

Bridging Culture and Communities: A Bibliometric Analysis of Collaboration Practices of Museums, Libraries, and Theaters

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Abstract: The study encompasses a bibliometric analysis of the classical cultural organizations (museums, libraries and theaters), considering the mainstream academic research documenting the relationships between these organizations and their communities. The first part discusses how these organizations' focus and commitments have shifted from passive cultural aims, observing a social and educational turn towards communities. We observe a redefinition of their core purposes, becoming dynamic community and social spaces that promote sustainable development, social enrichment and wellbeing. They are no longer temples of culture, but complex hubs, spaces for engagement. Mainstream academic research gives more attention to the transformations in the library sector. Nevertheless, overall, it captures the transformations in all cultural organizations investigated, highlighting the importance of technology, community engagement and interdisciplinary approaches, as well as their growing significance in community development and wellbeing.

Keywords: cultural organizations; museums; libraries; theaters; community engagement; social turn; community wellbeing.

Introduction

Classical cultural organizations such as museums, libraries, and theaters remain the most important and relevant for society, having unique roles and enduring contributions to cultural preservation, education, community building, and societal well-being. Their cultural and educational impact is traditional and largely recognized. Nevertheless, their significance and roles have diversified, especially in the past decades. They are not only guardians and promoters of the heritage or creators of culture; they have become community and social spaces, contributing to community cohesion and sustainable development of society, supporting social and cultural enrichment, and stimulating cooperation among various communities. We observe that they face a change of personality and status in society.

"What is a museum?", "What is a theatre?", "What is a library?" – these are seemingly simple questions. However, they often provoke reactions from the professional environment that further lead to redefining everything we thought we already knew, which is perhaps why we continue to ask ourselves the same questions repeatedly. A definition is a statement that affirms, delimits, and creates a status for a particular idea, concept, or object. At the same time, the definition is like a corset that binds together all the elements that should make it up and eliminates all the others. A definition is, therefore, a firm decision, an engaged attitude, and relationship. At this moment in history, a time of reformulations, redefinitions, reinventions, and rediscoveries, why do we still want unanimously accepted definitions for these major cultural organizations?

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Their educational and social impact may be the common thread running through all the answers currently redefining these institutions. Looking at them through these lenses gives them meaning outside, not just inside, meaning for the public, not just for the tiny community of specialists and artists.

In 2010 a small revolution occurred in the museum world. Nina Simon published online, open access, her seminal work entitled *Participatory Museum* (Simon, 2010). As the author describes her work, “The Participatory Museum is a practical guide to working with community members and visitors to make cultural institutions more dynamic, relevant, essential places.” What was revolutionary about this book? It was probably the first consistent reflection/analysis of an emerging practice in the museum world – supporting and involving communities in museum activities. Also, the book is an accessible and engaging read, explicitly designed for professionals, starting with practical experiences before offering broader insights. Filled with practical examples and reflections on decision-making processes, it avoids academic jargon to provide direct, actionable guidance. Also, being open-access and offering the possibility to be acquired in physical or digital form to those who would like it independently was rare in the domain. Access to professional or academic works in this field is generally limited due to their high cost when included in scholarly books or journals. Additionally, professional experiences are often published in specialized journals, which may be in various languages or have very limited distribution, further restricting their accessibility (Bira & Zbucheá, 2021). After several years, Nina Simon published another book, taking further the discussion, entitled *The Art of Relevance* (Simon, 2016). This book was meant to show “how mission-driven organizations can matter more to more people,” making museums more relevant to communities. Contemporary museums are not only more engaged and active in society (Janes & Sandell, 2019 but also more empathetic (Jennings et al., 2019).

Similar evolutions of establishing and developing tight relationships with their communities are increasingly observed in the case of the other two “traditional” fundamental cultural organizations: theaters and libraries. For instance, libraries were established as places for education and literacy. However, now they have evolved into community hubs, including a wide range of community services. The role of libraries changed considering many internal and external factors (Goulding, 2016). In some countries, such as ex-communist countries, the best practices in the field and professional development of librarians have been stepped up by organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Fried, Popova, Dąbrowska, & Chiranov, 2014; Gaherty, 2011; Wojciechowska, 2021). Practices in libraries, as well as in museums, have been significantly impacted by ICT technologies and, more recently, by artificial intelligence. These technologies have contributed to the management of these vital cultural organizations in many ways, mainly by offering new educational and learning tools, increasing access to their collections (including by creating digital ones), enhancing user experience in many ways, as well as contributing to community engagement remotely or onsite.

Theaters have experienced the same drive towards being more accessible and collaborative with their public and communities. As well as in the case of the other types of classical cultural organizations, they adapted the architectural design, initiated open spaces, and adopted architectural approaches to facilitate community engagement. Also, the design of programs and their offer is increasingly more collaborative, establishing partnerships with all sorts of local organizations, community groups or representative individuals. They are increasingly more open to co-creation initiatives and are connected to the present. These shifts' effects vary, ranging from enhancing the sense of community and cultural belonging (Abed, 2024) to promoting human rights, understanding and connections in societies, questioning social structures, and discussing problematic societal developments (McCammon, 2007; Zazzali, 2013; Massó-Guijarro, Pérez-García, & Cruz-González, 2021; Dahal, Joshi, & Swahnberg, 2022). Moreover, theaters determine public participation, being able to transform ordinary individuals into citizens (Feuchte

et al., 2020; Bodziński-Guzik, 2023) and increasing community resilience in many ways (Landy & Montgomery, 2012; Arreguín, 2020; Diakoumopoulou, 2022)

Considering the above-sketched developments, the present research aims to map these evolutions by developing a bibliometric analysis of relevant academic outlets. This investigation helps identify publication trends and research gaps, assess the relevance of research within the broader academic discussions, maps research networks, and could contribute to designing recommendations.

Literature review. Cultural organizations toward community hubs

Considering the vast diversity of cultural organizations and the many variations that might occur even in the same cultural sector, we chose to discuss each main type of traditional cultural institution separately, reflecting, in the end, their common traits in the context of the present discussion. We chose inductive reasoning to not only compare the traits, approaches and evolutions of the three types of organizations considered but also generate a broader view of the cultural sector and identify the present underlying mechanisms that make these organizations more significant for communities and society.

We examine each type of institution, starting with museums, continuing with libraries, and finishing with theaters. The comparison between the three allows us to identify patterns, common traits, and differences. Based on this, we can propose theories relevant to the broader field, for the cultural sector.

In the case of museums, in theory, everyone agrees on the importance of integrating the visitor experience not just into museum education activities but into museum work in general. With the definition and redefinition of the museum over the last century, both through the ICOM (Lehmannová, 2020; Zbucnea, 2023) effort and other approaches, the active involvement of the visitors in their own experiences of museum learning has been widely accepted for several decades (McLean, 2011, p. 72). On the other hand, from observing the activities proposed by museums to the public, a legitimate question arises: if this paradigm shift has been achieved in theory, why is it challenging to implement in practice? In a 2011 study on public participation in museum work, author and curator Kathleen McLean (2011) wondered why the most exciting discussions about visitors happen in their absence. Being part of the conversation and including the other is essential when you want to bring about not just perceptual but profound changes in communities of museum practice. This is necessary as culture is essentially about the human experience seen from different perspectives, something we all share, regardless of profession, education, or material status (McLean, 2011). Even though the study cited is more than a decade old, the same conversations are still being had, with little push for change on a practical level. Increasing the number of visitors to museum institutions certainly depends on a real transformation in the attitude of museum specialists towards the need for an actual dialog with visitors. Without this, the museum remains dominant even for educated people with regular and easy access to culture.

Beyond heritage preservation, museums continue to retain their authority in the broader cultural framework through the historical importance of their collections. But another relevant question immediately follows: Can the museum exist only as a capsule of the past? Is it primarily a collector of objects or meanings? The meanings help us to mediate between eras, people, and experiences; the meanings determine the educational vision of the museum, and without them, there could be no mediation between object and visitor. On the one hand, the museum space is welcoming and offers different fulfilling experiences to visitors; on the other hand, it often has an inhibiting effect on the visitor, especially on the less culturally emancipated, those with a difficult material situation, or other specific reasons related to themes, space, and age.

An integrative museum education experience can precisely trigger those communication valves that the visitor cannot otherwise release in his / her conventional space. For this to happen, a permeable museum space is needed to absorb the personal experiences of visitors in a way that is meaningful to them. In this way, the museum institution perpetuates the object's existence and, more importantly, its meanings. One of the pillars of the change we are witnessing in the last decades in the vision of museums is a result of the re-reading of texts published by one of the most influential leaders of museology of the previous century and an important reference for today's specialists, whether they are active in curatorship, research, museum education or cultural management. We are talking about Duncan Cameron (1972), a visionary who has not shied away from making controversial statements precisely to highlight the need to renew the museum discourse and the mission of the museum institution, bringing together two metaphors of the museum: the temple and the forum.

For the museum to move from the aura of a temple to that of a forum, however, a profound interaction between the object and the visitor is needed, one that in recent years has begun to be described by the concept of participatory. This is not a new concept; other authors are just recycling it to define it in as concrete a way as possible and make it serve different purposes. For instance, Nina Simon (2016) uses it to show us how important it is to energize the community and its life through an inclusive and active approach to the museum in its neighborhood, while another influential author who has devoted entire studies to this concept, Claire Bishop (2023), defines participatory methodologically by emphasizing its physical and non-digital media-mediated side. Bishop distances herself from all how a museum tries to show interaction with the visitor through digital means, such as online campaigns, but emphasizes the effort to bring the physical visitor into the museum and visibly engage them in an exchange of meanings that, in turn, constructs new meanings, especially socially relevant ones.

The successive reformulations of the museum's role in society reflect the changes taking place in the cultural or educational semantic field. Given that the museum is a cultural institution increasingly taking on an educational role, it is not surprising that it is constantly questioning its nature and mission. The search for balance between the roles of the museum, be it educational, cultural, social, or political, is similar to concentrating human intellectual efforts to imagine better worlds periodically.

In the past few decades, libraries have been highly active, significantly changing how they relate to their users, addressing communities rather than independent readers. The first step, the easiest one probably, that libraries took toward the public was to extend the services offered. Now, libraries are not only offering the possibility to borrow books but also many other services, such as public lectures, concerts, a wide variety of courses (mainly for children, but not only for them, to learn foreign languages, to develop various soft skills, programming and other ICT-related classes, self-development courses, arts modules, sewing and other crafts courses, and many more), access to different resources, offering spaces for communities and various organizations to develop all sorts of public activities (e.g., exhibitions, public lectures, meetings of multiple aims). This expansion of services could be designed and implemented with partners and including a collaborative network. Therefore, libraries tend to become community hubs, meeting places for communities and their stakeholders (Gilbert et al., 2020; O'Donnell & Anderson, 2022), fostering a culture of outreach and participation (Holmberg et al., 2009; Sobol, 2020).

Contemporary libraries could be places of inclusion and equity models (Dalmer et al., 2022; Holland et al., 2021). They cater in many ways to underprivileged individuals, groups, or communities, such as persons with disabilities (Daskalakes et al., 2024), lonely and homeless (Adams & Krtalić, 2022; Forrest, 2022), persons with mental or health issues (Dai, Bartlett, & Moffatt, 2023; Morgan et al., 2016; Vassilakak & Moniarou-Papaconstaninou, 2023) or people at old age (Anna & Harisanty, 2019; Lenstra, Oguz, &

Duvall, 2020). Libraries could support individuals' and communities' resilience (Veil & Bishop, 2014).

Even if discussions are much older (McShane, 2011; Jaeger et al., 2012), relatively recently, libraries have become increasingly more involved in digital literacy (Ridley & Pawlick-Potts, 2021; Grimes & Porter, 2024), a trend that probably increased with the COVID-19 pandemic. This activity has a substantial positive impact on communities. It could contribute to the development of communities, offer new job opportunities for young and older adults, and generally promote and advance sustainable development (Campana, Mills, & Martin, 2018; Msauki, 2021).

More recently, in Ukraine or some countries closer to the war in Ukraine, which have hosted numerous Ukrainian refugees and are affected by it in various ways – some libraries are actively supporting those affected by the war, contributing to the resilience of their communities through social, economic, educational and cultural interventions (Antczak & Gruszka, 2023a, b; Kosciejew, 2023). For responsible interventions in such traumatic and complex events, libraries must address both local and refugee communities and be accountable for creating bridges. Generally, public libraries could help communities and individuals in wars and disasters (Winston, 2005; Young, 2018; Grossman et al., 2022), including during the pandemic (Alajmi & Albudaiwi, 2021; Chakraborty et al., 2020; Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2021; Kosciejew, 2021; Wakeling et al., 2022). In all these cases, informing citizens and communities is crucial, especially since various threats and challenges are enhanced by misinformation and disinformation (Dar, 2021; Chisita & Ngulube, 2022).

In her seminal essay “The Social Turn. Collaboration and its Discontents”, the theoretician Claire Bishop (2006) highlights a profound transformation that marked fundamentally the recent decades - namely “the social turn”. What Bishop reveals through this concept is in fact a significant shift in the design on the performative field, marked by a turning point. At the same time, Bishop affirms that: “the social turn in contemporary art has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism”, emphasizing the attention that the critics give to the whole process of creation, to its implications and not only to the results. The theatre institutions have become more and more socially engaged centers of not only producing shows, but disseminating new forms of performative knowledge.

This knowledge - as it is framed in the performative arts studies - shapes according to new models of conceiving the mission of theatre institutions. This mission is more fluid and less rigidly oriented, imagining theatres as participatory spaces to the social and political transformations and challenging the perception regarding the multifaceted design of an institution. Thus, the act of performing broadens in the direction of questioning the mutuality of performativity: how the space that both spectators and performers share can become a co-creation space of political belonging to a community of actions? The theoretical studies delve into constant reconfiguration of vision and mission, with a significant emphasis on the responses that the institutions can offer to the cultural needs of the spectators. More devoted to the pedagogical mission, aiming to community animation of ideas, theatres generate models of co-learning and designs of practices that transgress fundamentally the limits of classical shows or question the core of a show. How can theatre institutions activate and modulate critical thinking?

What is the very essence of togetherness nowadays? What kind of theatre institutions are needed in unstable political contexts? These are only a few questions that recent studies on performativity, applied theatre, socially engaged theatre explore from intersectional perspectives.

Mapping cultural organizations as community partners and activators

Methodology

The main objective of the present investigation is to map the relationships between cultural organizations and their communities, focusing on identifying the main lines of academic research in the field. There is a gap between the theoretical investigations and the practices in the field, the latest ones seeming to be more complex. Therefore, the investigation does not cover all the diversity of the professional practices and the realities in the communities but rather pinpoints the focal points that attracted the researchers' interest, which might also be the more relevant aspects, attracting, therefore, more interest.

The method used to reach this goal is bibliometric analysis. The instrument chosen is VOSviewer, a popular free bibliometric tool, which contributes to investigating the structure of the current academic research. It allows the exploration of research networks and identifies the interest focuses in the scholarly literature and their impact on other research (van Eck & Watman, 2023). The online availability and ease of use have imposed VOSviewer as a relevant research tool (Orduña-Malea & Costas, 2021), especially in the case of exploratory initial research (Kirby, 2023).

For several reasons, Scopus is the only academic database selected for this bibliometric analysis. Scopus tends to be a more encompassing platform for the humanities field than the Web of Science or others (Pranckutė, 2021). It covers a broader research range but could also include case studies. Based on sound investigations, it is a reliable combination of academic exploration and professional approaches. It is also flexible regarding the search engine and data provided, being also integrated in the VOSviewer research approach. Therefore, it allows for broader analysis and more nuanced results.

After choosing the tool and the academic platform, the data collection was the next step in the analysis path. To ensure comprehensive coverage, we used the widest keyword selection possible. To cover the complexity of community relationships, we used the keyword "communit*". To ensure that all studies related to all chosen types of cultural organizations are selected, we have undergone three searches, one for each cultural organization. We excluded the studies associated with other fields of study, such as medicine, technology, and physics. Also, we considered only publications with a certain profoundness and impact, such as articles, book chapters, books, and conference papers. We exported all data in RIS format, including all essential metadata (authors and their affiliations, titles, abstracts, keywords, citations, and references). The data was cleaned using Zotero before being analyzed with VOSviewer.

The most substantial academic interest is given to the relationships of libraries with their communities. More than 850 entries have been identified in Scopus. The second organization that attracted the interest of researchers is the museum, with more than 300 entries. For theaters, we identified more than 200 contributions covered by Scopus. After cleaning the data, our database includes 1390 publications. This means that only relatively few papers investigate all types of cultural organizations, most focusing on one specific field.

Findings

The landscape of studies in the investigated field, published after 2010, is quite dynamic. Figure 1 presents its overall evolution. We observe a steady increase in the number of publications in the investigated period. It seems that the COVID-19 pandemic gave a relative boost to the academic investigations in the field, provoking discussions on the role of cultural organizations in times of crisis, facing distant/online cooperation with their public and communities.

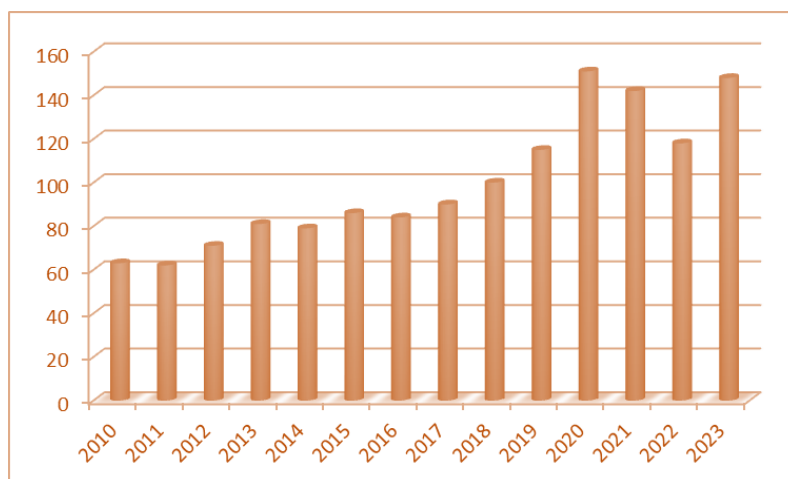


Figure 1. Publication dynamics between 2010 and 2023

We also observed that the interests in the relationships between cultural organizations and their communities are much older than expected. The oldest identified contribution was published in 1949 in the *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals* (the US), reporting on (Martus, 1949) the cooperation initiated by New York City high-school teachers with professional theaters to increase their students' access to theatre plays.

The same year, we registered some interest in community theaters, i.e., amateur theaters in the US (Work, 1949; Dietrich & Work, 1951; Baker, 1952; Schoell, 1953; Warye, 1966; Weaver, 1970). These articles suggest quite an energetic theater scene, with various approaches and stakeholders trying to make a place for communities and connect with the public. This discussion should have been consistent, especially in the US, considering that only part of the professional discussions is reflected in academic studies, especially considering the years following the Second World War. We also have to think that only a small number of these discussions and research can be uncovered online through academic databases. Only the most prominent academic outlets included their older collections online, making them accessible to interested contemporary individuals and communities. Also, some studies investigate how political organizations and ideologies might use theatre shows for propagandistic reasons (Mackerras, 1973).

Discussions on the relationships between museums and their communities / the wider society have also been included for several decades in Scopus, too. The first identified study was published in 1953 in *Museum International*, edited by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the leading professional organization in this sector, with chapters worldwide. The paper of Macfarlane (1953) praises that the American museums also serve as community centers for local communities and observes that such events would not be successful without proper cooperation between museums' representatives and their public/ communities. The following year, the same publication discussed how museums are increasingly relevant to society, contributing to explaining the relevance of science for ordinary citizens (Thomas, 1954). Another early interesting article included in *Museum International* was written by Singleton (1971), who discusses how British museums shifted their activity from acquisition and preservation to utilization of their collections for the public good. The article highlights that a museum is of genuine public service only if it considers the community's needs and cooperates with various stakeholders.

Similar discussions in connection to libraries are newer than those related to museums and theaters. Wilson (1972) states that libraries could have a unique role in community life, with the condition to adapt and plan for such a framework and adopt an interdisciplinary approach including using non-book media. Instead, libraries seem to

have had a slower start than museums and theaters. Nevertheless, the research revealed the interest in libraries in their communities, and the research in this field increased quite significantly in the past few years, being covered more by the literature than in the case of the other two cultural organizations.

Figure 2 presents the types of published contributions. 1 in 4 studies published is available on Scopus as open-access papers. Considering that many professionals from cultural organizations have limited access to paid academic content, this percentage might be challenging for them. Also, most publications are journal articles (71.5%) and conference papers (19%), meaning they are relatively narrowly focused and specifically located.

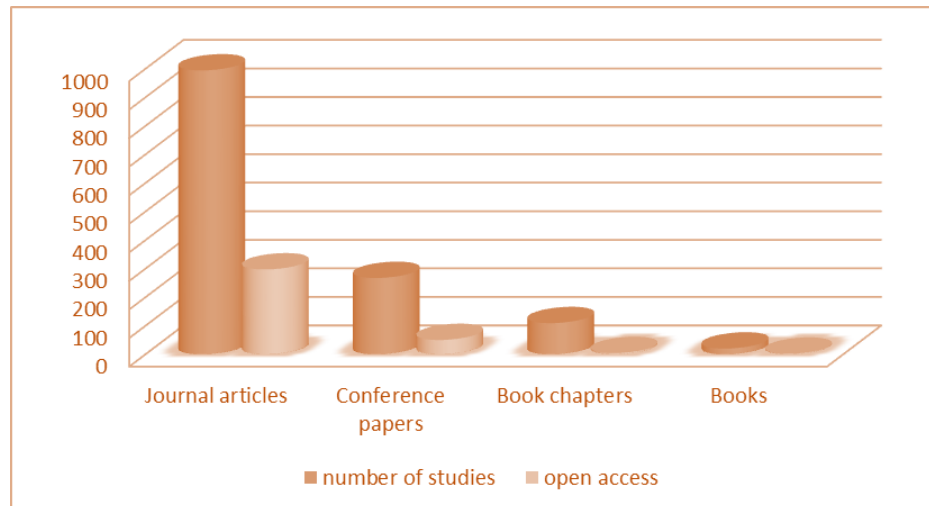


Figure 2. Total number of papers and the number of open access ones included in Scopus

In terms of the academic outlets hosting these studies, several journals stand out, as presented in Table 1. This table suggests a more diverse publication landscape in the case of libraries in the past decade. Also, a significant line of research focuses on the role of new technologies in supporting partnerships between cultural organizations and their communities. Despite the early interest in theatre and diverse, creative, and innovative practices, the academic journals covering this domain included in Scopus seem to lag behind the other two domains.

Table 1. Academic publications hosting most research on the relationships between cultural organizations and their communities

Domain	Publication	Number of articles
Library	<i>Public Library Quarterly</i>	37
	<i>Library Philosophy and Practice</i>	34
	<i>Journal of Library Administration</i>	19
	<i>Journal of Librarianship and Information Science</i>	18
	<i>Advances in Librarianship</i>	15
	<i>IFLA Journal</i>	14
	<i>New Library World</i>	13
	<i>Community and Junior College Libraries</i>	11
	<i>Library Hi Tech (News)</i>	11
	<i>Library Management</i>	11
	<i>Digital Library Perspectives</i>	10
	<i>Advances in Library Administration and Organization</i>	9
	<i>International Information and Library Review</i>	9
	<i>Vjesnik Bibliotekara Hrvatske</i>	8
	<i>Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association</i>	8
	<i>Journal of Library and Information Services in Distance Learning</i>	8
	<i>Journal of Information Literacy</i>	7

	<i>Australian Library Journal</i>	7
	<i>Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science</i>	6
	<i>Joint-Use Libraries</i>	6
	<i>Journal of Academic Librarianship</i>	5
	<i>Electronic Library</i>	5
Museum / Heritage	<i>Journal of Museum Education</i>	19
	<i>International Journal of the Inclusive Museum</i>	15
	<i>Museum Management and Curatorship</i>	14
	<i>International Journal of Heritage Studies</i>	11
	<i>Museum International</i>	6
	<i>One World Archaeology</i>	6
	<i>Journal of Community Archaeology and Heritage</i>	5
Theater	<i>Research in Drama Education</i>	25
	<i>Applied Theatre Research</i>	6
	<i>New Theatre Quarterly</i>	5
	<i>Studies in Theatre and Performance</i>	5
All /other	<i>ACM International Conference Proceeding Series</i>	36
	<i>Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology</i>	30
	<i>CEUR Workshop Proceedings</i>	23
	<i>Education for Information</i>	10
	<i>Information Development</i>	10
	<i>Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology</i>	7

The next step in the analysis is to map the authorship. 3008 authors have authored the 1390 contributions. Nine authors have at least five contributions in the database, 13 researchers are included with at least four contributions, and 43 authors have a minimum of three contributions.

The author with the most contributions (9 papers published in Scopus since 2010) is Bharat Mehra, from the University of Alabama, the US. The majority of his documents, co-authors with almost 10 other contributors, concentrate on rural libraries (Mehra, Bishop, & Partee II, 2016; Mehra, Singh, Hollenbach, & Partee, 2017; Mehra, Sikes, & Singh, 2019a, b; Singh, Mehra, & Sikes, 2022). Noak Lenstra, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the US, is the second most prolific author in the database, with seven contributions. The focus of his research is on health/well-being aspects, respectively, the role of public libraries in addressing food security and outdoor activities (Lenstra, 2018; Lenstra & D'Arpa, 2019; D'Arpa, Lenstra, & Rubenstein, 2020; Lenstra & Campana, 2021, 2022).

Regarding impact, Sarah Baker (178 citations) and John Carlo Bertot (76 citations) have the highest influence. Sarah Baker is a Professor in Cultural Sociology at Griffith University, Australia, mainly focusing on community heritage and museums (Baker & Collins, 2015; Baker, 2016; Hanley, Baker, & Pavlidis, 2018; Cantillon & Baker, 2020) and broadly on community development (Baker, 2011; Cantillon & Baker, 2020). John Carlo Bertot, from the University of Maryland College Park, the US, focuses his research on how public libraries contribute to building communities and technological contribution (Bertot, Butler, & Travis, 2014; Bertot, 2016;), as well as developing partnerships between libraries and public authorities (Bertot & Jaeger, 2011; Bertot et al., 2012; Bertot, Gorham, Jaeger, & Taylor, 2012).

In terms of link strength, the most relevant authors are Heidi Julien (total link strength of 9), John Carlo Bertot, and Paul T. Jaeger. Heidi Julien, specialized in information literacy, digital literacy, and information behavior at the University of Buffalo, the US, concentrates the research on the contribution of community libraries and organizations to digital literacy (see, for instance, Detlor & Julien, 2020; Julien, Gross, & Latham, 2020).

Overall, Figure 3 presents a loosely connected research field. This is related to the three domains associated with the investigated cultural organizations but also presents a granulation of the research interests.

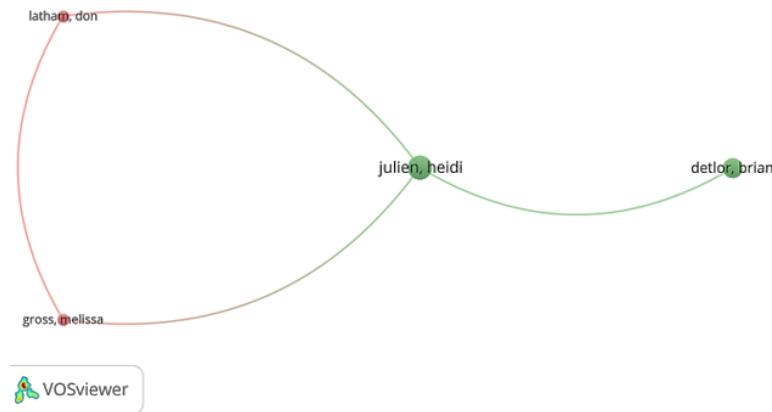


Figure 3. Author connections

In terms of research center influence, the database shows that the top cited academic structures are the University of Zurich (Switzerland) with 107 citations, Griffith University (Australia) with 75 citations, and Loughborough University (the UK) with 43 citations. There are more than 2.000 organizations, but only 13 have a minimum of 3 documents in the database.

In terms of countries hosting the researchers, the United States and the United Kingdom are in the top positions, as illustrated in Table 2. There are 120 countries represented in the database, with 29 countries having a minimum of 10 studies included. 48 countries have a minimum of 5 documents.

Table 2. Country ranking according to the total link strength

Country	No. of documents	No. of citations	Total link strength
United States	479	4761	56
United Kingdom	132	1073	43
Italy	43	519	27
Canada	98	471	26
France	31	150	23
Germany	25	180	23
Spain	48	684	18
Sweden	10	85	17
Netherlands	13	75	16
Australia	79	748	15

The final step of the analysis concentrates on the keyword mapping. A wide variety of keywords are used, of more than 7.000 concepts. 54 keywords are used more than 15 times in the database, 104 are used at least 10 times, and over 300 key concepts for at least 5 times. This situation shows the wide variety of lines of investigation assumed by researchers. To have a more focused evaluation of the research landscape, we considered the occurrence of the keywords at least 15 times, stressing the strong interest in that topic. To get the set of keywords, we vetted them before generating the keyword occurrence map, excluding the ones referring to geographic locations of the ones referring to research methods and analysis procedures (survey, data mining, article, etc.). We also merged the forms of the same keywords presented in various ways (such as singular and plural) or synonyms (such as academic library and university library or virtual community and online community). Table 3 shows the most frequent keywords included in the database (with more than 100 mentions).

Table 3. The highest keyword occurrence

keyword	No. of occurrences	Total link strength
Library	235	460
Digital library	159	356
Public library	167	249
Community	163	194
Museum	139	151
Community engagement	102	135

The cluster analysis (Figure 4) of the keyword occurrences presents the relationships between the researched topics in the area investigated, covered in Scopus.

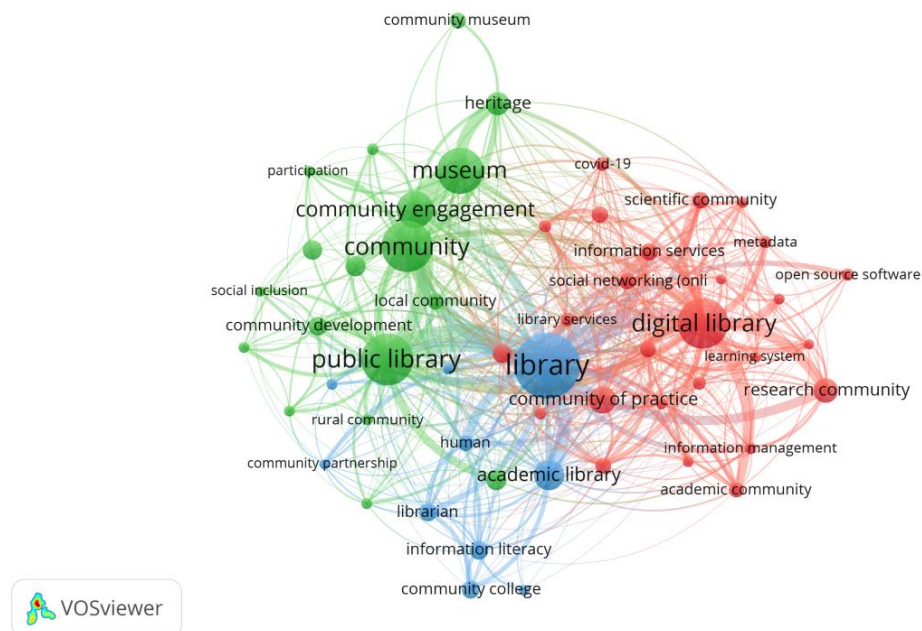


Figure 4. Co-occurrence based on (author and indexed) keywords

The bibliometric analysis of the most frequent keywords reveals three main clusters. Red is the biggest one regarding the number of significant keywords (26). The main item at the center of this cluster is the “digital library.” The following keywords with high relevance in the cluster are “research community,” “community of practice,” and “scientific community.” This cluster includes research on how information science supports learning and education, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second largest one is the green cluster, comprising 18 keywords. This seems to be a more homogenous one, investigating the relationships between cultural organizations and their communities. The most frequent items here are “public library,” “community,” “museum,” and “community engagement.” The third cluster, blue, comprises 10 items. “Library” is the most important item included, followed by far by “academic library,” “community college,” “information literacy,” and “librarian.” Table 4 includes the structure of all clusters.

Table 4. Cluster structure

Knowledge and learning community Red	Cultural organizations and community activation Green	Enhancing information literacy Blue
Academic community	Community	Academic library
Community of practice	Community building	Community college
Covid-19	Community development	Community college library
Digital library	Community engagement	Community outreach

e-learning	Community library	Community partnership
Education	Community museum	Human
Information management	Community theatre	Information literacy
Information retrieval	Heritage	Librarian
Information science	Local community	Library
Information services	Museum	Social media
Knowledge management	Participation	
Learning systems	Partnership	
Library and information sciences	Public library	
Library services	Rural community	
Open source software	Rural library	
Recommender system	School library	
Research community	Social inclusion	
Scientific community	Sustainability	
Social networking	Theatre	
Student		
User community		
virtual community		
virtual reality		

The first area of research, uncovered by cluster red, is at the intersection of technology, knowledge management, and community engagement in the context of education, research, and library services, especially in light of recent shifts driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. The green cluster reveals the second area of study, dedicated to community activation through cultural organizations. This line of research investigates how cultural organizations design initiatives for community building, engagement, and development to foster social inclusion, sustainability, and heritage preservation within rural and urban communities. It emphasizes the role of partnerships and participation in enhancing the vitality and cohesion of local communities. The research in the blue cluster discusses the role of (community college) libraries through outreach programs and partnerships. This concept brings together organizations, people, and technology, including social media, to support human connections and learning.

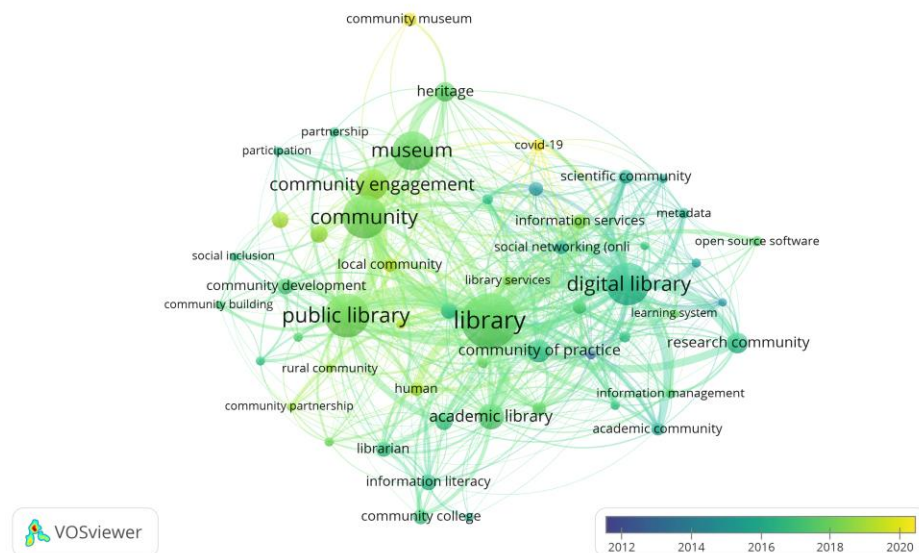


Figure 5. Keywords occurrences evolution visualization

VOS viewer also allows us to observe the research interests' evolution (see Figure 5). At the beginning of the 2010s, the interests were placed more on information science, virtual communities, and knowledge management, while the COVID-19 pandemic's impact investigations dominated the research in the past years. Local communities and human dimensions were also of more interest than previously in the past years. Nevertheless, research interests do not vary so much or come back in the spotlight after a while.

Since our investigation concentrates on traditional cultural organizations, we also focused the mapping around each type of organization: Library, Museum, and Theater (Figure 6).

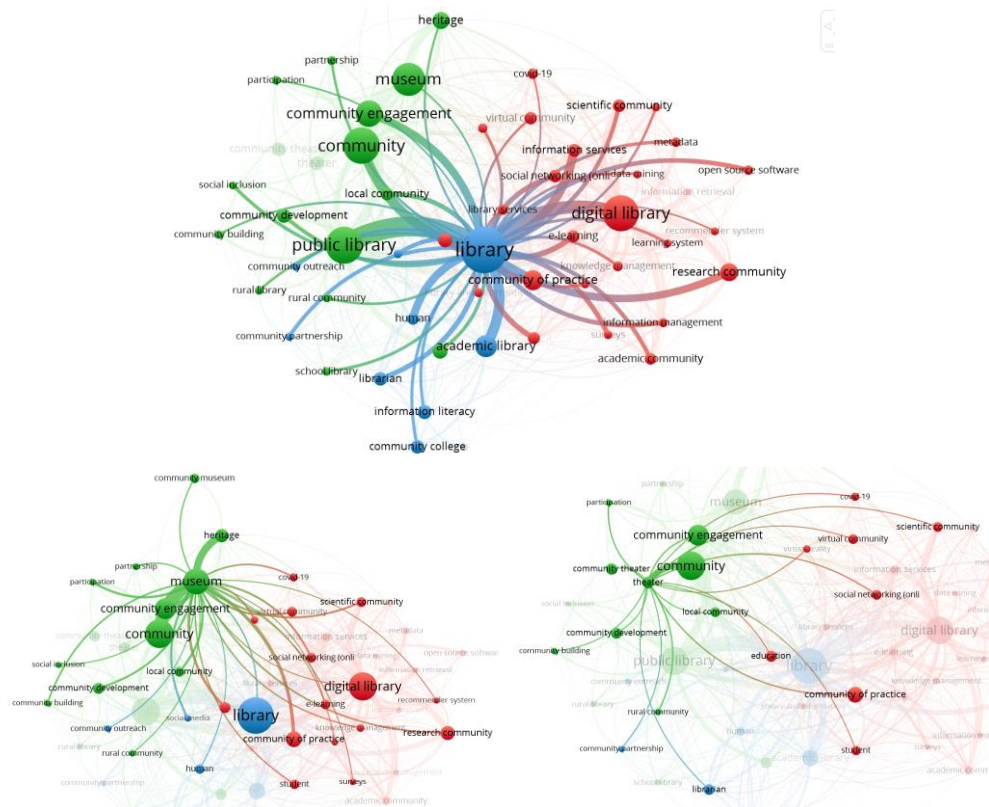


Figure 6. Co-occurrence of “library,” “museum,” and “theatre”

The maps associated with each main cultural organization highlight again that the research on libraries and their relationships with their communities is broader and more nuanced, encompassing many perspectives. The research on museums and their community is relatively multifaceted, including a component related to more recent digital transformations. Discussing the studies on theaters, the research landscape is not as nuanced as in the previous case. This is not associated with theaters' lack of interest in catering better to and building their communities. Quite the contrary, the practice of theaters in this respect is very significant, and the theatre scene is dynamic and experimenting for the benefit of their communities. The resulting map suggests that the academic research included in Scopus and the professional advancement in the field do not find common grounds in the database investigated.

Conclusions

Despite their initially different roles in society, as well as their specific means of action based on very different basis and skills, all the traditional cultural organizations investigated have taken similar paths, especially considering the past two decades. For

many libraries, museums and theaters we observe a step turn towards begin more social and educational in an active way. Best practices in the field show dynamic organizations, actively involved in their communities, in many ways. They contribute to the general wellbeing of their audiences, considering all dimensions of this concept (health, social, cultural, and economic).

The means used to achieve their new social and educational goals have changed. They are no longer restricted to using their primary resources and approaches. They adopt a much wider variety of tools than a few decades ago, in an interdisciplinary mindset. They also have a strong engagement to outreaching towards various communities, not being anymore inner-oriented organizations with a general public good in mind, adopting activist perspectives. They are dynamic and open partners for their stakeholders and communities.

Part of these shifts has been covered by academic studies focused on cultural sector. We observe a long-term interest of cultural organizations in their relationship with communities and having a relevant role in society. The increased interest in academia in the evolutions of cultural organizations and their relationships with society and communities was boosted by the evolutions determined by the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, the depth and breadth of research vary significantly across different types of cultural organizations. The theatre-related research tends to stay behind even if the practices in the sector are quite dynamic and advanced. In the case of libraries we observe the broadest research interests of mainstream academia. Research in the field also displays a wide range of thematic emphases, at the intersection of technology, knowledge management, and community engagement, especially in educational and library services contexts.

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Author biographies

Alexandra Zbucnea has strong research interests in cultural management, especially in connection with museums. She coordinates PhD research in sustainable development, as well as in cultural and non-profit management. She is a vice dean of the Faculty of Management of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA, Bucharest, Romania) and the Director of the Center for the Study of Responsible Organizations at the same university.

Iulia Iordan is a CESI doctoral student in the Cultural Studies section, researching the role of museum education in Romanian society through a study that is rooted in her practice as a museum educator, but that contextualizes this phenomenon on a national and international scale. The research stake is to theorize the impact of museum education on Romanian society both through the cultural accessibility of heritage for various categories of the public and as a factor of community coagulation at the social level through the democratization of culture. She also has a

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