

B.M.R. COMMENT



BUREAU OF
MUNICIPAL
RESEARCH

BETTER GOVERNMENT THROUGH RESEARCH

Suite 406, 4 Richmond St. E., Toronto 1, phone 363-9265

1973 FEB 27 AM 9:35

#140 -- 1973.

THE FUTURE OF A TWO-TIER URBAN LIBRARY SYSTEM

Large cities, with their sophisticated labour markets, create a greatly increased need for continuing education and research facilities. At the same time, the transience of urban life increases the importance of urban local community activities, which introduce an element of stability into ever-changing city life. These activities are needed not only for old area residents, but also to help introduce the area to new residents and to help them develop roots in the community more quickly. This places the urban public library, which is at the same time the most important informal adult education institution and one of the most visible and popular local community centres, in an especially crucial position.

Many large metropolitan cities, including Toronto, have made an effort to meet this problem by restructuring the public library into a two-tier library system.¹ One tier is a centralized reference system, specializing primarily in adult education and research; the other tier is composed of a number of area systems, each of which is free to accommodate the demands of its local area.

Because the two-tier system is relatively new in Ontario (including Toronto, where it has been in operation since 1968), a permanent division of powers and functions has not yet crystallized. The system is still evolving. This COMMENT examines the present structure of the Toronto two-tier system, describes the present functions of each tier, and suggests possible future functions for each of the tiers in this evolving system. It does not describe in detail modern library practices common to both tiers (such as the adoption of broader service areas, the increased use of non-print media, the treatment of libraries as part of a system rather than as individual units or the computerized collection, storage and retrieval of materials).

The Importance of Adult Education in Urban Areas

As has been previously pointed out, urbanization and urban growth are usually accompanied by quickening increases in the community's knowledge, information resources and education. Furthermore, many analysts

¹. This re-structuring into two tiers has also taken place in rural areas. In Ontario, for example, there are 14 regional library systems, only one of which (Toronto) is entirely urban in jurisdiction.

contend that advancing levels of adult knowledge and information will open the door to a post-industrial society, in which the economy will be based not on industrial production, but on research and innovation.

Science and business information requests, guidance in technical reading and in-depth reading lists in urban areas can best be provided by a specialized library which draws financial support from the entire area. In Toronto, this in-depth reference function has in fact been adopted by the metropolitan-wide library system.

The Metropolitan Toronto Library System

The Shaw Report's¹ vigorous analysis of the shortcomings of unco-ordinated municipal library systems provided a major stimulus for the creation of a metropolitan-wide system. Dr. Shaw found that:

- (1) average library service in Metropolitan Toronto was poor,
- (2) the quality of service varied greatly from municipality to municipality and
- (3) the Toronto Public Library system, in maintaining the Central Library was by itself financing a reference system for all 13 area municipalities.

Both Shaw and area library system administrators advocated the establishment of a metropolitan-wide system which would take on the operations of the Central Library and would also take some steps towards co-ordinating and standardizing local municipal systems. The Metro Toronto Public Library Board was eventually established as a regional library system under the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto Amendment Act of 1966 and the Public Libraries Act of 1966. The Board includes 9 members: the Metro Chairman, one member appointed by each of the 5 Boroughs and the City, one by the Metro School, and one by the Separate School Board.

The system is unique in the province. Of 14 regional systems, it is the only completely urban one in the province. It includes only 7 member boards; other regional systems include an average of 23 member boards. Like the other regional library systems, Toronto draws its powers and a grant from the province. Under the Public Libraries Act of 1966, a regional library board is required to submit a yearly plan for co-ordinating services in its area. Its legislated, but permissive, powers are: to establish a regional reference collection; to promote inter-library loan and other co-operation; and to establish a central service to divide up regional responsibilities for selecting, ordering, storing, etc. of materials, for providing advice to improve public library standards, for providing educational programmes for adults and for librarians, and so on.

1. Ralph Shaw, Libraries of Metropolitan Toronto (Toronto: Library Trustees Council of Toronto and District, 1960). Hereinafter referred to as Libraries of Toronto.

Since the powers are permissive and in practice, therefore, depend on the co-operation of area member boards, actual powers of regional library boards vary. In the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto Amendment Act of 1966, the Metro Toronto Library Board was given the additional powers to take over materials and buildings of member library systems and to provide grants-in-aid to member Boards. In general, powers fall loosely into two main categories of maintaining a central reference collection and of taking steps to co-ordinate practices of area boards.

The Metro Toronto regional board does maintain a centralized collection, which is a primarily non-circulating regional reference collection. Presently housed in four separate buildings, the collection of 613,959 books, 465,022 pictures or slides and 11,902 records or tapes¹. will within five years be housed in one central building. Established in 1909, Metro Toronto's collection includes highly specialized materials and is one of the finest in Canada. A recent study². revealed that main users of the Metro system are post-secondary students or managerial and professional employees, and that there were about 173,000 users over the 1970-71 period. To date, the main activities of the Metro Board have been expanding this central collection and studying alternatives for a new single site Central Library³. although some progress has also been made in the second main category of co-ordinating local libraries.

The most impressive example of co-ordination has been the maintenance of a central bibliographic centre which lists the book and periodical holdings of every public library in Toronto. All six area library systems are linked to this centre via teletype and thus have almost instantaneous access to this bibliographic information. The Metro Board has supported and gained acceptance for a single area-wide borrower's card. It also maintains central repositories of languages and audiovisual materials, which are made available to area library systems. (Its film collection includes 2,000 titles). It provides some advice and consultation by specialized staff to area systems, and sponsors joint area library systems publications and public relations materials. In addition, the Metro Library system, in co-operation with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and the Ontario Association for Continuing Education, finances the publication of Metrodoc, the only listing of all continuing education courses available in the area.

1. December 31, 1971 figures.

2. Jack Barry Ellis, Survey of Users of the Metropolitan Toronto Central Library, (Toronto: Metropolitan Toronto Library Board, 1971).

3. Metropolitan Toronto Central Library Programme and Site Selection Study, Report for the Library Board by Raymond Moriana Architects and Planners, Albert Bowron Information, Media and Library Planners and Jack Ellis, Systems Analysis Consultant, 1971.

Future Roles of the Metro System

The Central Library collection will continue to expand. Yet this expansion will not be the only major concern of the Metro Board. Broadening the Metro Library system co-ordinating function requires attention. Indeed, the major preoccupation should become area system co-ordination. Co-ordination should be designed to compensate for individual area shortages and to provide area-wide balance.

A number of observations about future Metro co-ordinating activities can be made:

(1) The staff of Metro co-ordinators, limited at present to Languages and Audiovisual Co-ordinators, will expand to give other subject areas Metro-wide co-ordinators.

(2) One major co-ordinating step that still remains to be taken despite near unanimity about its importance, is the installation of a uniform Metro-wide card cataloguing system. Area systems will probably eventually agree to undertake this standardization in spite of the possible initial expense involved.

(3) It is uncertain whether or not centralized book ordering will be established, since there is substantial disagreement over the usefulness of this type of centralization.¹

(4) The Metro regional system may be able to introduce standards for personnel and training throughout its region.

(5) New co-ordinating functions arising from new technologies or from efficiency analyses may also come about. The Metro Board December 1972 Statement of Policy includes the creation of a systems staff to expand the efficiency of Metro system operations in its list of future activities.

A final possible co-ordinating step would be to integrate area library resources by providing a region-wide inter-library loan system, including inter-library loan from the complete Metro collection to area systems. At present, part of the collection goes to area systems through inter-library loan. The Metro Library system Director would like to phase out Metro's lending activities in most cases and make the central collection totally non-circulating. He takes the position that "The collection as a whole is designed for maximum accessibility but this does not equate with home use."² Inter-library loan from a well-established collection can be a major incentive for co-operation of area systems in a regional system: taking the above position on inter-library loan seriously weakens the case for co-operation. To achieve a truly metropolitan system, inter-library loan from the central collection to area systems, whether the central collection is borrowed for home use by the Metro system's own direct patrons or not, appears essential. One alternative would be to restrict use of

1. See Ralph Shaw, Libraries of Metro Toronto, Ch.V. versus Francis St. John, A Survey of Libraries in the Province of Ontario, (Toronto: Ontario Library Association, 1965), pp.43-53. Hereinafter referred to as A Survey of Libraries. These sources take opposite positions on the potential for economic savings through centralized book ordering in Ontario.

2. Statement of the system Director, John T. Parkhill, December 1, 1972.

books through this loan system to the premises of local system libraries. The collection would not be used at home, but it would not be confined to use in the Metro Library. Failing this, the Metropolitan system should at least finance the expansion of the inter-library teletype system, to include inter-area library teletype communication.

The Borough and City Systems

The North York, York, East York, Toronto, Scarborough and Etobicoke Library Boards include the mayors and three representatives each from the municipal councils and the area school board and two representatives from the area separate school board, as required by the Public Libraries Act of 1966, Section 5. The systems vary greatly in size and resources, from the East York 1968 population of 97,000 and 1970 expenditure of \$528,497, to the City of Toronto 1968 population of 687,000 and the 1970 expenditure of \$3,821,281. The number of municipal library boards decreased from 13 to 6 in 1966, when the number of area municipalities decreased.

The area systems have the broad goal of meeting the total library needs, except for the need for in-depth reference collection, of their respective municipalities. To organize their resources more effectively, all area systems have developed middle-level "district" libraries. These district libraries serve areas of at least 10,000 people and aim at having collections of 100,000 books to provide a backup service for the local branch libraries. Thus, each local library system includes at least one district library and 4 branch libraries.

	<u>Number of District Libraries</u>	<u>Number of Branch Libraries</u>
East York	1	4
Etobicoke	3	7
North York	5	8
Scarborough	2	7
Toronto	3 (projected)	26
York	1	4

Within this framework, the branch library's aim is to meet the library needs of its local jurisdiction, to the extent that its revenue permits. Its functions include maintaining a current collection of general and quick reference reading; collecting community information; and providing a certain amount of space for meeting rooms, displays and programmes. All of the activities are geared to meet local area needs. The district library aims at providing a middle-level reference service, with collections adequate to meet all research needs of secondary-school level students. It, too, provides information about the area, meeting rooms and programmes. Resources within each city or borough system are pooled by the use of inter-library loan among the district and branch libraries.

Two user studies of borough systems have been done: the North York Exploratory Survey of Users and the Scarborough User Survey.¹ Overall, the borough systems attracted more people for general reading and secondary school level research than did the Metro system; the borough clients were mainly 12-18 or 36-50 years old, while Metro clients fell heavily into the 19-35 year old group. Both borough studies show that closeness to the library is the most important factor in an individual's choice of a particular public library.

Local Systems and Community Activities

The community activity category of services is the one local system type of activity which is not also undertaken by the Metropolitan system. It thus deserves special attention in the local systems. With the establishment of the Metro-wide library system, in-depth library services have been transferred to the Metropolitan tier, and local systems are freer to pursue activities which serve their particular communities.

A broad range of community activities is sponsored by local public libraries, acting alone or in co-operation with other agencies. Most of the activities fall into four main categories:

(1) sponsoring community cultural and educational programmes such as courses, theatre groups, concerts, exhibits, playreadings and book discussion groups. Toronto area systems sponsor these plus cultural evenings and story hours.

(2) Increasing community information -- e.g., collecting information on government and other agency programmes in the area and providing meeting rooms for community groups. Two area systems -- North York and Toronto -- officially sponsor community information centres, and all of the other systems actively support such centres.

(3) Aiding special interest groups, such as ethnic groups, groups of disadvantaged children, or the disabled. Most area systems sponsor ethnic group activities, including various types of foreign language library promotion efforts to attract non-English speaking people to the library, citizenship seminars, and so on. All local systems sponsor delivery service to "shut-ins".

(4) Providing other community-oriented services, such as day care or reader advisory services. Some argue that these types of activities should be expanded in the local systems, although providing people with books and educational materials will probably always be the main objective of the library.

Each of the local library systems in Toronto has expanded its community services over the past few years.² North York, for example,

1. Mary Jo Edmonds, Exploratory Survey of Users (North York Public Library, February 1971) and James Montgomery, Scarborough Public Library User Survey (Scarborough Public Library Board, July 1972).

2. Bureau inquiry, January 1973.

sponsored 20 programmes per year ten years ago; it now sponsors 500 yearly. Attention to the special needs of each local library's community has become a more important objective in policy statements issued by all of the borough and city library systems. And community services have been allocated formal budgets in some systems. The evidence from the libraries themselves is that community activities are increasing; but, unfortunately, the evidence in the two borough user studies is also that individual categories of community services such as film showings or exhibits are used by only 2% to 15% of library users. Library administrators also consider it unfortunate that users of the programme and community activities and users of books may be two different groups.¹ Libraries could use these facts as reasons to cut back on the number of community activities sponsored. Instead of cutting back, libraries might consider using a variety of methods to increase the number of people using the library community services.

Future Roles in the Local Systems

Low attendance at some local community programmes indicates that these programmes are not properly geared to local needs. Other programmes and services might be more popular and more effective. The essence of the following specific suggestions is that the community activities of local library systems should be planned and conducted entirely at branch libraries. Ideally, none should be planned or held at district libraries. As we have already seen, people tend to use the library closest to them. Since branch libraries are more numerous, they actually reach a larger combined population than do district libraries. At the same time, branch libraries can be closer to community residents than can district libraries, since they serve a smaller number of people. Since they are designed only to serve their particular communities they can be expected to be thoroughly familiar with the communities they serve. They should therefore be the points in the system for finding out which community activities are needed. Implementing this suggestion would involve several problems, which would in turn suggest further changes.

1. While overall turnout is low, some programmes have continually attracted high turnouts and enthusiastic reception. The Bureau recommends that this class of programme (which includes films, international nights, discussion of topical issues such as Women in the Modern World or Urban Renewal and sessions giving practical advice on income tax, investments and so on) receive primary emphasis.

2. Often, programmes are conducted at district rather than at branch libraries since district libraries have larger staffs, more room, larger budgets and more resources to sponsor programmes. If it is totally impossible to shift actual programmes to branch libraries

¹. Toronto Public Library Board, Community Services in the Toronto Public Library, January 1973.

physically, at least the main responsibility for the planning and suggestion function should be shifted to branch libraries, which would channel requests from areas residents.

3. Since area residents rarely bring forward unsolicited suggestions for programmes, an active advertising campaign and community survey (like the community surveys done recently by the North York system) should be initiated, to solicit community desires for programmes and community activities.

4. Book selection is a complex issue. While some degree of central control is probably necessary to give over-all direction to the library system, some degree of local autonomy should also be encouraged. Different areas obviously have different tastes and needs.

5. Lastly, some form of citizen participation in library decision-making should be provided. One way to achieve this would be to remodel the present city and borough library board structure -- which seems to be oriented largely to the needs of schools,¹ rather than to the needs of the entire population -- into a directly elected body. Some way might otherwise be found to enable structured community input into individual branch libraries' decisions.

All of these and other changes aimed at making local libraries more responsive to their communities could be made without spoiling a general local system library plan, provided that the plan were flexible.

If the entire responsibility for community activities were shifted to branches, the district libraries would concentrate on middle-level reference services for the secondary student or for "the lay reader who wants to have enough information about a subject to form his own judgement."² The district library might also build up collections of materials which could be lent to the branches, such as audiovisual material.

Summary

In summary, Toronto has a commitment to a two-tier library system which allocates in-depth research and reference functions to the metropolitan tier and responsiveness to local community library needs to the second tier. Since the system as a whole (created in 1968) is still evolving, suggestions can usefully be made about future directions for each tier.

Although the Central Library collection will continue to absorb a large part of the Metropolitan Library budget, the main part of the

1. Francis St. John, A Survey of Libraries, p.141.

2. Shaw, Libraries of Metro Toronto, p.78.

system's energy will and should go to co-ordinating area library systems and pooling regional resources. The development of a staff of co-ordinators, the introduction of uniform card cataloguing and the development of area-wide training and personnel standards are all expected to take place as part of this activity. The Bureau recommends that a regional inter-library loan system including full participation of the Metro Central Library, also be established.

In local systems the Bureau suggests that primary responsibilities for local community activities (including programme planning, local book selecting, locally-oriented advertising, community surveying and partial local priority setting) should go to the branch libraries. Local community activities must continue to expand. District libraries, on the other hand, should concentrate on their intermediate-level reference functions.

Some of these suggested changes may prove to be expensive. But, given the growing importance of the information, education and local community services provided by urban libraries, such increased expenditures should be carefully considered.