al.*, 2021; Johnston, 2016 and 2018), to learn the local language (e.g., Johnston, 2016, p. 13; Vårheim, 2014), or to study for school (Burke, 2008). Similarly, the function of public libraries as meeting places for professional, educational, and leisure activities (e.g., Aabø *et al.*, 2010; Khoir *et al.*, 2017, p. 37; Vakkari *et al.*, 2016) is connected to increased levels of trust (Audunson *et al.*, 2011 p. 224-226), the development of social capital in communities (Vårheim, 2011 p. 18), and a means of promoting social inclusion for newcomer groups.

The cultural background of newcomers is sometimes cited as a significant underlying reason for resource use in this body of work. For example: Lloyd *et al.* (2013) and Martzoukou and Burnett (2018), acknowledge the importance of appropriate information formats for newcomers, and identify that illiteracy and different cultural practices for the communication of information (such as story-telling) influence the usefulness of information resources; prior work has established that trust in the public library system leads to higher use (e.g., Vårheim, 2014 p. 65); and Caidi & Allard (2005 p. 320) consider the relevance of resources provision. However, the focus in much of the work cited here is the more evident information behaviors rather than their less visible determinants. For example, apart from some discussion in Fisher (2018) of the trustworthiness of information sources, the reasons behind the tendency of immigrant populations to rely on community sources of information are not discussed in the three outputs cited above that identify this trait (Borkert *et al.*, 2018; Fisher *et al.*, 2004a; Fisher, 2018). In addition, the specific issue of conceptualizations of public library services is not addressed in this work.

Culture is framed in one of two ways in the extant work: (1) to differentiate between distinct user groups (e.g., Caidi & Allard, 2005; Lloyd *et al*., 2013; Martzoukou & Burnett, 2018), or (2) to draw attention to integration (e.g., Audunson *et al.*, 2011; Johnston, 2018). Differentiation is often accomplished with reference to social norms and values, as in work by Peterson (2014) where the value of self-sufficiency is seen to contribute to an unwillingness to ask for help (p. 395), or that of Yeh (2007) where the social norm is that information can be found in an act of doing. Integration is often approached with the desire to determine whether specific public library resources promote it, as Johnston (2018) explores with reference to library programs designed to enhance language skills. Yet despite the identification of culture as a determinant of information behaviors in such work, the concept is not explored in great depth, and the term is often used loosely. Without a definition to contextualize its meaning (Salzano *et al.*, 2020), "culture" is not a useful explanatory variable of information behavior. Nor can studies that (at least at on the surface) appear to be comparable, generalizable, and repeatable be genuinely considered such. These observations surface an opportunity for LIS research to generate a deeper understanding of the relationship between culture and information behaviors of newcomer populations in general. The study reported in this paper focuses on one specific element of this as relevant to one newcomer population – conceptualizations of public libraries for forced migrants – in the context of the larger body of extant work that is primarily concerned with information behaviors, including public library use, of newcomers.

Theoretical framework: *Theory of information worlds*

The *Theory of information worlds* (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010) offers a suitable framework for a study targeted at enhancing of knowledge of the relationship between culture and conceptualizations of public library services for forced migrants. This theory was initially considered appropriate because it places an emphasis on a holistic understanding of information behaviors (Burnett *et al.*, 2014), and has previously been deployed in LIS research about newcomers (e.g., Peterson, 2014). More specifically, its main tenets correspond neatly with the framing of the theme of culture in this study, as elaborated below.

The *Theory of information worlds* has mainly been developed from two previous theoretical works: *Small worlds* (Chatman, 1999 pp. 209-210) and *Lifeworld* (Habermas 1984 p.13). Chatman considers the micro-context of an individual's information behavior, and Habermas the macro-context of societies (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010 p. 8). In the *Theory of information worlds*, it is posited that a combination of the micro- and macro-contexts most accurately accounts for information behaviors. Thus, while the specific background of an individual, such as the norms of behavior assimilated within the family setting, may determine much information behavior, broader society also plays a role. Jaeger and Burnett (2010, p. 8) establish five societal elements that serve as actors on information behaviors: social norms; social types; information value; information behavior; and boundaries. These elements can connect to a range of factors encompassed in the definition of culture adopted for the study reported in this paper (as noted above), and include, for example, understandings of appropriate roles that individuals may hold, and shared perceptions of value.

In the research elaborated below, the findings from the empirical work on cultural determinants are linked to two societal elements from the *Theory of information worlds*: social norms and information value. Social norms have previously been highlighted as important aspects of individuals' "ways of knowing" (Lloyd *et al.*, 2013 p. 123), and the means by which newcomers reconcile the social norms of their countries of origin with the social norms of the countries in which they settle is an important element of resettlement. The notion of information value applies not only to the content of information (p. 2), but also other elements such as its presentation (p. 42), and provenance (p. 44). For example, taking into account the *Theory of information worlds*, when the format or origin of a piece of information is distrusted, it will be assigned low information value and is unlikely to be used.

METHODS

Given the lack of extant knowledge on the impact of culture on the use of public library services by forced migrants, the <u>larger</u> study to which the findings discussed below contribute was designed to answer two broad research questions:

> *Research question 1:* How do forced migrants use public libraries during their period of residence in the UK?

> *Research question 2:* What is the nature of the cultural factors that influence this public library use?

More specifically, <u>in this paper,</u> which is primarily concerned with conceptualizations of public library services for forced migrants (a more distinct topic than 'use', despite the impact of one on the other), the following sub-questions are addressed:

> *Sub-question 1:* How are UK public library services conceptualized as services for forced migrants?

Sub-question 2: What is the role of culture as a determinant of these conceptualizations?

A qualitative research design approach was adopted for this research. This accommodated the need to gather data on community perceptions of a service, and of the relationship between perceptions and the concept of culture, from individual informants. Data collection in semi-structured interviews was deemed the most appropriate method in this case. This was because semi-structured interviews more easily incorporate open-ended questions than do other data collection tools (such qualitative questionnaires, with the additional risk of low response rates (Lavrakas, 2008)), and also offer the flexibility for asking follow-up questions. In addition, several concepts covered in the question battery, such as culture, were not straightforward. Interviewing thus allowed for additional explanation on behalf of both the interviewer and the interviewee.

The timing of data collection for this study coincided with the global COVID-19 pandemic. To interview forced migrants directly at this time risked adding to their anxiety of living through the experience of forced migration while also coping with the further stresses of life under the UK lockdown restrictions. Therefore, the decision was taken to target an alternative group as interview candidates. Following Spacey *et al.* (2021 p. 434), who have identified that gatekeepers are often used in research with communities considered vulnerable, staff and volunteers who work with forced migrants in the UK were targeted as study participants. While there is precedence for this approach, bias may have been introduced into the research through the use of indirect participants. To address this, there are plans for the findings of the analysis reported below, alongside those from another element of the larger study (Salzano *et al.*, [in press]), to be presented to a focus group that comprises forced migrants. This will allow for garnering forced migrant views on the issues surfaced in the two phases of the earlier empirical work.

Recruitment of 30 interviewees was achieved following a campaign to market the study in various ways, including: accessing members of the research team's own social networks with requests to share news of the study; calls on social media tagged with relevant names of organizations and individuals to increase visibility; promotion of the study by relevant professional bodies (e.g. the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), and CILIP Scotland) and groups connected to migration and integration in the UK (e.g. City of Sanctuary, and The Welcoming), in both their open and 'closed' (member only) communications; and cold-calling combined with follow-up emails, to UK public library services known to offer specific provision for forced migrants. These efforts resulted in 30 participants from England and Scotland who agreed to undertake an interview between May 2021 to February 2022, and confirmed that their data could be used in the final data set for analysis. (One further interviewee withdrew their participation post-interview.) An overview of the participants and the nature of their work with forced migrants is given in Table 1.

Nature of participant work with forced migrants	Organization/sector	No
Paid	Local government (including 4 resettlement officers)	7
	Public library	7
	Third	6
Voluntary	Formal body (e.g. funded national initiative or charity)	4
	Local group (e.g. unfunded befriending group)	6
	Total	**30**

Table 1. Participant overview

As can be seen in the table, the majority of interviewees were not public library staff. This is in contrast to many of the prior studies cited in the literature review above, and may account for some of the novel contributions of the study as reported below. Gatekeepers from beyond public libraries were desirable as research participants to help generate a more complete understanding of the research topic under investigation. Although not deliberately sought during the recruitment campaign, four of the participants who came forward for interview also offered lived experience as forced migrants themselves: one a local government resettlement officer, two third sector workers, and the fourth a volunteer in a formal body. Their experience added an extra valuable dimension to the interviews and – to an extent – addressed the study's limitation of lack of involvement of "current" forced migrants as participants in the research. A further point to note in respect of the sample selected for interview is that two versions of the interview schedule were used in data collection. For all interviewees, the schedule comprised an initial list of questions that covered the study themes of forced migrants, public libraries and culture, contextualized to the detail of the organization/group in which the interviewee worked/volunteered (e.g. background information on the forced migrants who use the service, partnerships with other organizations, organizational communication strategies, the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on services provision). However, the questions were presented in a slightly

different way depending on whether or not the interviewee in question worked in a public library. For example, for non-library gatekeepers, questions were posed on forced migrants' use of two forms of services provision, i.e. that offered by their own (and, where relevant) partner organizations, and that by the public library service.

In 28 cases, the interviews were conducted entirely via Microsoft Teams. Telephone and email each served as backup in two separate cases due to connectivity issues on Microsoft Teams. The Teams interviews were recorded and transcribed using the application's transcription software, then reviewed for inaccuracies and corrected manually. The telephone interview was recorded via a portable voice recorder and transcribed manually (and the email 'interview' did not require transcription). The average interview length ranged between 30 and 95 minutes, with an average of 57 minutes.

Following Braun and Clarke (2013), inductive thematic analysis was conducted on the data set. This process followed the iterative phases of transcription, reading and familiarization, coding (here using NVivo20), searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finalizing themes. The approach made it possible to discern and interpret patterns in the data set, allowing for rich detail to be developed from themes created during the analysis. Since the codes were data-derived, participant perspectives were captured in a manner that reflected their views more faithfully that might have been the case if they had been based solely on theoretical lenses (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p. 207). Every instance relevant to answering the research questions was coded (i.e. complete coding was deployed), and retrospective coding was applied as appropriate. This supported a deep and comprehensive analysis. Initially, eleven candidate themes were developed during review of the finalized codes. Subsequently, three candidate themes were confirmed as relevant to the two specific research questions addressed in this paper.

RESULTS

The three confirmed themes to address the two research questions can be articulated in three statements as follows:

1. Public libraries are for leisure - but forced migrants do not have leisure time.
2. Public libraries hold information - but are not a main source of information for forced migrants.
3. Public libraries are part of the "system" - but forced migrants don't trust the system.

Below each of the statements is elaborated. The sources of data from which the results are drawn are indicated by a participant number with the participant's profile. For example, 'P25: volunteer local group' was the 25th interviewee and a volunteer in a local group that supports forced migrants. It is also important to note that the views related below derive from discussions with individuals who work (whether as employees or in a voluntary capacity) as gatekeepers to services for forced migrants, and that the majority do not have lived experiences as forced migrants themselves.

Public libraries are for leisure - but forced migrants do not have leisure time

A few interviewees cited clear examples of valuable services that public libraries may offer to forced migrants. These included: help with benefit claims (P25: volunteer, local group) and to access rights to free public transport (P9: third sector staff, experienced newcomer); and the provision of health and well-being products such as free sanitary products, hearing equipment, and lateral flow test kits (P12: local government staff). There was also acknowledgement (albeit weak) of public library holdings of support resources for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), although the emphasis here was that public library services provide books that *could* be used for ESOL, rather than represent a primary source of ESOL provision. This is illustrated by public library staff member P26's comment "We do have (sort of) an ESOL skills for life section".

The interviewees more readily connected public libraries with the leisure departments of local authorities, applying the terms "leisure", and "luxury" when making reference to the services on offer. In short, public libraries are perceived as institutions for leisure activities related to the provision of physical artifacts for entertainment (e.g. books), or space to relax when spending time away from work. Public library staff member P26 summarized this view by saying: "We're more… like [an] additional service for leisure".

However, in the words of P27 (volunteer, formal body), access to leisure services is not a priority for forced migrants:

> *[Forced migrants are] not looking for intellectual stimulation and portals into another world. They're wondering where their next meal is coming from.*

Similarly, P12 (local government staff) was one of a number of interviewees who highlighted that public libraries do not feature in the list of institutions that offer resources for survival:

> *In terms of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, [Housing, Education, National Health Service (NHS)] are our key providers…If people were articulating the gaps, I'd anticipate they're more about the additional things that give a greater sense of well-being.*

It would therefore be unusual to find a community of forced migrants who are heavy users of UK public library services.

The perception of public libraries as arenas of leisure was largely attributed by the interviewees to forced migrants' cultural backgrounds and their experience of public libraries in their countries of origin. For example, in some countries, public libraries are viewed as exclusively for those of a higher socio-economic standing, and certainly not a government-funded service that offers communal public space open to all. As P18 (volunteer, formal body) said:

> *The whole idea of any cultural institution is almost alien to many parts of the world in the forms that are semi-funded by public bodies. [They are] largely for an elite class.*

Furthermore, P3 (local government staff - resettlement officer, experienced newcomer), referring to print material as the main resource offered by public libraries, explained that reading is not a cultural norm for the forced migrants:

> *I come from similar backgrounds… reading for adults - it's not something they do.*

Public libraries hold information - but are not a main source of information for forced migrants

According to the interviewees, rather than access information from a public library, forced migrants rely on members of their own communities as their primary sources of information. P9 (third sector staff, experienced newcomer) observed:

> *What I see is happening is in the community centers. For instance, it could be a restaurant in the city, an Eritrean restaurant, where people could go and try to ask for information. These are [forced migrants'] libraries for the moment.*

P15 (volunteer, local group) expressed a similar opinion:

> *I think [forced migrants] rely on their immediate community…I see here in the UK they are relying a lot on their mates, on their community based… network that already [exists].*

One reason for this is the availability of information in a format that is accessible. In many cases, this is a question of language:

> *If you have someone who wants to do some reading in their own language, for example…The library does not have those resources. Any Arabic books for example…I don't expect libraries to have those books but, from a personal point of view, then why do I need to go to the library?* (P22, third sector staff, experienced newcomer)

A cultural factor of importance here relates to preferred channels for communicating information, especially if members of the forced migrant community are illiterate in their mother tongue (in addition to the language of the host country) and rely on information relayed by word-of-mouth (P13: third sector staff). In such circumstances stories imparted by others from the same community assume importance (P6: volunteer, formal body, experienced newcomer).

These observations on accessibility of information format tie to the question of trust. For example, P18 (volunteer, formal body) drew attention to the UK custom of providing government-produced information in small handy pamphlets. When information is this format is viewed as a source of propaganda by forced migrants on the basis of experiences from their country of origin, it will be ignored:

> *If you come from a country…where any leaflet was propaganda, this is a really stupid way of trying to make information public.* (P18: volunteer, formal body).

Thus, according to P9 (third sector staff, experienced newcomer) "stories… available in their own communities, and with the people they trust" assume greater importance than print material issued by publicly-funded services. Even in cases where public bodies, such as the public library service, might have been considered an accessible information source, one interviewee argued that the propensity to use them is likely to decline in favor of resources held within the forced migrant community:

> *As there's more community information, and resilience, and knowledge, amongst the new Scots families, the less that they would rely on public buildings like libraries or library staff…the need for that has been replaced by social connections elsewhere* (P28: local government staff – resettlement officer).

Another interview hinted that community information sources are strengthened due to prevailing attitudes of society in which forced migrants find themselves:

> *I think institutionalized racism and intolerance force people to create migrant communities, rather than to integrate within a broader British community* (P27: volunteer, formal body)

As well as accessibility and trust, relevance of information to be accessed is a factor of public library use (or, more usually, non-use). P22 and P9, both with lived experience as forced migrants themselves, indicated in their interviews that public library resources often aren't seen as relevant to them:

> *On a more critical note, aside from being an important building, what does the library offer to me? What kind of resources are there in the library?"* (P22: third sector staff, experienced newcomer)

> *I would prefer to go to, for instance… museums…because these are open spaces where you see images and pictures and artifacts, and you can have your own interpretations of them.* (P9: third sector staff, experienced newcomer).

P6 (volunteer, formal body, experienced newcomer) offered cultural norms of the location of relevant information as an explanatory factor related to accessing relevant information:

> *There is a cultural thing, from my perspective…that we do tend to do things together a bit more. We tend to kind of consult others… A challenge for one of us is something to be discussed with everyone to get everyone's perspectives on things.* (P6: volunteer, formal body, experienced newcomer).

Here, relevant information for making life decisions is not held in a public library, but in other members of the community.

It is worth noting here that none of the public library staff members amongst the interviewees initiated any conversations during their interviews that generated data to inform the discussion above on the relevance of public library services to forced migrant populations. In addition, the claim that "We signpost each other to services and service providers in the region" (P22, third sector staff, experienced newcomer) could be indicative of public library services becoming further distanced from this vulnerable group, especially in the light of apparent ignorance of the wide variety of foreign language resources offered in the quotation from this interviewee. (See the above quotations on print resources in Arabic, and the library merely as an 'important building'.) Indeed, one participant reflected deeply on the gatekeeper role in shaping the perspective of forced migrants, and the impact of this on the ways in which forced migrants interact with available services and resources:

> *I think we shaped what their life should be…The Somalians, for example…they were also brought here and just dumped here in the UK with no help or information or anything. So, they made their own way. I think that's why may be the cultural differences, their use of the library…They look at the culture before they look at any other learning sources. But with the Syrians, they came here and the help was there for them.* (P3: local government staff - resettlement officer, experienced newcomer).

Public libraries are part of the "system" - but forced migrants don't trust the "system"
The third main result from this study relates to a specific kind of trust: trust in the "system". "System" here refers both to the UK asylum system specifically, and to broader governmental and societal systems that encompass everyday life in the country. Examples of the system evident in the interview data include local authorities, the police, government-funded services (including public libraries), voluntary organizations, and the media.

The system in the UK is not deemed trustworthy by forced migrants. P18 (volunteer, formal body) neatly summed up the reason for this with reference to a "typical" employee of the system:

> *He's a white man in a suit. These are the guys who lock you up in the UK.* (P18: volunteer, formal body).

The distrust of the system is attributed to both lived experiences of the UK asylum process, and in countries of origin. Belief that the asylum system in the UK is not built to grant asylum, but rather to deny it, was often mentioned by the interviewees. The impact of this is felt in perceptions of a full range of service providers, including those that employ the interviewees:

> *For a lot of people, everybody is Home Office, and anybody who from even a voluntary organization is Home Office. We're all part of the same thing.* (P21: resettlement officer, local government).

> *They don't want to engage with local authorities…and… government-related… service providers because they do not have trust in them.* (P9: third sector staff, experienced newcomer).

This has implications for the public library service:

For someone who has been through very, very difficult journey navigating the asylum system…which is brutal, which will brutalize people. And then associating maybe the library with authority, I don't know if there might be a slight element of apprehension in using the library. (P22, third sector staff, experienced newcomer).

According to the interviewees, forced migrants see barriers to public library membership because this depends on revealing personal identifying information (P7: public library staff) such as date of birth or address (P10: public library staff). Others avoid using specific services, such as the computers, for fear that their actions may be monitored (P16: public library staff).

Layered on the distrust of the system is the issue of whether forced migrants envisage themselves as public library users. This partly relates to public library stock, for example whether it includes resources in the forced migrant's mother tongue (P6: volunteer, formal body, experienced newcomer), or in the nature of the content of resources offered for consultation or loan:

One of the barriers for me was in trying to read all this Western knowledge that I find are deeply colonial. (P9: third sector staff, experienced newcomer).

One interviewee with lived experience as a forced migrant asked at interview:

What is in the library for me? Do I see myself in the library?'…Do I see as an African, for example? Do I see any resources for my children? What, aside from being an important building, what does the library offer to me? (P22, third sector staff, experienced newcomer).

P22 (third sector staff, experienced newcomer) identified multiple cultural aspects impact trust of the system and use of the public library:

…it's a combination of how we see the library… being a migrant coming from a different context… from a political cultural context as well, and from a reading culture context. (P22: third sector staff, experienced newcomer).

The interviewees considered distrust in the system as a cultural norm that grows amongst people fleeing an area of conflict "particularly if you have come from a place where you've always being told you don't belong, or where you're at risk of being asked for your ID or…where there's a risk that if you kind of hang around too long in one place the police will want to see your ID card and you know you're at risk of being detained" (P21: local government staff – resettlement officer).

DISCUSSION

The first research question that this study sought to address was: "How are UK public library services conceptualized as services for forced migrants?" The results indicate that public library services for forced migrants are conceptualized in three ways: (1) as leisure institutions; (2) as information sources (but not primary information sources); and (3) as part of the "system". Further to these novel conceptualizations, the analysis of interview data from which they were generated provides additional evidence that forced migrants are often deterred from using public libraries. These results on public library (non)use build on existing knowledge, adding extra "flavor" to the body of work summarized in the literature review above.

The second main contribution of the study reported in this paper is new knowledge to respond to a further research question: "What is the role of culture as a determinant of these conceptualizations?" Use of the factors "social norms" and, to a lesser extent, "information value" from the *Theory of information worlds* (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010), the micro- and macro-contexts of the UK forced migrant population (as related by the interviewees) was addressed. As well as opening up the under-developed question of culture as a contributory factor to the three conceptualizations of public library services for forced migrants, this also helps account for the aspects of forced migrants' information behavior that surfaced in the results. This adds to discussions about public library use beyond the more commonly asked "what?" and "how?" questions, to questions of "why?" These findings are presented in greater detail below, and their implications for theory and practice highlighted.

First, it is worth noting that the results of the empirical work largely correspond with those related by other researchers. For example, there is close alignment here with prior work that identifies public libraries as places of leisure in general (e.g., Aabø *et al.*, 2010; Vakkari *et al.*, 2016). The same is the case for topics of direct relevance to the broader topic of use of public libraries by newcomers. These include, for example: turning to community members for access information, rather than to institutions such as public library services (Borkert *et al.*, 2018; Fisher *et al.*, 2004a; Fisher, 2018); provision of information in appropriate formats (Lloyd *et al.*, 2013 pp. 130-131; Martzoukou & Burnett, 2018 p. 1116); recognition of different preferences for information access and sharing in

distinct groups (Lloyd *et al.*, 2013 p. 131; Martzoukou & Burnett, 2018 p. 1116); and the association between trust in systems and their use (e.g. Vårheim, 2014 p. 65). Where there is a lack of alignment between the results reported here and those of similar prior studies, this is likely due to specific contextual factors and artifacts of research design. For example, Khoir *et al's* 2017 study on Australian public libraries (cited above) reports that Asian immigrant families make frequent trips to public libraries for leisure purposes. However, the population observed in the study comprised highly skilled migrant workers, and the data collection techniques deployed included on-site recruitment of existing library user participants within public library premises.

There is one key difference, however, between the findings of many of the earlier studies and those reported in this paper. This is the underlying reasons for observed behaviors. Although recognized - for example Lloyd (2017, p. 42) acknowledges that lived experience of libraries and forced migration are important - they have not been investigated in depth in prior work. For example, apart from discussion in Fisher (2018) on the trustworthiness of information sources, the reasons to account for heavy reliance of newcomer population on community information sources - rather than those provided by bodies such as public library services - have remained unexplored to date. Here it can be argued that unreconciled differences between social norms (in countries of origin and/or the country of settlement) are at the core of the question of culture as a determinant of the three conceptualizations of public library services identified in this paper.

For example, in respect of the first conceptualization – that public libraries are for leisure – the social norms experienced in the host country are particularly important. As can be seen in the account of the results above, opinion may be shaped by gatekeeper views, as well as the context of the forced migrants themselves (e.g. they lack leisure time). The second conceptualization – that public libraries hold information, but are not a main source for forced migrants – can be associated to home country social norms such as the exclusivity of public library services, and the status of reading as an activity not regularly undertaken by adults. In addition, while the social norm of community information sharing and decision making does not nullify the possibility of visiting a public library to access information, a perceived low community "presence" there, both in terms of people found in the physical space and the information value of library holdings (e.g. materials in mother tongue languages, print resources of relevance to the forced migrant community), is a cultural barrier to participation. This further strengthens the case for the second conceptualization of public libraries identified from the analysis. For the third conceptualization – that public libraries are distrusted because they are part of "the system", social norms formed during times of conflict and migration journeys are key cultural contributors. Furthermore, these have an impact on the information value placed on resources found in public libraries: if it is a social norm to distrust the "system", then information from entities viewed as part of the "system" are not to be trusted either, so lack value and are not used. When the public face of the entity is a white person requesting personal details as a condition of service provision, this simply confirms that public libraries are, indeed, no different from other elements of the distrusted system.

A further contribution of this study is to suggest that Maslow's *Hierarchy of needs* (Maslow, 1943) (which posits that humans have five levels of need, each of which must be satisfied needs at subsequent levels will be pursued) might be considered a moderating variable for the five societal elements of the *Theory of information worlds*. This is on the basis of conversations with interviewees about the relative value of public library services when compared with others such as housing and the NHS, as noted above. Here it is evident that when the levels of physiology and safety are not met, needs from higher levels such as self-actualization are not pursued. From this observation, it is suggested that the presence of possible moderating variables from the hierarchy should be considered in future research that adopts the *Theory of information worlds* as a framework. This contribution adds to the body of LIS research that has connected the *Hierarchy of needs* to information seeking behavior (e.g., Markwei & Rasmussen, 2015), and information needs (Oduntan & Ruthven, 2019).

Public library practitioners will find the three conceptualizations of public libraries identified here of interest, especially if they witness underuse of their services for forced migrants. For example, they may be encouraged to strengthen partnerships with other service gatekeepers from bodies akin to those represented in this study to address misconceptions evident in the analysis presented here. This is important in the light of prior research that shows that when forced migrants use public library this facilitates growth in trust in their host societies (Vårheim, 2014), improves their experiences of integration (Johnston 2016; 2018), and increases their social capital (Audunson *et al.*, 2011). Ignoring these findings risks the perpetuation of perceptions that public libraries are places for leisure activities, not relevant to meeting information needs, and cannot be trusted as part of the "system".

CONCLUSION

The analysis of interview data, collected from 30 public service gatekeepers who support forced migrants in the UK, has led to three conceptualizations of public libraries: as services that provide access to leisure activities; as information sources; as part of "the system". Using the *Theory of information worlds* (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010),

cultural factors cast as elements of social norms and information value are revealed as key determinants of these three conceptualizations. In addition, this account has provided theoretical explanation for the use (or non-use) of public library services by forced migrant communities. It thus contributes a further dimension to a body of extant literature which, to date, has tended to describe the information behavior of newcomer populations without examining its determinants, and only does so on the basis of data collected from the context of public library service informants. The work also opens up an opportunity to develop the *Theory of information worlds* by considering Maslow's *Hierarchy of needs* (Maslow, 1943) as a moderating variable for its five societal elements. In addition, the study points to practical ways in which public library staff may address the issues raised in the study and - in doing so – contribute to the creation of an information-resilient society for those who have experienced crisis and high levels of transition in their lives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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