The future of the Dutch public library: ten years on
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Foreword

It is as natural as the baker’s, the local supermarket or the corner shop: a public library within walking or cycling distance. There are just under 1,100 public libraries spread throughout the Netherlands. The library enjoys wide public support: whenever a branch is threatened with closure, there is almost always an action group which campaigns to keep it open. Users appear to be happy with the service they receive. Yet despite all these positive notes, the statistics reveal a considerable decline in the use of the library since the 1990s.

In 1998 the Dutch Council for Culture called for an administrative reorganisation of the decentralised library network in the Netherlands. Challenges such as the decline in reading and the digitalisation of media and information could, it was argued, not be met without more centralised control. This marked the start of a process of library renewal which has now been under way for ten years. The ending of the mandate of the Libraries Steering Group (Stuurgroep Bibliotheeken), which gave direction to the process of renewal in the period 2001-2007, provided an opportunity to review the situation. What is the current status of the public library, which has had a presence in the Netherlands for a hundred years? And will society ten years from now, when much more information and culture will be available via the Internet than is already the case today, still need a public library?

This study analyses developments in the public library system itself, but above all in the environment in which it operates. Based on these analyses, trends are extrapolated to map out a possible future ten years hence, in so far as this can be predicted today. One thing that becomes clear is that the challenges are considerable. The study ends with a number of suggestions for library policy which, while neither a panacea nor a guarantee for success, could nonetheless help give direction to the course to be pursued in the coming years.

Many individuals and organisations lent their cooperation to this study. The Libraries Steering Group (Stuurgroep Bibliotheeken) fired the starting gun for the study, while the Office for Library Renewal (Procesbureau Bibliotheekvernieuwing) provided organisational support. The library service organisation ProBiblio in Hoofddorp facilitated the secondment of the second author to SCP. A sounding board group provided the authors with expert commentary and valuable suggestions, while experts from the sector and the relevant public authorities gave their views on what needs to be done in the coming years. Special thanks are due to all of them.

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Summary

This study outlines the prospects for public libraries in the Netherlands in ten years’ time. The starting point for the study was the observation that, after ten years of library renewal, opinions are still widely divided on what libraries should be concentrating on in shaping or preparing for the future. In order to give the discussion more focus, we formulate two future projections for libraries ten years from now, based on analyses of the use of libraries and wider media use against the background of social trends and of developments in the media and information landscape. Based on the normative task of the public libraries, we conclude with a number of recommendations for redefining their social relevance in a rapidly changing environment.

Work has been going on in the Netherlands for nearly ten years on the restructuring and renewal of the public library system. Changes in society and in the media and information landscape have consequences for the way in which citizens obtain information and interact with culture. The general consensus is that these changes create a need for a reflection on the functions and services provided by public libraries.

The process of library renewal began following the recommendations of the Dutch Council for Culture in 1998 that the library structure be changed at local and provincial level. The Council noted a lack of cohesion in the library sector, whereas the challenges facing libraries actually created a greater need than ever for them to adopt a unified front. The Steering Committee for the restructuring of the public library system (known as the Meijer Committee) recommended the creation of ‘basic libraries’ with separate front and back offices, and the transformation of provincial central libraries into provincial service organisations, in order to boost the strength of the sector. The signing of a joint agreement (Koepelconvenant) in 2001 by the three government layers involved marked the official start of the process of library renewal.

The administrative reorganisation process is currently in its final phase. The number of library organisations has been reduced sharply, while the number of branches has remained fairly constant. The renewal of the service and function of libraries has not always received a proportionate amount of attention in recent years, though now that the end of the administrative reforms is in sight, the balance is shifting in the direction of these substantive reforms. The question remains, however, whether this process is being driven energetically enough and whether the direction of change is sufficiently clear.

The purpose of this research project is to describe how Dutch public libraries might look in the period 2015-2020 and to set out a route map by which those involved (public libraries, the library sector, the Netherlands Public Library Association, provincial service organisations, central government, provincial and local authorities) can achieve the envisaged future position. This is done on the basis
of analyses of present and future social trends and of developments in supply and
demand in relation to information. The vision must on the one hand provide an indi-
cation of the direction in which public libraries need to develop in order to continue
to fulfil their public function, including in the medium term, whilst at the same time
it must be made clear which actions the various layers of government – local authori-
ties, provincial authorities and central government – and the sector organisation
need to take in order to enable public libraries to meet these challenges.

We take as a basis the analyses of data from a number of longitudinal studies,
which enable us to provide an insight into trends in library use over recent decades.
Those trends are placed in the context of the societal environment of libraries and
wider media usage. Starting from the normative task of the libraries, we analyse
which social ‘deficiencies’ might arise which public libraries could combat in a
‘desirable future’. In conclusion, we offer a number of policy recommendations
for the sector and the various layers of government in order to bring that desirable
future closer.

Role and history
The traditional task of public libraries has been to provide universal access to infor-
mation and culture (chapter 2). The awareness of the importance of free access to
information and culture arose during the Enlightenment. During the 18th century,
the well-to-do bourgeoisie formed ‘reading groups’. In the 19th and early 20th centu-
ries, the same bourgeoisie began calling for public reading rooms for the less well-off
(the ‘reading room movement’). The first public libraries emerged in the Netherlands
on the eve of the 20th century. The national public library network was not created
until the 1970s, when public, Catholic and Protestant library associations joined
together to form the Netherlands Library and Literature Centre (NBLC) (1972) and
the Public Libraries Act was introduced (1975). This led to a sharp increase in the
number of libraries and to a concomitant sharp increase in their use. The growth in
the number of libraries also led to an increase in the size of their collections. There
were corresponding rises in membership numbers and borrowing figures.

The decentralisation of the library sector, introduced in the 1980s, was formal-
ised in 1994 in the Cultural Policy (Special-Purpose Funding) Act. Primary con-
trol of public libraries was handed to local authorities, which also provided their
subsidies, with support at provincial and national level. The 2001 joint agreement
on the restructuring of public libraries (Koepelconvenant herstructurering openbaar
bibliotheekwerk) left the decentralised structure intact but changed the distribution
of tasks across the different government layers. The aim was to create a network of
‘basic libraries’, each of sufficient size in terms of catchment area and therefore with
adequate critical mass. Libraries were able to purchase services from regional serv-
ice organisations and organised national cooperation in sector-wide tasks.

The ‘Basic libraries directive’ (Richtlijn voor basisbibliotheken) (2005) lists the five
core functions that the library sector sees for itself. Those functions are ‘knowledge
and information’; ‘development and education’; ‘arts and culture’; ‘reading and liter-
nature'; and ‘meeting and debate’. Libraries are or should in principle be active in each of these five areas. The assumption is that these five functions reinforce each other and together form a cohesive whole. The functions appear to be widely accepted in the sector: there is no evidence of strong contradictory voices. Both in terms of their collections and their other activities, therefore, libraries focus on these functions.

There has always been a certain tension between the principles underpinning libraries and the real world of practice. From the start, the idea of elevating the people was at odds with the reality that the majority of users visited the library for recreational purposes. Moreover, there were limits to the facilitating of unfettered access to information and culture by the public: for religious, moral or other reasons, certain materials were excluded from the collections, and until the 1960s it was by no means always possible for visitors to wander among the bookshelves themselves and select their own reading materials without the intervention of a librarian. The system of ‘pillarisation’ which dominated Dutch society, with its rigid divisions of society along ideological and religious lines to create discrete ‘vertical groupings’ or ‘pillars’, and the Occupation during the Second World War, put pressure on the drive to create a public and independent library system. The subsidy system also meant that libraries were dependent on administrative ‘fashions’ and were sensitive to movements in the economic cycle. Nonetheless, public libraries as an institution represented and continue to represent four key values: freedom, equality, social cohesion and quality. These four values can be operationalised in nine normative principles for the proper functioning of public libraries:

- accessibility, availability;
- diversity, plurality;
- independence, objectivity;
- solidarity, social inclusion;
- social control, integration;
- maintenance of the symbolic environment;
- reliability, precision;
- professionalism, expertise;
- topicality, renewal.

We use these principles in chapter 7 to test the extent to which public libraries will still be fulfilling their social role in ten years’ time. The changes in the environment in which libraries operate are on the one hand socio-demographic and socio-cultural in nature, while on the other hand they are also taking place in the media and communication landscape.

Trends in society
In chapter 3 we describe the socio-demographic and socio-cultural trends which could be of importance for the functioning of public libraries ten years from now. Expected socio-demographic trends are relevant in matching the services offered by the library system to the services that people want going forward. Socio-cultural
trends influence the expectations of library users and the type of services they require.

As regards the socio-demographic trends, figures from Statistics Netherlands (CBS) suggest that the population will continue to grow over the next ten years, but less rapidly than in recent decades. The over-65s will constitute a larger proportion of the population than at present, while the ethnic composition of the population will also continue to change. Within the non-Western immigrant population, the four major groups (Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans/Arubans) will become numerically less predominant due to the growth of new groups of non-Western immigrants. In addition, migration within Europe will create large groups of new Dutch citizens of Western origin. The majority of immigrants currently live in the four major cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht), but it is projected that those groups which have lived there for longer periods, in particular, will leave for the larger towns surrounding the ‘big four’. Partly as a result of this, the proportion of younger members of non-Western ethnic minorities in the four major cities will decline slightly, though they will still make up a sizeable proportion of the population in ten years’ time.

One relevant socio-cultural trend is that the rise in education level that has taken place in the past century will continue, though not at the same pace. Disadvantaged pupils, of both ethnic and indigenous origin, will continue to need extra attention at school. The encouraging of ‘lifelong learning’ by the Dutch government and the European Union also means that people will more often follow courses and further training after completing their formal education. The Dutch are becoming more prosperous, and particularly if that prosperity is linked to the expenditure on leisure time, the strong growth of recent decades in that expenditure will continue. On the other hand, there will also be a group of people who have difficulty making ends meet and who will have to rely on social support. More and more people will combine work and care tasks, which will squeeze the amount of available free time people have available, especially for those in the middle age categories. People will more often opt to live alone. Attitudes to membership of associations and organisations are changing due to individualisation and informalisation; ties are becoming more temporary and more changeable. This is also reflected in changing attitudes to voluntary work; there are signs that voluntary work is in decline, but also that it is taking on a different, more temporary and project-based form. Finally, there is the ongoing informatisation process. Online computers are present in virtually all Dutch households, especially those with growing children, and are also widespread at school and at work. Virtually all Internet users use the Web to search for information and to communicate. Older people and those with a low education level will gradually make up their deficit in computer usage over the next ten years.

Libraries aim to serve the whole population, but that (changing) population contains some groups who rely on the library more than others, such as those with a low literacy level, newcomers and disadvantaged school pupils. In addition, libraries can serve a less urgent group: people studying outside an educational establishment. In
addition, people’s expectations are changing as a result of what is happening in ‘the market’. People are getting used to freedom of choice, individualisation of services and certain groups are facing growing time pressures, and this is resulting in a need for different library services and for different forms of accessibility. Lifelong memberships of libraries will become less commonplace. The library will have to meet the changing expectations and needs of its users by offering innovative services. Given their task of acting as a place for meeting and debate, libraries can play a role in the ever more committed, local and temporary social participation.

Trends in communication and information
In chapter 4 we discuss the trends in media and communication that are important for how and how well libraries are able to fulfil their five core functions. Changes in people’s media use, the way they search for information and communicate make it essential for libraries to adapt their services. Moreover, it is not impossible that a different party could fulfil the functions currently provided by the library so well that the added value of the library disappears.

Digitalisation has radically changed the world of information: information is now faster, broader, more accessible, more international, and more personal. At the same time, there are concerns about the quantity (too much) and quality (too little) of that information. The library has an important function as a source of reliable information, but it must keep its services socially relevant.

Democratisation of production and distribution resources in media and communication is spawning new and interesting phenomena, which are currently developing rapidly and whose future role is uncertain. There has been a sharp increase in the quantity, speed and accessibility of content. Technological developments such as e-books and publishing on demand will have an influence on the production process of printed media, but are unlikely to lead to the disappearance of the large-circulation printed book within the next ten years.

The policy of decentralisation has had a clear ‘localising’ effect on the configuration of the library sector. As an institution visited by millions of people, developments in local welfare and cultural amenities are important because of their relationship with the tasks of the library. Developments in the book policy and the policy to promote reading are also relevant for libraries. Opening up access to information in the digital domain is meeting with resistance from commercial players who, fearing uncontrolled illegal distribution of their content, impose severe restrictions on public libraries.

In the media market, internationalisation and economic concentration go hand-in-hand. The government seeks to promote the provision of impartial and diverse information. The Internet has led to a growth in niche markets, making relatively obscure titles more easily available. These new market dynamics have negative repercussions for libraries, but can also be a source of inspiration for a repositioning.

A complete new spectrum of contact opportunities has arisen, from direct interaction to social networking sites with user-generated content. Finding information
in the digital era is often simpler than in the past. At the same time, there are doubts about the quality of some of the information found on the Internet and the skills of users to find their way through the morass of information.

Trends in library use
Chapter 5 looks at trends in library use over the last 30 years. Although that use involves more than simply visiting the library to borrow books, our study is restricted largely to this aspect of library use. Only limited data are available on other forms of library use, and certainly no trend data are available.

Library use has been in decline since the 1990s according to all measurable criteria: memberships, number of visits, number of borrowers and number of books borrowed. This is despite an increase in the media budgets of libraries, a more or less stable number of libraries and a collection which has shrunk relatively less quickly than the number of lendings. Computer use in libraries also shows a downward trend as more and more people have a PC with Internet connection at home.

Libraries are losing ground more quickly among men, people in work and the better educated; the decline is less marked among older people, the lower-educated and women. Only Turkish and Moroccan Dutch citizens exhibit a contrary trend: not only is their library use increasing; it is also strikingly high among teenagers and young adults (higher than among their indigenous peers).

The analyses contradict some explanations given by libraries themselves for the reduction in interest. The introduction of the ‘borrowing right’ in around 1996 and the partial passing on to borrowers of the costs in the form of borrowing fees (a contribution per book borrowed) will not have done anything to promote borrowing, but no clear ‘extra effect’ can be observed in the figures. The suspicion that falling satisfaction with libraries explains the fall in their use is also not supported by the figures.

One thing that does lead to less borrowing of library books is the increase in the buying of books and the receipt of books as gifts. A generational effect can also be observed in reduced book borrowing. Younger generations, who have grown up with a larger library collection than preceding generations, visit the library frequently at primary school age. Their – free – use of the library falls off rapidly once they reach adulthood, however, when they visit the library less often than older generations. Analysis at the level of birth cohort provides no support for a ‘return effect’, with adults rejoining a library when they have children themselves.

Changing media use
In chapter 6 we focus attention on the changes that have taken place in the last 30 years in the broader use of media, so as to provide a context for a better understanding of the reduction in library use itself. We focus in particular on reading and searching for information, two activities which touch on the core of library services.

In the population as a whole, the time devoted to media in their free time has remained remarkably constant since the 1970s. Within that overall time budget, a gradual decline in the reading of printed media up to 2000 went hand-in-hand with
an increase in time spent watching television and (from the mid-1980s onwards) in computer use. Online computer use has been increasing rapidly since 2000, and now appears to be taking place mainly at the expense of watching television.

There are wide age-related differences in media use. Comparing younger and older age groups shows that new media are consistently embraced first and most enthusiastically by the young. The difference in media use is due primarily (though not exclusively) to the fact that younger generations incorporate innovations into their activity patterns more readily than older generations. The declining popularity of older media is also largely generational. If we look at the figures on time spent on old and new media, we see that it remains remarkably constant within generations as they age.

Books are still popular media for relaxation and escaping from reality; the Internet is growing strongly as a source of information. Once again, corresponding differences can be observed for old and new media depending on age/generation.

The innovations in available media took place first and primarily in the commercial domain and therefore outside the sphere of influence of public libraries. It is consequently not surprising that the balance in time use has shifted to the detriment of libraries, whose services are still focused mainly on the public domain. This does not mean that a further decline in library use is inevitable, but it does make it highly likely.

The future of the public library

Chapter 7 is concerned with the future of public libraries. We first outline the likely future for libraries based on an extrapolation of observed trends. We then describe a situation in which these trends progress more quickly than they have to date. Both future projections are described for the five core functions of the library: ‘knowledge and information’; ‘development and education’; ‘arts and culture’; ‘reading and literature’; and ‘meeting and debate’.

The starting point for the future projections described is the following summary of six trends:
- from limited supply and access to information to abundant supply and wide access;
- from analogue to digital media and information supply;
- from the public-sector to private-sector operation of the media and information market;
- from a focus on the general public to an individually customised service;
- from the use of printed and audiovisual media to digital media;
- from allocation (‘broadcasting’) to consultation and conversation (exchange of content).

The implications of these trends for public libraries are that digitalisation and other trends (especially individualisation) are leading to a fundamental shift in the orientation towards media and information by younger generations of users in particular.
The added value of an ordered collection of physical information and culture carriers (as in libraries) is declining. Those collections are increasingly perceived as a limited selection from the total, compared with the rapidly growing supply of information available outside the library. Whereas in the past users saw added value in an institution which organised the supply of information and culture for them, they are today becoming more and more accustomed to organising that supply themselves, in their own fashion (albeit perhaps in a less cohesive, less complete and less permanent way) and to tailoring it to their own individual needs.

Based on its public task, the public library now faces the task of seeking out users and assisting them in organising their own content, rather than assuming that users will continue to come to the library for that content. Only if the library enters the field of view of potential users will the conditions be created for bringing them into contact with both the physical and the digital library collection.

A SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) provides a starting point for our explorations of the future. The strengths of the library system are its still wide reach, not only as an institution where people can borrow books for recreation and relaxation, but also as a neutral, low-threshold place to visit and to consult content. The extensive collections and the good ties with primary schools are further strengths of the library. Weaknesses are the fall in the number of members and books lent, especially among teenagers and young adults, and the limited visibility of the library in the digital domain.

The trend towards digitalisation also presents opportunities for the library, however. By making skilful use of the distribution opportunities offered by the Internet, libraries can increase the access to their content for their users. The large-scale use of libraries by Turkish and Moroccan youngsters also offers interesting possibilities for further developing the social position of the library. The attention in society for social cohesion and ‘lifelong learning’ offers opportunities for libraries to deliver useful services via strategic alliances.

The threats are however also considerable. The changing expectations and needs of ‘clients’ (more customisation, faster delivery) demand adaptations by libraries. The ageing of staff will also pose a threat within a few years, as the replacement of retiring employees is likely to be problematic due to a lack of sufficiently qualified young entrants to the sector. Substitution of library services by other providers is manifesting itself in information search behaviour (for which libraries are used less and less) and the growing tendency to buy rather than borrow books.

Our outline of the possible future projections for the public library is based on a theoretical model which focuses on the choice process of the user between the library and alternative routes to achieve particular objectives. The perceived costs and benefits of the library and of alternatives by (potential) users are described for the five core functions of the library. In outlining the likely situation ten years from now, we assume a continuing decline in library use, leading to diminished support among the population. In this future projection, the knowledge and information function of the library, in particular, will (continue to) suffer due to changes in the
environment in which it operates, especially digitalisation. The function ‘reading and literature’ will also diminish further measured in terms of borrowing figures, due to a decline in reading and the higher proportion of books purchased and received as gifts. The threats appear less marked for the functions ‘development and education’ and ‘arts and culture’. A lack of figures on social impact makes it difficult to assess how the functions ‘arts and culture’ and ‘meeting and debate’ will fare in practice compared with ‘knowledge’ and ‘reading’.

In the second future projection we assume that the decline in library use will accelerate in the coming decade compared with the last ten years. The development of attractive, user-friendly alternatives on the Internet and from content suppliers who enter into a direct relationship with users could lead to the radical marginalisation of the library as a traditional supply-centred institution. The marked fall in the number of people visiting libraries has an impact on all core library functions, but especially those functions where the broad reach of the library is a condition for the development of other activities. It is certainly likely that in these circumstances the returns on the public monies invested in the library system will come under scrutiny.

The likelihood of a decline in support for public libraries over the next ten years does not of course mean that this is a desirable development. The undesirability of such a trend lies not so much in the consequences for ‘the public library’ as an institution itself, but in the social functions it fulfils. Based on the nine normative principles presented in chapter 2, it is possible to identify the areas where shortcomings arise from a social point of view – ‘market failures’ in economic terms – if either of the two future projections becomes reality. This analysis indicates how libraries could fulfil their social task in a different way. The undesirable consequences of a further decline in library use differ for each core function, but all form part of the market failure which arises in terms of independence, diversity, objectivity, reliability and social inclusion. The conclusion might be that there will still be sufficient reason in ten years’ time to justify a publicly funded correction of the market. Public libraries will however then have to offer something which makes them a natural partner for the responsible public authorities in combating the identified gaps. It is by no means certain that the library will by definition be the most natural partner in this regard. According to our assessment, there are in any event key tasks to be fulfilled on the following aspects:

- reading and literature;
- offering help to those who need it in finding, understanding and assessing information;
- combating the further shrinkage in the level of amenities in small communities;
- correcting market forces by maintaining an independent and diverse range of content for all citizens.

Libraries are not the only institution that could fulfil these tasks, but with their current size, reach and expertise, this is for the moment the most logical option.
Recommendations for policy

The concluding chapter 8 offers a number of pointers for policy for the library sector and the relevant layers of government in the coming years. Since these recommendations are rooted in the field, we have based them chiefly on discussions with experts from the sector and representatives of the public authorities concerned. The experts generally cited the need for further digitalisation of the service that libraries can or should seek to offer, and the personnel-related complications this will bring. There was a diversity of views on the configuration of and cooperation in the network of basic libraries, and the distribution of back-office and front-office tasks between the different levels in the sector. Nonetheless, most interviewees see a need for an escalation of the back-office tasks from local and regional to national level. Given the anchoring of the library sector in the local community, the prevailing opinion is that the front-office tasks should continue to be locally organised. In the middle of these opposing trends, the position of the middle level occupied by the provincial authorities will in time be called into question. The biggest diversity of opinion relates to the administrative structuring of the sector. Particularly given the ending of the mandate of the Libraries Steering Group (Stuurgroep Bibliotheken) and the Office for Library Renewal (Procesbureau Bibliotheekvernieuwing), many are concerned about the degree of control in the renewal process. Opinions vary on the question of which party should take up which tasks. Clearly, a better definition of the roles that the sector organisation, local authorities, provincial authorities and central government should play is important for the progress of library regeneration.

Our recommendations for policy target both substantive and administrative/organisational requirements. At the substantive level, it is essential that the user is the central focus. Libraries will have to gear their services to the way in which people in the digital reality of today and tomorrow increasingly search for, organise, share and produce content themselves. Since it is no longer possible for libraries to organise everything that is published in a meaningful way, the emphasis in the gathering and ordering of information will shift from the library to its (potential) users. The key for libraries in the next ten years will be to facilitate this trend as adequately as possible. It is also inevitable that choices are made in the services on which libraries concentrate and in which they specialise. In the present communication system it is not possible to be a guide in every field, nor is this always necessary. This leads to the following ten substantive pointers for policy:

- make content easier to find;
- create a hybrid collection;
- seek users out;
- do not regard the decline in reading and book borrowing as inevitable and do not write off the book;
- personalise services and carry out market research for this purpose;
- diversify the access to digital content;
- make choices in the guide function;
– support the public in developing information skills and, more broadly, media ‘savvy’;
– provide both local (front-office tasks) and national anchoring (back-office tasks);
– gear the physical branches more closely to the service they offer.

In administrative/organisational terms, the library sector has already undergone numerous changes in the last decade. Now that the need for substantive renewal in terms of library services is becoming more pressing, it is not the time to introduce further administrative/organisational change. This does not mean that the present configuration of the sector is ideal; the large number of members (basic libraries) of the Netherlands Public Library Association (vob) constrains the striking power of the sector. The innovations developed at national level are often too far removed from the basis in the eyes of the members. Solutions could include further increases in scale, leading to a reduced number of basic libraries, or a change in the way the sector organisation gives form to innovation, e.g. via a tender system in which basic libraries can subscribe for the implementation of innovation projects.

Within the existing administrative configuration, it is important to combine the benefits of local anchoring and decentralisation with a sector which is able to develop meaningfully at national level. Differentiation of the offering in individual libraries, the allocation of back-office and front-office tasks and the replacement of staff all deserve particular attention in this context. With regard to the administrative structuring of the sector, efforts need to be made to enable local authorities to fulfil their overseeing role more fully. A certain shift in control from the provincial to the national level would appear to be a good way of mobilising the innovative strength that is needed to reverse the decline in library use.

For the short term, we identify the following as acute focus areas for policy:
– continuation of the cooperation between the sector and the three layers of government in the interests of substantive renewal of the public library network;
– seeking solutions for the threatened staff shortages, especially staff who can give practical form to the substantive renewal;
– carrying out research to fill gaps in knowledge.
1 The Dutch public library ten years on: background and problem definition

What will the public library in the Netherlands look like in ten years’ time? After ten years of thinking about and implementing library renewal, there is still a wide diversity of views on what should be the main focus of libraries in shaping or preparing for the future. Based on analyses of the use of libraries and wider media use against the background of social trends and developments in the media and information landscape, in this study we present an impression of the likely position of public libraries ten years from now. We also explore a more extreme variant of this future projection, in which public libraries play only a very limited role in society. Based on the (unchanged) normative task of the public library, we then identify the socially undesirable consequences of marginalisation of the public library and present a number of suggestions for ensuring that public libraries retain their social relevance ten years from now.

1.1 Background

Since the beginning of this century, the public library sector and the different layers of government in the Netherlands – local, provincial and national – have been working together in a process of library renewal. The green light for this renewal process was given by the Dutch Council for Culture, which in 1998 was commissioned to produce a report on the administrative organisation of the public library network. In its report the Council proposed a ‘change in the existing library structure at local and provincial level’. It observed a lack of cohesion in library facilities at regional level, with central and local libraries within one and the same region to some extent duplicating tasks with little or no coordination. The fact that every library had its own management also did little to foster cohesion in the system. ‘Summarising, the Council feels that the need for change in the existing organisational structure lies not so much in a need to change the task of the library as such, as in a combination of increasing tasks, ever scarcer resources, greater mutual dependence and the use of Ict. These developments create a need for a more unified operation. In order to achieve this, the administrative organisation needs to be simplified’ (Raad voor Cultuur 1998: 4). Concentration of services in a single ‘regional administrative and working organisation’ (with a region not necessarily being the same thing as a province) was proposed as a solution to the inefficiencies that had arisen.

The report was not unequivocally welcomed in the library sector or by the public authorities concerned (especially local authorities). Although most stakeholders endorsed the Council’s analysis, the proposed solution pathway met with a great deal of resistance. There was a reluctance to abandon the benefits of a locally embedded administration, even though the drawbacks of administrative fragmentation
were recognised. The favoured approach was strengthened cooperation between library organisations at regional level. In response to this, the State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science commissioned a new report from the Steering Committee for the restructuring of the public library system (the Meijer Committee), which had been specially set up for this purpose. In a dialogue with policymakers and the sector, the Committee formulated a view which was broadly in line with that espoused by the Council for Culture. The main thrust of this report, too, was that the organisation of the public library system was insufficiently robust to meet the challenges of social and technological change. ‘The steering committee [...] observes that the changes in the environment in which libraries operate are proceeding too quickly for the present system to keep pace. Moreover, the pace of developments is accelerating. A revitalisation effort is needed in order to enable public libraries to continue to function in the future as centres of expertise and gatekeepers of quality’ (Stuurgroep herstructurering openbaar bibliotheekwerk 2000: 17).

The Committee proposed the creation of ‘basic libraries’: organisations with considerable catchment areas (minimum 30-35,000 inhabitants, but preferably more), multiple branches in neighbourhoods and villages, and separation of the front and back-office operations. It was proposed that provincial library centres (PBCs), which in the present system provide a sizeable proportion of the library services to rural communities, should be transformed into provincial service organisations (PSOs, non-profit private-law organisations). These PSOs would no longer provide part of the front-line library services themselves, but would act purely as service providers to the basic libraries.

A new Libraries Steering Group (Stuurgroep Bibliotheken) was set up to oversee the implementation of the Committee’s recommendations, with support from an Office for Library Renewal (Procesbureau Bibliotheekvernieuwing). Local authorities (Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)), provinces (Association of Provincial Authorities (IPo)) and central government (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW)) signed a joint agreement on restructuring the public library system in 2001 (Koepelconvenant herstructurering openbaar bibliotheekwerk). This agreement, to which a rider was added in 2004, set in motion a process which (particularly in the rider) envisaged both strengthening of the system and substantive renewal. The Meijer Committee gave the provincial authorities a steering role in the renewal process. A series of ‘road maps’ was used to give tangible form to the upscaling process in each province. Initially the intention was to have a short period (2002-2005) in which priority was given to the administrative reorganisation/upscaling. Partly due to the wide regional differences in the speed of implementation, however, this target date was not achieved. The mandate of the Steering Group and the Office for Library Renewal was consequently extended to 2007, with central government setting aside additional resources accordingly. Extra funding was also provided for the library renewal operation.

From 2006, priority was given to completing the administrative reorganisation by the end of 2007. In the field, however, still characterised as it was by its decen-
ralised structure, many (often widely diverging) views remained on the position of
the public library in the rapidly digitalising information society. The ‘changes in the
environment in which libraries operate’ to which the Meijer Committee had referred
were meanwhile still proceeding unabated. Within the sector this led to differences
of opinion about the course to be pursued in the coming years. These differences
became very apparent during a discussion meeting on 4 September 2006 in Amster-
dam. The views aired at that meeting on the future of the public library reflected a
whole palette of ideas ranging from ‘continuing to do what we have always done’ to
radical modernisation with the aid of information and communication technology
(ict). Where one library director argued for a greater emphasis on books, another
said that he would like nothing more than to see the end of the book carousel as
quickly as possible.

As stated, the administrative reorganisation of the library sector is nearing
completion, ten years after the Council for Culture was asked to produce its advice.
The number of independent public library organisations has roughly halved since
2001. A survey in mid-2007 showed the likely endpoint (table 1.1); the number of
branches has fallen slightly but still numbers nearly 1,100. As an average for the
country as a whole, each basic library has a catchment area of more than 100,000
inhabitants, though there is wide variation in this figure; provinces such as Drenthe
and Overijssel, for example, have deliberately opted for a smaller scale, while the
provinces in the Randstad region, comprising the provinces of Noord-Holland, Zuid-
Holland, Utrecht and Flevoland and containing the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam,
The Hague and Utrecht, are far above the average.

The merger process proceeded more slowly than anticipated. In particular, more
time than expected was taken up in reflecting on the most appropriate local merger
model and the actual mergers themselves. A perhaps somewhat charged claim, but
no less valid for that in essence, would be that in the first years of the present century
energy was invested primarily in administrative/organisational renewal in support of
the substantive modernisation (Kasperkovitz 2005: 14). That substantive renewal has
now moved higher up the policy agenda, partly due to developments in the library
landscape. Our hope is that this study, in which we map out developments in recent
decades as accurately as possible using statistical data, will provide a framework
within which that substantive renewal can take place.
Table 1.1
Overview of library organisations per province, position as at 31 May 2007 (expectations at that time for the number of future organisations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>province</th>
<th>inhabitants 1 January 2007</th>
<th>municipalities</th>
<th>library organisations</th>
<th>inhabitants per library organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Groningen</td>
<td>574,000</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>72,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friesland</td>
<td>642,000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>107,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drenthe</td>
<td>486,000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overijssel</td>
<td>1,116,000</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flevoland</td>
<td>374,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>187,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gelderland</td>
<td>1,979,000</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>104,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utrecht</td>
<td>1,191,000</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>170,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noord-Holland</td>
<td>2,613,000</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>138,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zuid-Holland</td>
<td>3,455,000</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>157,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeeland</td>
<td>380,000</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>95,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noord-Brabant</td>
<td>2,419,000</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limburg</td>
<td>1,128,000</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>103,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>16,358,000</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>104,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Procesbureau Bibliotheekvernieuwing (www.bibliotheekvernieuwing.nl); Kasperkovitz (2006); CBS (resident numbers; StatLine) SCP treatment

1.2 Problem definition

The purpose of this study is to describe how the Dutch public library might look in the period 2015-2020 and to set out a route map by which those involved (public libraries, the library sector, the Netherlands Public Library Association VOB, central government, provincial and local authorities) can achieve the envisaged future position. The vision must on the one hand provide an indication of the direction in which public libraries need to develop in order to continue to fulfil their public function in a changing society and a changing information and communication landscape, including in the medium term, whilst at the same time making clear which actions the various layers of government – local authorities, provincial authorities and central government – and the sector organisation need to take in order to give public libraries an administrative organisation structure that will enable them to meet these challenges.

In order to be able to describe the likely future position, four questions need to be answered:

1. Which historically developed normative principles underpin the functioning of public libraries as a public institution?
2. Which relevant developments in society and which developments on the informa-
tion supply side (at home and abroad, in the public and private domain) are likely to take place in the coming decade?

3 Which relevant trends can be identified in library use and in (wider) media and information use, and what are the opportunities and threats for public libraries in the light of those trends?

4 Starting from the public function described in question 1, how can public libraries respond to the developments outlined in questions 2 and 3, and which responsibilities must local, provincial and national authorities and the sector association possess in order to enable the library sector to achieve this?

1.3 Assumptions

Every study implicitly or explicitly starts from a number of assumptions regarding the phenomenon to be studied and from a certain view of that phenomenon. The complexity of the phenomenon makes this unavoidable. In this section we consider the main assumptions made in this study.

Focus on the user
The main aim of the library renewal initiative was to simplify the organisational structure of the sector. The diagnosis by the Council of Culture in 1998 and the Meijer Committee in 2000 was that the advanced decentralisation of the sector presented an obstacle for libraries in meeting the challenges of the information society. Accordingly, a plethora of policy memoranda, letters and reports, agreements and guidelines have appeared in recent years which place the central focus squarely on the administrative organisation. As a result, according to the Meijer Committee the actual challenges confronting the sector have been pushed somewhat into the background. In our view, however, an analysis of changes in library and media use is the key to the renewal of the front-line services provided by public libraries. The steady decline in lending figures and the – not corresponding – increase in the use of digital services in public libraries tell us something about the relevance of the public library in the society of today and tomorrow. It is for this reason that the main focus in this study is on users and non-users: who are they, what do they do and why do they do it? It is only in the concluding chapters that we shift the perspective back to supply, organisation and policy.

Who are the users?
The ‘users’ of Dutch public libraries can be divided into different groups. First, of course, there are the members: people who are registered as users, complete with name and address. But not all members actually use library services; there are members who never visit the library (anymore) and who no longer borrow materials. Then there are people who are not members but who visit libraries to consult books or to read a newspaper or magazine. Users and members are thus to a large extent overlapping groups, but they are not identical. Users are people who actually use
the services of the library. Due to the public nature of libraries, however, the term ‘library users’ can be interpreted much more widely than this, and taken to include all those who could make use of the library: everyone, in other words. After all, ‘public’ means that no one is in principle excluded. The ultimate aim of public libraries, therefore, is to be of service to everyone.

We use both meanings in this study. Chapter 5, which deals with trends in library use, is of course concerned with the first, more limited group. By contrast, the suggestions for policy in chapter 8 bring the potential library user explicitly into the picture.

Institutional or functional perspective?

Public libraries came into being at a time when information and culture were inaccessible or accessible only with difficulty for most people. The chief aim of the ‘reading room movement’ (see chapter 2 and the Summary) in the 19th and early 20th centuries was what was then called ‘elevation of the people’ and is today called empowerment. The idea was to enable everyone, including the lower social classes, to come into contact with information and culture. By offering development opportunities to these groups as well, the thinking was that they would be able to improve their own living conditions and that ultimately a better, happier society would result.

From a sociological perspective, it could be said that the public library embodies the institutionalisation of a social function. In the early years of the 20th century (and in countries such as the UK earlier than this), an institution was created whose focus was on the elevation of the people.4

When analysing the present and future position of the library, it is very important to distinguish the institution ‘public library’ from the social function it fulfils. A century after public libraries came into being, the social environment has changed. A much larger group of people can today afford to purchase a subscription to media services, and access to information has been established as a basic human right. Moreover, the supply of information and culture is many times greater and more accessible than in the past. This begs the question of whether the social function ‘development of the people’ is really as current today as it was in the past. If it is not, then an institution specially designed for this purpose is no longer needed. If that social function is still relevant, the next question should be whether it is still equally necessary or desirable to have a special institution to fulfil that function.

‘Elevation of the people’ and ‘development of the people’ are terms which sound very dated at the start of the 21st century. This is in part because the freedom and identity of the individual has come to the fore, to some extent overshadowing the notion of ‘the people’, while the ties between individuals have become looser (individualisation). The slightly ‘nanny-state’ connotations of a term such as ‘elevation’ are no longer appropriate in such a situation. Today’s librarians no longer describe what they are trying to do in those terms, but do suggest that the task the public library network sets itself in reality remains unchanged: to offer development opportunities to individuals and groups by providing them with low-threshold access to
information and culture so that they are able to obtain a better social position (see the UNESCO Manifesto in chapter 2).

Given the declining use of ‘traditional’ library services and the social developments which underlie that decline (these will be discussed extensively in later chapters), there is every reason for all those involved in the library system to reflect on the social functions of the public library, such as providing access to reliable information. Where in the past public libraries tore down the barriers to ‘public accessibility of information’ (barriers relating to costs, time and searching proficiency), this function appears less needed in the Internet era (though this is not the same thing as superfluous).

All these considerations raise questions about the future position of public libraries within the social communication system. Recent reports in the field of media policy (Huysmans et al. 2004; Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid 2005; Broeders & Huysmans 2006) argue that the social functions of media should be seen separately from the information and culture carriers themselves. Government policy on media should, they argue, be aimed at safeguarding the public functions of media, not at ensuring the continued existence of the institutions (such as public broadcasters) per se. Applying this line of reasoning to public libraries, this would mean that the government should be concerned with preserving the public functions fulfilled by libraries rather than the libraries themselves. Less extreme – based on the assumption of the utility and need for a public institution such as public libraries to safeguard such functions – the question is which media and which services public libraries should be offering in future.

This study largely adopts this functional perspective. We assume that the social function of empowerment is still relevant and will remain so for at least the next ten years (chapter 2). We analyse, bearing in mind the perspective of the user, how the services of public libraries compare with those provided by other parties, including commercial providers. The idea is that different services can fulfil the same function for the user, and that the user weighs these services against each other: how much effort and money will it cost me, and what is it likely to deliver for me? By taking the social functions as the starting point for the analysis, rather than the continued existence of the institution itself, the necessary critical distance is acquired.

Another aspect which warrants an explanation here is our use of the term ‘content’. This term is accorded a wider meaning here and is used to refer to all kinds of media content: current and thematic information, but also teaching methods, artistic and cultural expression (including music and film), literature and other fiction. This means that, although the term ‘content’ is often used to refer to the information that can be found on websites, we use it explicitly to describe all kinds of content: not just information available in digital databases, but also the content of books, films, music carriers, even the knowledge that is transferred in courses. Content is broader than information and encompasses all core functions of the public library (of which ‘knowledge and information’ are one) treated in this study.
1.4 Method and study design

The first question addressed in this study, concerning the normative principles which underlie the existence of public libraries, is answered by taking a look at history. Historically, the social task of the public library stems from a number of normative principles which came into being during the Enlightenment and which were later enshrined in laws, constitutions and treaties. Those principles still apply today, but their translation into the practice of social communication in general and the public library system in particular has changed in the past century. Chapter 2 traces the development of that social task from the beginning to the present day. This then serves as a backdrop to the subsequent discussion of developments which may place that task in a different light.

An understanding of the changes in the composition of the population, due to things such as ageing and immigration, is necessary in order to obtain a clear picture of the group of (potential) library users over the next ten years. Socio-cultural trends such as individualisation are also important here, because they too influence developments on the demand side. Chapter 3 summarises the relevant developments in this regard.

A number of developments on the supply side – the social communication system – are also important for a portrayal of the likely future situation. Digitalisation and developments in the Internet are of course the most prominent examples, but changes in other areas, too, such as the book trade, education and cultural policy, can also have consequences for the public library. The material needed to outline these developments is drawn from national and international literature surveys. The findings are reported in chapter 4.

Finally, developments in the use of media and libraries are important in portraying a reliable picture of the likely future. We provide an insight into trends in library use over the last 30 years, and (where possible) explain them. We also view them in relation to developments in media use, in particular reading. We draw on studies carried out by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP which include questions on library use, such as the Time Use Survey (TBO), the Amenities and Services Utilisation Survey (AVO) and the survey of the life situation of ethnic minorities (LAS). Based on this material, members and non-members, users and non-users of public libraries can be described by personal characteristics such as age, education level, labour market position, ethnicity and other media use. As a number of these studies have been repeated at regular intervals since the 1970s, we can analyse trends over the last 30 years. We present this analysis spread over two chapters. Trends in library use are the main focus of chapter 5; by way of intermezzo, these Dutch trends are then placed in an international perspective. Comparison with a number of other countries shows to what extent developments in the Netherlands have occurred in isolation or are by contrast illustrative of a broader international trend.

In chapter 6, library use is embedded in the broader context of media use – participation in and time spent on reading, listening, viewing and surfing the Internet.
These changes, which largely fall outside the sphere of influence of public libraries and which are proceeding more rapidly in some population groups than others, provide the clearest insight into the challenges facing the public library over the next decade.

Chapter 7 brings together the earlier strands of the study in order to present two possible future projections of public libraries. First, the probable future is presented. Here it is assumed that the gradual decline in library use due to the emergence of substitutes in the form of alternative forms of service delivery will continue; in this view, the library sector is unable to mobilise sufficient innovative capacity to check the downward trend in library use. We then describe a situation in which the present downward trends accelerate. With this future projection we explore a situation in which public libraries play virtually no social role of any significance ten years from now. Based on these two future projections we explore what undesirable (from a social normative perspective) situations this could produce, and how the public library can counter this. The term ‘undesirable’ here refers to the normative framework described in chapter 2. This leads us to the question of what the sector needs to do in terms of innovation to ensure that the public library is still or becomes again a relevant institution for (potential) user groups in the future.

The concluding chapter 8 shifts the perspective away from the user – the central figure in chapters 3-7 – to the library sector and the public authorities. The path to a socially desirable future for the public library is translated in this chapter into suggestions for policy. These suggestions focus on the renewal which is needed both at the level of content and of the administrative organisation of the library, and highlight the points which in our view warrant primary attention. Logically, in carrying out the study new questions were thrown up; these questions are listed in the form of a concluding research agenda.

The following figure shows the relationship between the different chapters, as well as the structure of the book.
Notes

1 A list of acronyms and associations is included at the end of this book (p. 201).
4 It was not until the 1970s that the Public Libraries Act marked the culmination of the process of institutionalisation in the Netherlands.
2 The social task of the public library

Freedom, Prosperity and the Development of society and individuals are fundamental human values. They will only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information.

The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. This Manifesto proclaims UNESCO’s belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.

UNESCO therefore encourages national and local governments to support and actively engage in the development of public libraries.

UNESCO Public Library Manifesto

2.1 Rhetoric and reality

The above quotation shows clearly what the foundations of the public library system are. The terms ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ refer to the liberal democratic theory which arose in the Enlightenment. It is no coincidence that the idea of a public library has its roots in the time of the French Revolution in the late 18th century. According to the quotation, well-informed citizens who actively participate in society constitute a condition for the proper functioning of the democratic system. ‘Development’ is the key word, and governments are called upon to empower their citizens to engage in that development themselves, throughout their lives. The purpose of the public library is to provide free and unlimited access to information and culture.

It can do no harm to question the extent to which these normative principles are met in practice. As the British library historian Black (2000: 6) argues, ‘rhetoric can cloud reality’. He rightly distinguishes between the rhetoric on the public library as a stimulator of a sense of community in a time when social cohesion generally arouses warm emotions, and the reality which does not automatically live up to that rhetoric.

That public libraries ‘remain at the heart of every community’, or that ‘books build communities’, are propositions that surely appear trite in view of the massive under-use of libraries and the ‘poor press’ which public opinion often awards them (Black 2000: 7).
This justifies the question of whether people really do use the library to reinforce their democratic functioning as citizens, to increase their knowledge and to foster their cultural development. Research into the motives for library use rarely brings to light any democratic or developmental arguments. When library users are asked for their motives, recreational purposes top the list (Hillebrink & Huysmans 2008). Pleasure in reading is in any event the most important reason for adolescents to join a library and remain a member (Stalpers 2005) and there is no reason to assume that this is any different in other age groups.

Questions can also be asked about whether libraries are used to an equal extent for those different functions by different population groups. There are for instance clear differences in the degree of library use based on gender, for example (girls and women use libraries more than boys and men), age (children and the ‘younger’ elderly use libraries more than young people and the over-65s, respectively) and education level (the better educated use libraries more than the lower-educated). Last but not least there is the pertinent question of how much the growing access to information and culture in people’s living rooms via digital media is undermining the social task of the public library, in particular in relation to free and unlimited access to information. Many who have witnessed the arrival of the Internet will acknowledge that they now have much simpler and faster access to information and culture than was the case some 20 years ago.

In order to measure the mission of public libraries in the forthcoming chapters against developments which may be undermining that mission, it is important to make clear precisely what that task entails. This is the object of this chapter. We follow the earlier analysis by the communications scientist Denis McQuail (1992) of media performance, which is largely expected to meet the same normative principles. The following questions serve as a guide in our study:

1. How has the social task of the public library developed from the beginning to the present day?
2. According to the prevailing normative theory, which principles underpin the functioning of the public library today?

### 2.2 Historical development

The very use of the adjective ‘public’ is enough to enable us to place the public library within the liberal tradition which began to emerge in Europe during the 18th century (cf. Habermas 1962). During the Enlightenment the (well-to-do) citizenry underwent a process of emancipation, shaking off the spiritual domination of the Church and the secular domination of the nobility. The bourgeoisie became organised, and in several European countries this laid the basis for the development of a democratic political system. Part of this civil emancipation entailed the creation of a public space based on the example of the agora or the forum from classical antiquity. Under this new system, political decisions would be the result of a free dialogue based on reasonable arguments. Feeding those reasonable arguments demanded access to
information; only knowledge of what was happening in the world could strengthen the free debate.

The self-organisation of the newly free citizenry led to this access to information. In the second half of the 18th century reading groups arose everywhere in Europe, in which groups of often well-to-do, prominent citizens read and debated the same material (Dann 1981). This phenomenon also occurred in the Netherlands, where it gave rise to clear ties with political and religious associations. Although the scientific circles looked down on these reading groups, the latter most definitely had ambitions to attain scientific status (Buijsters 1981). Books, newspapers and other periodicals (including the pièce de résistance of the Enlightenment, the Encyclopédie by Diderot & d’Alembert), were the sources they devoured with this in mind.

The Industrial Revolution in the 19th century again spawned a new class who began to demand their rights. The year 1848, with the publication of the Communist Manifesto, marks the struggle for emancipation by the working classes from the bourgeoisie. The latter naturally noted with concern the rise of communist ideas (removal of the means of production from private hands). As a way out, and undoubtedly also out of compassion for the often miserable conditions in which factory workers were forced to live, members of the well-to-do citizenry began to concern themselves with the fate of the workers. Initiatives were conceived to develop the lower classes, with education and access to knowledge and information as the keynotes. The precursor of the public library system, the reading room movement, also dates from this period (Schneiders 1990). Well-educated and often well-to-do citizens, especially in the countries of northern Europe and in North America, took the example of the reading movements to clamour for the founding of public reading rooms in which every individual, regardless of their social background, would have access to textual information and thus to opportunities to further their development. The ‘people’s libraries’ which were already in existence, were rejected. In the eyes of the reading room protagonists these libraries, founded as a result of philanthropy, were guilty of being condescending by recommending certain books and placing others on a restricted index. In the Netherlands, this happened in rural Catholic communities, for example; in these areas, church leaders had founded the St Vincentius libraries whose book collections were intended to further the dissemination of faith. The libraries (Nutsbibliotheken) founded by the Maatschappij tot Nut van ’t Algemeen, an association which sought to promote education among the poorer classes were also often less than politically and religiously ‘neutral’ (tending towards Protestant views). It was clear to the founders of the reading room movement that this nannying by the founders (and librarians) stood in the way of the genuine free development of the people. To guarantee this freedom, the funding of the new public libraries must come from the public purse. The historian Schneiders uses this criterion to place the birth of the public library in England in 1850.1 That country:

was in reality taking the lead in what can be described as the information and communication revolution of the 19th century: the development of the railways, the telegraph, the postal service. The creation of the modern public library, a birth which took place when the English
Parliament passed the Public Libraries Act in 1850, was unmistakably a part of this resolution. The new Act gave municipalities the power to levy a special tax from which public libraries were funded. The English public or free library was new. Unlike the people’s libraries it was not the result of philanthropy and charity, but of the progressive liberal view that everyone had a right to read and that reading (development!) increased the general level of welfare and prosperity (Schneiders 1990: 32).

What was happening in England was followed with interest in the Netherlands by influential citizens who were keen to set up similar institutions in their own country. Although calls went up in the Dutch parliament as early as 1851 for the passing of a similar law, the then Minister of Internal Affairs Johan Thorbecke had no enthusiasm for compelling municipalities to set up a public library. As a liberal in heart and soul, he preferred not to impose such a requirement from above, but to leave the initiative to citizens themselves (Schneiders 1990: 33).

Even in the early days of the public library, ideology and practice were not always entirely in harmony, as Black (2000: 4-5) has outlined for England. In politically turbulent times, the library tended to stand more on the conservative than the revolutionary side, notwithstanding the rhetoric about helping citizens in their struggle for emancipation. The recreational function of the library in lending books that were designed to be ‘a jolly good read’ was not always regarded as desirable by librarians. And the working class was reached to only a limited extent. All in all, this leads Black to conclude that,

alongside the desire to realise citizen emancipation and empowerment, it is possible to bestow upon Victorian and Edwardian librarians a controlling dynamic, their aim being to help bring order to society and to impose order also on the burgeoning book collections of the modern age (Black 2000: 5).

It ultimately took until the turn of the century before the first genuine public libraries opened their doors in the Netherlands. This was also the purple period for public libraries in countries such as the United States, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Dutch towns such as Dordrecht (1899), The Hague (1906) and Rotterdam (1907) were among the first to have such a facility. Utrecht had a sort of intermediate form between 1892 and 1908, which in the latter year acquired the status of a ‘genuine’ public library. In fact the libraries in those days were generally called ‘public reading rooms’ in the Netherlands, and the emphasis was much less on lending than on the reference function. In the precursor of the public reading room, the public development network of Ons Huis, it was in fact not even the intention that people should be silent; meeting others was actively encouraged, for example in Ons Huis on Rozenstraat in Amsterdam (from 1892). The founding of the public library in Amsterdam followed in 1919 (Schneiders 1990: 51-75). The year 1908 (18 April) marks the founding of the Central Association of Public Reading Rooms and Libraries (CV), the precursor of the later Netherlands Library and Literature Centre (NBLC) and the present Netherlands Public Library Association (VOB). Although it can rightly be
claimed that the public library network in the Netherlands is now a century old, in reality it was not until 1972 – when the CV merged with the Catholic and Protestant library groups to form the NBL – that the library had truly become ‘public’ in its focus throughout the country.

In broad terms (for the finer detail we refer to Schneiders 1990), the history of Dutch public libraries in the first three-quarters of the 20th century can be read as an account of the rise and fall of the system of ‘pillarisation’ in the Netherlands, with its rigid divisions of society along political, ideological and religious lines to create discrete ‘vertical groupings’ or ‘pillars’. In the 1920s and 30s, especially, a fierce battle of words raged between the liberal advocates of the public library, who had since been joined in their advocacy by the social democrats, and representatives of the various Christian faiths. The battle was about the old question of whether libraries should serve the individual development of every person, or rather the dissemination of faith and redemption for the soul. The reading room movement drew support for its struggle from the formalisation of the government subsidy conditions in 1921 by the Protestant Christian Historical Union (CHU) minister De Visser. It was a rare instance of an initiative breaking through the pillarised social structures, even though Catholic and Protestant libraries could also apply for state subsidies. The first article in the ministerial order allocated the government funding explicitly for libraries ‘without distinction according to religious faith, political orientation or social status’. Greve (1933: 179) reports that these words were taken from the very first constitution of the library in Dordrecht.

The Second World War temporarily subdued the battle between the public and private reading rooms. The biggest worry in the years of Occupation was how best to secure access to reading material coming from the different political and social movements. The Occupier exerted pressure through the CV on librarians to include certain books and writings in their collections and exclude others. The CV bowed to that pressure in order not to jeopardise the position of the still young public reading rooms and libraries; the strategy was one of steering a cautious, low-key course. To some extent this strategy proved successful; many libraries were able to stay open and were evidently meeting a need. In other places (Middelburg, Vlissingen, Gorinchem, Arnhem, Nijmegen, Venlo, Zutphen, to mention the hardest hit), the libraries and their collections were severely damaged by the violence of war. Where the libraries were able to remain open, the number of books lent rose sharply during the War years, only to fall steeply again in the first years after the Liberation.

After the War questions were asked as to whether the CV had not been too compliant in continually avoiding the confrontation with the Occupier and the Dutch National Socialists (Van Riemsdijk 1979). Voices were also raised within the library world itself arguing that the CV administration had compromised the mission of the public library by prescribing at national level which books and writings had to be removed from the shelves.

The re-establishment of the pillarisation system after the War led to the resur-
rejection of the old battle of words (Schneiders 1990: 193-194; Van Riemsdijk 1982: 16). This was reflected among other things in the fate of the National Committee on Reading Provision (Rijkscommissie inzake de Lectuurvoorziening), installed in 1949 by the Catholic People’s Party (KVP) minister Rutte. The Committee spent five years on its report, and after its fourth meeting had to manage without the Catholic committee members who, by analogy with the freedom of education, sought to link the library network with private initiative – in reality an attempt to maintain the old St Vincentius libraries. With the onset of the process of secularisation and the ‘cultural revolution’ in the 1960s, this battle slowly but surely dampened down.

It was only with the development of the welfare state in the years after the Second World War that the expansion of the library network came within reach. And it took until the 1970s before the break-up of the pillarised structures had advanced far enough. The creation of the NBLC which depillarisation had made possible coincided with preparations for the first library legislation in the Netherlands. Although public money had been channelled to the libraries since 1921 under government subsidy arrangements (Van de Roer, not yet published), it was not until 1975 that the Public Libraries Act was passed in Parliament. The progressive government under Prime Minister Den Uyl saw public libraries as an instrument in their commitment to achieving a greater spread of knowledge, income and power.

The expansion of the library system was tackled energetically, with the provision in non-urban areas, in particular, increasing sharply. If at all possible, independent libraries were also created in small settlements, and only the most thinly populated parts of the country had to rely on the mobile library (bibliobus) which had visited them a few times a week since 1951. In the library statistics, this expansion of branches, collections, members and borrowings during this period was a clearly visible consequence of the public investments that were being made.

It was clear from the moment the new Act came into force that the public library, as a policy-driven component of the welfare system, would have to be devolved to municipal level. In the 1980s the idea grew that centralism led to inefficiency and by definition to a bloated public sector. Devolution of powers from central to local government level was seen as a means of both reducing the size of the public sector and of bringing libraries, in both conception and implementation, closer to the people. This would enable solutions to be delivered that were tailored to the local situation. The welfare system and the library system, which at the time both fell within the competence of the Minister of Welfare, Health and Culture, were ultimately devolved in 1987. The Cultural Policy (Special-Purpose Funding) Act followed in 1994, in which (in Section 11) the division of responsibility between the various government levels was formalised. Both this Act and the division of responsibilities it enshrined remain in force to this day, though they have been added to in the form of a joint agreement between the public authorities and the sector (Koepelconvenant herstructurering openbaar bibliotheekwerk) (2001) and a later rider to that agreement (2004).

The legislative anchoring of the library system in the 1970s cannot be seen in isolation from the formulation of fundamental rights to information from the Second
World War onwards. In the various formulations of the human rights canon, the opportunities for individual development came to occupy centre stage. The United Nations produced the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. ‘Europe’ added to this the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (De Meij et al. 2000; Dommering et al. 2000). Both documents endorsed the public library by citing the right to individual freedom of information. The call in the 1994 UNESCO Manifesto for governments to guarantee that freedom is in reality the same as the first position cited in the debate: the government has a duty of care with regard to the basic right to information and has a duty to guarantee that right, including financially.

When the Council for Culture voiced the question aloud at the end of the 1990s as to how future-proof the administrative organisation of the library system was (see § 1.2), the government task as such was accordingly not questioned. The question was mainly concerned with whether the system (with its large number of independent institutions each with a small catchment area) were an effective and efficient enough means of spending public funds in guaranteeing public objectives in an increasingly digital world. The report by the Meijer Committee and the subsequent process of library renewal were intended to bring an improvement in that situation.

As described in chapter 1, in line with the recommendations by the Meijer Committee, a system of ‘basic libraries’ was set up in the first years of the present century, often created through mergers of several small libraries. The Committee suggested that the front and back-office tasks be separated in these libraries, a recommendation that has since been implemented in the majority of basic libraries (though in some cases the small number of staff means that such a split is not possible). The creation of basic libraries and the associated merging of the back-office tasks of several branches would release more manpower for these support tasks, helping to raise the quality.

The front office delivers the direct service to the user. The back office tasks comprise all activities that have to be carried out within the system in order to make that service delivery possible. Front-office tasks consist of counter duty, lending, collecting and preserving media, providing access to the collection and the catalogue, membership registration, providing information on membership and answering requests for information.

In the structure proposed by the Meijer Committee, the back office is not only the responsibility of the individual basic library, but to some extent also of the sector association VOB. The back office of the basic library manages the collection, including background and exchange collections. Requests for items not held in the home collection are also processed here, as is transport of media. Policy development and administration are also tasks for the back office of the basic library, along with market development and management (communication policy, marketing policy for specific target groups, etc.). The sector association is responsible for the development and administration of national products, promotion, management information, and so on.
2.3 Normative principles and values

As the brief historical overview showed, the public library came into being as part of the establishment of the democratic rule of law, with equal development opportunities for all citizens. The central task of the public library system, offering access to information to everyone, has remained unchanged since 1850 (Kerslake & Kinnell 1998). However, history also shows that carrying out that task in practice has not always run entirely smoothly; there have been several occasions when the mission has run up against the rocks of the prevailing Zeitgeist. The tension between task and practical reality can be summarised in the following points.

1 From the start the idea of empowerment has been at odds with the reality that the majority of users visited the library for recreational purposes; entertainment rather than edification and development was the reason for borrowing books from the library. Illustrative in this regard is the dissertation by Greve (1906), in which this founding father of the Dutch public library demonstrates clearly that he is not against recreational reading, provided it is of a certain literary merit. In recent years the sector has received criticism from writers who claim that precisely this good-quality literature has become scarce in public libraries (see Huysmans 2006a).

2 Offering ‘information and culture to everyone’ has its limits. Traditionally, writings that have run against the grain of moral norms have been excluded from the collections of public libraries. Those norms varied from library to library, however, so that where in one municipality only what the Americans couch in that terribly nice euphemism ‘explicit content’ (sex, extreme expressions and consequences of violence, coarse language) is absent, in other localities ‘ordinary’ books were also ‘cleaned up’ with a black felt-tip pen. And until the 1960s, the open display of books was by no means considered the norm; the librarian (usually female) ‘mediated’ between collection and user (Schneiders 1990: 208-210).

3 For a long period (from the early 20th century until the 1970s) the idea of the public reading room open to everyone faced competition from the ‘pillars’ which preached sovereignty for their own circles. The desire to serve the general public thus sometimes encountered resistance from that very public. This also happened in other sectors (education, public broadcasting).

4 The Occupation during the Second World War demonstrated unambiguously how difficult it is to defend the gains of a process of democratisation when the democratic rule of law within which those gains were achieved is set aside. Did the administrators of the CV do the right thing in complying with the Occupier’s wish to remove from their collections books by Jewish authors, Communist tracts, etc.? The libraries were able to remain open and meet an evident need for reading material during the War years, but in order to do so their public mission was undermined.

5 The explicit choice in favour of public funding, supported by the human rights semantics in the UNESCO Manifesto, has advantages and disadvantages. In prac-
tice, subsidies are a conditio sine qua non for the library system. Dependence on subsidies also means dependence on administrative ‘fashions’ (government/market, centralisation/decentralisation, top-down/bottom-up) and on the economic cycle and associated funds and political choices (investments/economies). The investments in the system in the 1970s undeniably broadened the public reach of libraries. The emphasis on rationalisation of the public sector since then has led to cuts in branches, opening times and collections. In short, whether the mission can be met is dependent in no small measure on the flow of subsidies.

This list could create the impression that the social task of the public library is no more than the use of fine words to describe an ideal. Declaring that ideal to be superfluous on these grounds would however be going too far. The library is after all not alone in this; all organisations which impose upon themselves a normative mission find themselves having to deal with a recalcitrant practical reality. And more than this: it could even be said to be a distinguishing characteristic of norms that they are formulated and upheld in situations where departures from them could be anticipated (Luhmann 1984: 444-445). Put differently: a mission gives direction to the actions of an organisation precisely in situations where the practical reality is recalcitrant, because otherwise that direction would be lacking.

The question then is whether the mission, for example as set out in the UNESCO Manifesto, has been formulated sharply enough and whether it offers enough structure to assess to what extent developments in society and in the field of media (will) put it under pressure. In an earlier publication (Huysmans 2006a) an argument was put forward for aligning with the analysis made by McQuail (1992; cf. 2005; Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg 2003) of the normative theory which supports the functioning of the media in modern society. According to McQuail, the norms which apply for the media can be traced back to the three tenets of the French Revolution, liberté, égalité et fraternité, whereby the latter is translated into social order or solidarity. These values shape the design and organisation of the social communication system, of which public libraries form part:

1 freedom: freedom of information gathering, freedom of expression and freedom to disseminate information; absence of censorship; protection of privacy; confidentiality of personal correspondence;
2 equality/justice: equal access to communication channels on the producer and user side; equal educational opportunities; respect for intellectual property;

In normative discussions on information and culture, a fourth value is generally added to this list:
These four values can then be translated into nine normative principles for good functioning (cf. McQuail 1992; Huysmans 2006a). These are in the background in the following chapters, but return in chapter 7 as a starting point for the formulation of a desirable position for the public library 10 years from now.

1 **Accessibility, availability**
Two questions are relevant here: whose access, and the availability of what? (Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg 2003: 244). The word ‘public’ in the mission of the public library implies that no one is excluded. The fact that no one is stopped at the entrance door to the library does not of course mean that everyone will find what they are looking for. The collection must therefore in principle meet the wishes and preferences of all sections of the population and give them the wherewithal to develop themselves – all of course subject to the protection of the law and good morals. A further point relates to opening times: citizens must be able to visit the library outside of the times when they themselves are socially active.

2 **Diversity, plurality**
A modern society such as that in the Netherlands contains people with different cultural backgrounds and political views. The normative theory prescribes that in a constitutional democracy everyone is of equal value and has a right to access information and opinions from their own and other circles. The library must in principle meet the information needs of all sections of the population, and also promote their use of the library and encourage them to come into contact with the thoughts and ideas of others. Both diversity in supply and in the use of that supply must thus be promoted (cf. McQuail 1992: 141-159).

3 **Independence, objectivity**
‘Public’ has traditionally been interpreted as meaning neutral and non-commercial. Putting together a collection of information and cultural material should therefore be seen separately from the political and economic interests in particular. By opting for government subsidies, the public library is largely immune to economic interests, but is susceptible to political interests: a collection policy which does not meet the approval of the dominant political colour could in theory lead to a squeeze on the flow of subsidies. Statutory or other measures need to be put in place to counter this threat (by an analogy with the editorial status for newspapers).

4 **Solidarity, social inclusion**
As we have seen, ‘elevation of the people’ was one of the core tasks of the public library from the start. This task was aimed mainly at people at the bottom of the social ladder; in the 19th-century the working classes; today, we would call them the socially vulnerable: people who for whatever reason (social background, poor education, physical or psychological impairments) have difficulty playing a full part
in society. To the extent that access to information and culture can foster social inte-
gration, the financial and other obstacles must be as low as possible.

5 Social control, integration
A society wishing to maintain the social status quo will benefit from the transfer of
knowledge, norms and values from one generation to another. ‘Newcomers’, both
children and immigrants, must be able to come into contact with that knowledge
and those norms and values. Moreover, it is a sign of strength in a democratic system
to also allow scope for opinions which questioned the existing order, as long as the
intention is to change it for the better.

6 Maintenance of symbolic environment
The library is sometimes described as a ‘house of stories’. Those stories form part
of the country’s cultural identity and serve as material for discussion or as latent
background knowledge when interpreting new information. In addition, the public
library (albeit in a less obvious way than the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, the scientific
and special (private) libraries) fulfils a function in storing and disseminating cul-
tural heritage. Providing low-threshold access to stories and tangible heritage pro-
motes the maintaining of this shared cultural ‘stock’ and thus helps keep society's
wheels turning. As such, this criterion is thus a counterpart to the notion of ‘topical-
ity’ discussed below (item 9).

7 Reliability, precision
The rapid increase in the amount of information means it is important for citizens
to know which information they can rely on in their actions. Although it is of course
impossible for individual librarians to assess the reliability of information in every
domain, the library system as a social system or network must be capable of organis-
ing such an assessment. To ensure that information can be readily found, precision
in building collections and making them accessible is also important. Naturally, this
criterion is related to that of independence and objectivity (see item 3).

8 Professionalism, expertise
A professional attitude primarily entails reflection on one's own work. Librarians
may be expected to be able and willing to reflect on their own function and to ensure
that they remain up to date. Moreover, they may be expected to keep up their level of
professional expertise and in general to be aware of what is going on in society.

9 Topicality, renewal
As well as retaining what is good from the past, the society also benefits from
renewal. Topical social issues demand up-to-date information to enable people to
engage in the debate and form an opinion. For cultural expressions such as the latest
literature, (sheet) music and cinema, the interest is normally greatest immediately
after their release. Libraries must respond to this by keeping their collections up to
date. They must also have an eye to (the development of) new services which enable
them to perform their task better.

### 2.4 Fixed normative principles in a changing environment

Together, these nine principles of good functioning constitute a criterion with which
we can assess the degree to which public libraries are fulfilling their social task, or
perhaps more accurately, are trying to fulfil it. In 2005, following the publication of
the report by the Meijer Committee, five core functions of the public library in the
Netherlands were formulated in the ‘Guideline for basic libraries’ (Richtlijn voor basis-
bibliotheken (VOB 2005)). This document serves as a guideline in the process of library
renewal for all stakeholders. The five core functions are as follows:

1. **Provision of knowledge and information: the library as a storehouse of knowledge and information**
   With its collection as the basis, the library offers opportunities for borrowing,
   consulting and providing answers to questions (both personally and digitally via
   al@din). In particular, information from and about the government can be pro-
   vided, as well as information points on issues such as youth, education, care and
   health.

2. **Education: the library as a centre for development and education**
   The library compiles project collections, offers study opportunities for pupils,
   students and people engaged in self-study, together with the associated facilities,
   supports education, in the first place with multimedia facilities, but also by giving
   lessons in information skills. Information skills are also taught to other target
   groups (such as older persons, for whom specific ICT courses are organised).

3. **Culture: the library as an encyclopedia of art and culture**
   The library presents the results of and materials about intellectual and artistic
   activities. Historical or otherwise interesting collections are held and made acces-
   sible. The library fits in with the local and provincial cultural traditions. By col-
   laborating with other cultural institutions, the library provides information about
   the background to museum exhibitions presentations and exhibitions, and about
   music and theatre performances. The library brings together the professional and
   amateur arts by organising lectures, displaying specific collections to coincide
   with artistic events, and by providing specific services such as programme inform-
   ation and ticket sales.

4. **Reading and literature: the library as a source of inspiration for reading and literature**
   The library offers children and young people up to the age of 18 a continuous
   reading pathway, which aims to promote reading and literary education in all age
   groups, as well as the associated collection. The collection for adults matches
   the reading behaviour of the local population (differentiated by target groups
   and needs), but also offers easy access to the total collection of the Dutch public
   libraries. Less frequently requested books which form part of the literary canon
are also present in the collection. Literary lectures and presentations form part of
the standard activities in relation to the promotion of reading.

Meeting and debate: the library as a podium for meeting and debate
The library is a neutral, objective, impartial meeting place for all groups in society. The library offers space for local initiatives, for debate on social issues, for providing information on complex topics and for discussions on issues of local, regional, national or global importance (VOB 2005: 6-7).

These five core functions appear to be broadly accepted in the sector; at any rate, no strong opposition has been voiced. The discussion that does take place is concerned with whether every library should meet all five of these functions. The starting point of the Richtlijn is that the five functions are inextricably linked, a combination of tasks which are mutually reinforcing and which do not constitute a palette from which a free choice can be made. Removal or reduction of one of the core tasks has direct consequences for the other functions. In practice, there is some acceptance of the fact that libraries do not always have the financial or organisational wherewithal to fulfil all five core functions.

Practical considerations can also play a role here. For example, if there is already a debating centre in a municipality, whether or not the library collaborates with it, it may be decided to accord less priority and effort to the core function ‘meeting and debate’.

The five core functions are a clear operationalisation of the tasks which the public library sees for itself in today’s society. We use this broadly accepted formulation of the tasks of public libraries as a guiding team in our study. In chapter 7 we use these five functions to present an outline of both the probable and the desirable future for the library sector in 10 years’ time. By testing the functioning of the library against the nine normative principles, we can focus proper attention on the diversity of tasks performed by libraries and the social task which underlies them.
Notes

1 Although the revolutionaries in France founded ‘public libraries’ as early as 1792, these consisted primarily of confiscated collections previously belonging to the Church and the nobility. These mainly historical, theological and legal tomes did not really appeal to the imagination of the ‘ordinary’ citizenry (Schneiders 1990: 32). Long before the French Revolution libraries had been opened to ‘the public’. These were largely private libraries whose collections had not been compiled with the aim of reaching a general readership (Bertrand 2004).

2 Another library historian, Alastair Black (2000: 4), formulates it thus: ‘Public libraries emerged in Britain, from 1850, as modern institutions, serving as both workshops of scientific inquiry and citadels of cultural elevation. As prominent civic institutions, public libraries operated as agencies of modernity within a public sphere of open, democratic discourse. Their supporters and librarians promoted them as sources of both useful knowledge and rational recreation. Information in the form of books, newspapers, periodicals and reference sources were provided for both serious study and training for good citizenship. The aim was to help meet the educational and technical needs of an increasingly complex, industrial, democratic society, yet one in which diversionary, imaginative literature played a role in countering the tensions and dehumanisation associated with abrupt social and economic change.’

3 The question of the quality versus proportionality subsequently plays a role here: should all political schools and all sections of the population be given equal exposure, or should this be in proportion to their relative share in the population? For a discussion of this point, see McQuail (1992: 147-149).
3 Trends in society

In this chapter we explore the demographic and socio-cultural trends in society which will have implications for the functioning of the public library ten years from now. Expected demographic trends are relevant for matching the future offering of the public library to the envisaged demand. We look in this chapter at the composition of the population (age profile, educational level, income and cultural diversity) and at developments such as individualisation and ‘informatisation’. These trends have varying implications for the fulfilling of the core functions of the public library. We restrict ourselves here to tracing an outline of trends over the last 30 years and, where possible, of the anticipated trends over the next 20 years. The relationship between these trends and specific developments in the communication and information landscape is discussed in later chapters.

3.1 Population profile

The Dutch population has increased by almost 3 million in the last 30 years to 16.4 million people (2007). Figure 3.1 shows how the population is expected to develop in the coming years. Statistics Netherlands (CBS) produces population forecasts with a margin of error of 5%. The further in the future the prediction lies, the more divergent the predictions become. Current expectations are that the population will continue to grow, but less strongly than in recent years. In the 2030s the population is expected to begin shrinking.

A growing population means the number of potential users of public libraries will also increase. The growth in the population in recent years has also to some extent masked the fall in the reach of libraries among the population. As will become clear in chapter 5, the percentage of library members and users is falling, though this is less visible in the absolute numbers. With the population continuing to grow, any further reduction in the absolute number of library users could be smaller in the initial years.

Of greater importance is how that growing population is made up. Not all population groups make equal use of the library, and it is also useful for target group-specific policy to know which groups in the population are increasing in size and which are probably not.
The age profile of the population is set to change markedly in the coming years, as figure 3.2 shows. The percentage of young people in the population fell sharply between 1975 and 1995 (a phenomenon which demographers refer to as ‘dejuvenation’), and in a few years’ time the percentage of over-65s begins to increase noticeably (population ageing). The falling number of people aged between 20 and 65 years is due partly to ageing baby-boomers and partly to rising emigration in this age group in recent years: in 2006, 1.6 times as many people (132,470 to be precise) left the Netherlands as in 1995, and three-quarters of them were in the 20-65 age group. This growth appeared to come to a halt in 2007 due to declining emigration and a resurgence in immigration, due among other things to the economic revival (CBS 2007a).

Another reason for the increasing proportion of older people in society is the increased life expectancy. For men, this has now reached 77 years, and for women 82 years (Van Campen & Den Draak 2007). Healthy life expectancy – the number of years that people can expect to live in good health – is rising even faster than general life expectancy: it is currently 71 years for men and 73 years for women. Both are greatly influenced by socioeconomic factors; better educated people grow older and have a longer healthy lifespan than people with a low education level. Low-educated people and members of ethnic minorities also less often feel healthy or very healthy than the better educated and the indigenous population, and these differences have not reduced in recent years (Van Campen & Schellingerhout 2005).
These trends imply that there will be a growing group of older people in the future, who will also remain active for longer. It is known from the Time Use Survey (TBO) that older people spend more time reading printed media than young people (www.tijdbesteding.nl). As better-educated people stay healthy for longer, and also visit the library more often average, this would appear to be a relevant target group for public libraries in the coming years. It is only in the much longer term than the ten-year period chosen here that the proportion of over-65s in the population begins to fall. This is a particularly relevant development for the fulfilling of the function ‘reading and literature’. Closer analysis of library visitors and readers in chapters 5 and 6 will shed more light on this.

In another sense, population ageing could also create a potential problem for public libraries, due to increased natural wastage of staff. As figure 3.2 shows, the population of working age will shrink in the coming years, not only due to retirement of the post-war generation, but also because of a decrease in the number of young people joining the labour force.

More people will leave the labour market than will join it in the coming years (Kerstholt et al. 2006), though there are wide differences between sectors: there are ‘grey’ sectors (such as the former utilities), where more than half the employees are aged 40 or older, and there are ‘green’ sectors (such as the hospitality industry), where 40% or more of employees are aged below 30. Sectors where large numbers of jobs will become vacant in the coming years require a substantial influx of younger employees in order to maintain staffing levels, assuming this is necessary. If a
relatively old employee population is combined with a low influx of younger workers, there is a danger of staff shortages.

Recently the Netherlands Public Library Association (vob) commissioned a study of the labour market position of the library sector. Part of this study involved an analysis of the intake and exodus and of the profile of the workforce employed in the sector. It was found that library staff are older than the rest of the Dutch labour force. Nationally, 36% of the working labour force were aged 45 years or more in 2005; the figure in the library sector was 64%. Although (early) retirement currently does not constitute a large part of the exodus, this situation is likely to change markedly in the future. Estimates suggest that more than half the current staff will have left the sector in 2014, either through (early) retirement or for other reasons. The number of people leaving the library sector has in fact been greater than the number entering it for some time. The study also shows that it is mainly staff with desirable skills (enterprising, focused on results and possessing ICT and computer skills) who are choosing to leave library organisations (Leemans 2007). We shall return to this problem in chapters 7 and 8.

3.2 Ethnicity

The variation in ethnic origin is also relevant for libraries, not only because of the number of schools containing more disadvantaged pupils from ethnic minorities, but also because young people of non-Western origin visit the library significantly more often than their indigenous peers (Huysmans 2006b). We shall return to this in chapter 5. As there are wide differences between the ethnic composition of the population in (large) urban and in rural areas, the difference in population profile by municipality size is also dealt with in this section.

There has been a sharp rise in the number of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands since 1975. The growth in the non-Western population group has slowed sharply in recent years, mainly due to a decline in asylum-seekers and ‘marriage immigrants’, but the proportion of non-Western ethnic minorities in the population is still rising. The four ‘traditional’ groups of non-Western ethnic minorities (people from Morocco, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, Surinam and Turkey) account for a smaller proportion of this group. The growth in numbers of ethnic minorities from other non-Western countries is projected to increase further in the coming decades (Garssen & Wagenveld 2007; StatLine, consulted on 4 April 2007).
Table 3.1 shows how the percentage of non-Western ethnic minorities has developed, and how it is likely to develop after 2007, broken down by size of municipality and for the Netherlands as a whole. The percentage of non-Western ethnic minorities within the population as a whole will increase further, at more or less the same rate as in the last ten years. It is important to remember that these are no more than forecasts and that, given the many factors which influence migration, they are hedged in with a wide margin of uncertainty. The expectation is that non-Western ethnic minorities in the four major cities (G4), where the majority of them now live (Simon 2006), will increasingly move to the larger towns outside the G4. The expectation for the four largest cities is therefore that, after growing more strongly than the Netherlands as a whole until 2006, the percentage of ethnic minorities living in them will decrease slightly. In municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (excluding the G4) and in smaller municipalities, the proportion of non-Western ethnic minorities in the population will roughly keep pace with the national trend.

When broken down by age, substantial differences emerge between groups of different ethnic origin, as figure 3.3 shows. Ethnic minorities, and especially non-Western ethnic minorities, are considerably younger than the indigenous population (who currently account for almost all the population ageing): 3% of non-Western ethnic minorities are aged 65 or over, compared with almost 16% of the indigenous population. The 20-65 age group is roughly the same size in all three groups distinguished, and the percentage of young people in the indigenous population is significantly smaller: 23%, compared with 36% for non-Western ethnic minorities.

The expected developments in age profile vary somewhat, especially if degree of urbanisation is also taken into account. Although more non-Western ethnic minorities currently live in the large cities than young indigenous people, this situation is likely to reverse in 2011 due to the ‘flight’ of non-Western ethnic minorities out of the four largest cities (G4) to the surrounding larger towns (figure 3.4).
Figure 3.3
Composition of population by age and origin, 2007 (in percentages)

Source: CBS (StatLine), consulted on 21 January 2008

Figure 3.4
Share of 0-20 year-olds in the population of the Netherlands and the G4, indigenous and non-Western origin, 2000-2025 (in percentages)

ind G4 = indigenous young people in the four largest cities
nwem G4 = young non-Western ethnic minorities in the four largest cities
ind NL = indigenous young people in the Netherlands
nwem NL = young non-Western ethnic minorities in the Netherlands

Source: CBS (StatLine), consulted on 10 April 2007, forecast from 2007
The projection is that more young indigenous people will live in the major cities after 2011, but that the group of young people of non-Western origin will remain sizeable. Nationally, the proportion of young people in the population will fall further, while the percentage of young people of non-Western origin (first and second generation) will gradually decline.

Non-Western ethnic minorities will make up a smaller proportion of the population in the largest cities, including among the young. There will also be developments in the integration of these population groups, making it likely that differences between indigenous and ethnic minority citizens which are currently responsible for wide differences in library use, could gradually reduce. Nonetheless, the likelihood is that younger members of non-Western ethnic minorities will for the time being continue to form a sizeable group of library users, and that a move of this group to medium-sized and small municipalities (and libraries) may be anticipated.

For libraries this means that, because the four main immigrant groups have been in the Netherlands for longer and will therefore generally have a better command of the Dutch language, collections in the Turkish and Arabic languages in particular will come to play a less important role. For the other non-Western ethnic minorities, where immigration is expected to increase, materials in other languages will be requested more. The composition of the group could however be so diverse that it is questionable to what extent this demand can be met within the available budgetary framework.

The composition of the population is of course not only important for the collection policy, but also for other forms of service offered by public libraries. Activities in relation to language, education, culture, meeting and debate will also have to be adapted to the diversity of the local population. In the four largest cities, this means that libraries will increasingly be dealing with other groups of non-Western ethnic minorities, while libraries in the other large towns and cities will have to focus more on people with a non-Western background.

3.3 Education

There are four links between education and the public library: the education level of the population; the relationship with primary schools; the concept of lifelong learning; and literature education.

The education level of the population has been rising for decades; each new generation is on average better educated than its predecessor. For 31% of the generation born between 1924 and 1931, primary school (or what was then its equivalent) was the highest education level attained; this applies for only 7.5% of the generation born between 1964 and 1975 (Vogels 2005: 48). The differences between successive generations are however becoming smaller, and the rise in education level is levelling off, particularly in the indigenous population.
The better educated generally read more and, as we shall see in chapter 5, library users tend to be better educated. An increase in the education level of the population could thus in principle create a larger group of people with an interest in borrowing books from the library. This could also lead to a shift in what is read. The Time Use Survey (TBO) shows that better-educated people not only read more books, but also more literature and informative books, and less romantic fiction and thrillers (www.tijdbesteding.nl).

Libraries have always had close ties with primary schools. A visit by an entire class to the library is good practice. Libraries offer schools a great deal of support for children with reading and other difficulties, for example organising ‘easy reading programmes’ for children (and adults).

Two categories of disadvantaged pupils can be distinguished in primary education: indigenous disadvantaged pupils (pupils with two poorly educated indigenous parents) and ethnic minority disadvantaged pupils (pupils of whom one parent is of non-Western origin and whose school career has gone no higher than pre-vocational education (vbo)). These two groups are almost equal in size and together account for roughly a quarter of all primary school pupils in the Netherlands. This percentage fell sharply in the 1990s, partly because the education level of parents increased, but also because the criteria were applied more strictly. This decline is expected to continue in the coming years (Vogels & Bronneman-Helmers 2003).

Disadvantaged pupils from ethnic minorities mostly live in highly urbanised areas, while indigenous disadvantaged pupils are more widely spread throughout the country and relatively often live in non-urban areas. The spread across schools also differs for the two groups: disadvantaged ethnic minority pupils are often together in the same schools, while their indigenous counterparts are more spread across different schools. As a result, there are far more schools with high concentrations of ethnic minority disadvantaged children than with a high concentration of indigenous disadvantaged pupils. The quality of education at schools with a high concentration of indigenous disadvantaged pupils is often lower than at ‘black schools’. The spread of indigenous disadvantaged pupils and the weighting rule means that indigenous disadvantaged children are much more often placed in schools without additional staff (40%) than disadvantaged children from ethnic minorities (8%).

Disadvantaged indigenous pupils have fallen further behind in recent years, while disadvantaged pupils from ethnic minorities are making up their disadvantage. The degree of disadvantage is greater in language skills than arithmetical skills. Disadvantaged pupils in year 8 are one year behind in language, while their ethnic minority counterparts are two years behind (Vogels & Bronneman-Helmers 2003).

It is still unclear why disadvantaged indigenous children fall behind at school. What is clear is that the background to that disadvantage is probably different in rural communities than in towns and cities. To be able to offer relevant services, libraries must know whether schools in their catchment area have disadvantaged pupils, and if so which category they fall into and what the underlying problems are. Schools with disadvantaged ethnic minority pupils will require a different kind
of support from schools with indigenous disadvantaged pupils, for example with regard to language development, and given the differences in extra staffing levels, the latter group will probably also require more support from the library.

There are approximately half a million people with low literacy aged over 16 years in the Netherlands, of whom two-thirds are indigenous (Stichting Lezen en Schrijven 2007). The public library can offer them specific services, to the extent that it is not already doing so, in reading advancement and related projects.

Many adults continue to follow courses and training programmes after they have left mainstream education behind them. They do this via their work, but also independently. Given the attention being devoted at national and European level to promoting lifelong learning, and the economic benefits it is expected to bring, there is justification for assuming that the proportion of adults following some form of education will increase further. During the European Council in Lisbon in 2000 it was agreed that by 2010 12.5% of people aged between 25 and 64 years should be taking part in education and training. The Dutch target is even higher, at 20% (see www.ocw.nl/levenlangleren and www.europa.eu/scadplus/leg/nl/s19001.htm). The public library can provide support for these people in lifelong learning, for example by offering a place for people to study and helping them search for information.

In addition to combating language and reading disadvantage, the education system and public libraries work together to promote reading in general and the reading of literature in particular. The Dutch Reading Foundation (Stichting Lezen) and the Netherlands Public Library Association (VOB) have jointly developed a ‘continuous reading pathway’ for reading and literature education in different phases of reading development (0-6 years, 6-12 years, 12-15 years, 15-18 years and 18+; see www.lezen.nl). The focus is not only on reading skills, but also on gaining pleasure from reading. Research has shown that the activities of the library in promoting an interest in reading in collaboration with parents and the school, has an effect on reading as such and also on the level of the material that people read (Kraaykamp 2002). The fact that more attention is now devoted in language teaching at secondary schools to communication and less to literature may however mean that secondary school students will use the library less in the future for reading from their reading lists.

### 3.4 Income

There has been a general rise in the level of prosperity in the last few decades, and this is reflected particularly in consumer spending. Related to the free time of the average Dutch citizen (about which more later), spending per hour of free time rose by 80% between 1975 and 2000 (Huysmans et al. 2004).

Disposable income in the Netherlands rose by an average of 5% per annum between 1993 and 2000. It then began to fall again, resulting in loss of purchasing power between 2002 and 2005, a trend which in turn now appears to have come to an end (Wildeboer Schut et al. 2005).
Despite the increase in prosperity, there is also a not insignificant amount of poverty in the Netherlands. The percentage of households with a low or minimum income fell steadily from the middle of the 1990s onwards, but after the turn of the century most Dutch people experienced a loss of purchasing power and the percentage of households with a low or minimum income began to increase again in 2001. In 2005, 10% of households had an income that was on or below the low-income threshold, a measure which is derived from the level of social assistance benefit. This percentage is likely to fall again in the coming years as the purchasing power of many households improves again (Bos et al. 2007). The percentage of households having difficulty making ends meet has also risen in recent years, as reflected among other things in the fact that 13% of households with a low income had payment arrears in 2005. This applied for 5% of households with a higher income. Here again, the trend in 2006 appears to be positive, though the percentage is still above its 2001 level (Ament et al. 2007).

Almost 14% of all children aged under 18 were living in a household with a low income in 2004; the figure in 2000 was 15%. These were mostly households with two parents. Children born in a non-Western country (i.e. first-generation non-Western ethnic minority children) have a much higher probability of living in a household with a low income, namely 37% (Otten et al. 2006).

Analyses show that income plays a role in library membership and use (Huysmans 2007; Glorieux & Kuppens 2006). At the same time, the rise in income, and particularly the rise in consumer spending, means that more people can afford to buy books – another reason why income trends are important for public libraries. Attention for the less well-off is also relevant in the light of the traditional role of the library in developing and improving the living conditions of citizens. Against the backdrop of the increased prominence of the Internet as an information medium, libraries will have to provide these services for people whose financial constraints mean they do not have an Internet connection at home. Chapter 5 contains a description of library use based on income level.

3.5 Employment, care and leisure time use

Many more people have begun combining paid work with care tasks in recent years. The increased labour market participation rate, particularly of women, means that more partners are performing both work and care tasks, and the traditional breadwinner family model has in many cases been replaced by the ‘one and a half earner’ model.

The labour market participation rate of women increased from 30% in 1981 to 56% in 2006, while that of men remained roughly unchanged at between 70% and 75% (www.cbs.nl, StatLine, consulted on 3 January 2008). If the Lisbon targets are achieved, the labour market participation of women will rise by a further 7% over the next three years.
Although more people now go out to work, they do not work more hours per week or per day; in fact, the average contractual and actual working hours per week fell by around two hours between 1995 and 2005. This is due to the popularity of part-time working among Dutch women; the growth in the number of working people in the Netherlands is due primarily to an increase in the number of part-time workers.

More than 85% of work is still performed within office hours, and this has changed little over recent years, though people do increasingly work through the lunch break (Breedveld et al. 2006). A substantial proportion of workers also regularly perform overtime (i.e. more than the contracted working hours, at home or at work): 38% did so in 2005; in 2000 the figure was 33%. In other words, there has been an intensification of work for many employees in recent decades (Peters 2000).

In addition to their paid employment, women also spend 28 hours per week working in the home and looking after children; men manage to limit their input to 12.5 hours per week (Breedveld et al. 2006). Women combine employment and care tasks more often than men. People are classified as ‘task-combiners’ if they spend at least 12 hours per week on employment and an equal amount on care tasks. Roughly a third of men aged between 20 and 64 years fall into this category, compared with almost 45% of women (Breedveld et al. 2006). Combining tasks leads to an increase in pressure of time, but also to a greater need for coordination. The number of task-combiners has grown strongly in recent years due to the higher labour market participation rate of women: from less than 15% in 1975 to 38% in 2005. Task-combiners feel rushed slightly more often than people who do not combine tasks, though the latter group also feel rushed at least one day per week (Breedveld et al. 2006).

Children – an important and large group of library users – often visit the library with their parents, especially young children. If library opening hours are limited or inconvenient, the pressure of combining tasks can lead parents of young children to decide that it is ‘too much trouble’ to go to the library. Within the existing constraints, therefore, the policy of libraries needs to match the time use patterns of families.

After work, care, sleeping, eating and school, the Dutch had an average of just under 45 hours per week free time in 2005, roughly three hours fewer than in 1975. However, the amount of – and decrease in – free time is not the same for all sections of the population. The labour force (20-65 years) have less and less free time, while a growing group of over-65s have significantly fewer obligations. At the same time, the desire for self-realisation during leisure time appears to have increased. In the middle years, sometimes referred to as the ‘rush-hour of life’ (Knulst & Van Beek 1990), this leads to a sense of being under pressure of time and a desire to ‘get everything possible out of life’ (Schnabel 2000).
Table 3.2
Time use broken down by the five core functions of the public library, population aged 12 years and older, 1975-2005 (in hours per week)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>knowledge and information</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading newspapers and news magazines</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading magazines</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which newsmagazines</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which professional/specialist journals</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watching teletext</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading free newspapers</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watching the cable tv text</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading books: information/other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer on line: news/newspapers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer on line: searching for specific information</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>development and education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training and courses (outside mainstream daytime education)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>arts and culture</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visiting events</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural participation</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arts and crafts</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solitary hobbies</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creative activities</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listening to music</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>video</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer offline: watching film/DVD</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer offline: listening to CDs, MP3s</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>reading and literature</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading books</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which literature</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading newspapers, news magazines, house-to-house newspapers</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading magazines</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>meeting and debate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participation in political organisation, etc.</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work for an association</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voluntary work</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The way leisure time is used has also changed since 1975. Table 3.2 links use of leisure time to the five core functions of the public library, to the extent that an activity can be unambiguously attributed to one of those five core functions. Time spent watching television and listening to the radio, which cannot be broken down by type of programme, is for example left out of consideration, as is the rise of the computer (these are however dealt with in chapter 6, in the discussion of trends in media use). Reading newspapers and magazines is linked to two core functions, ‘knowledge and information’ and ‘reading and literature’, because this activity is related to both functions. The figures in the table relate only to main activities, so that things such as listening to music whilst doing the washing-up are left out of consideration. Where possible, activities are presented both in general categories (reading magazines) and more specifically (e.g. ‘of which newsmagazines’). New activities such as surfing the Internet obviously only occur in later years. In addition, only the most recent edition of the Time Use Survey (TBO) asked for details of computer use and reading books; as a result, no trend data are known for these activities.

The time spent reading newspapers and magazines and other activities aimed at gathering information falls in virtually every year measured, as table 3.2 shows. How great the shift away from paper to digital media is cannot be clearly seen from these figures. Reading from a computer screen is often combined with watching and listening, making it difficult for respondents in a survey to separate them into different kinds of time use.

The time that people devote to courses and training programmes outside mainstream education had fallen back to its 1975 level in 2005, after increasing in the intervening period. The category ‘arts and culture’ includes activities for which no clear upward or downward trend can be discerned, such as cultural participation (visiting the cinema, theatre and museums) and watching videos and DVDs. Less time is spent on arts and crafts, listening to music and creative activities (playing music, amateur dramatics), but much more on solitary hobbies (doing puzzles, collecting).
The reduction in the amount of time spent reading books is discussed in more detail in chapter 6. Here we merely note the trend. It can be seen that twice as much time is spent on literature as on informative books.

The rising popularity of solitary hobbies can be related to the fall in the amount of time that people devote to social contacts, at just under four hours per week over the last 30 years. People also play fewer games, but go out to restaurants more often (or for longer) and to dinners. The amount of time spent on voluntary work has returned more or less to its level in the 1970s; in 1985 people spent almost 25% longer on this activity. Other forms of social participation, such as working for associations and participation in political organisations, appear to be declining somewhat in recent years (see § 3.6 for more details).

All in all, the majority of leisure time is devoted to activities which fall within the function ‘meeting and debate’, followed by ‘arts and culture’. These are two core functions in which the activities of the public library are probably the least expensive. The more traditional functions ‘knowledge and information’ and ‘reading and literature’ not only include activities to which relatively little time is devoted, but this form of time use also shows a downward trend over the years. This is because people spend less time reading books, newspapers and magazines. The public library is therefore confronted with the fact that two of its most important functions involve activities on which people are spending less and less time.

3.6 Individualisation and social cohesion

One of the ways in which the process of individualisation that has been ongoing for several decades manifests itself is in an increase in the number of smaller households. People are tending to live alone for longer before starting a family and less often have children. On average, therefore, households consist of fewer people. One consequence of this ‘household shrinkage’ is that there are less people in the household from whom to borrow books. Chapter 6 will show that this is also actually happening less in practice. Shared use of a library membership is also less likely for the same reason.

Individualisation is also open to a more cultural interpretation.

Individualisation is the – still ongoing – process of reduced dependence by the individual on one or more people in their immediate environment, and of growing freedom of choice in structuring their own lives (Schnabel 2000).

An increased – and increasing – range of choices is giving people more and more possibilities for shaping their lives to suit their own personal preferences. It is also considered increasingly important to do this (Giddens 1991). On the other hand, there are plenty of examples which show that the result of all this increased freedom of choice is that people make comparable choices en masse, and that for all their individuality, people often do the same things (Hurenkamp & Duyvendak 2004). This applies for the numbers of hours that men work, which despite all the choices
available and the differing family circumstances, shows surprisingly little variation (Evers et al. 2007). It is also visible in the choices that people make in multiple-choice models of terms of employment, a system which is designed precisely to meet individual preferences. At organisational level, too, there is often great uniformity in the choices made (Hillebrink 2006a).

The increased choices available and the rise in individualisation has led to increased variation in life courses. It is becoming less and less easy to say with any certainty at birth how someone's life will proceed, whereas in the past this could be predicted fairly accurately on the basis of their social background (Beck 1986). There is growing diversity in the moment at which people follow education, work or perform care tasks, and these activities are also increasingly combined, though this varies from one group to another. For example, there is greater variation in the life courses of women than men, and (for the moment) more variation in the life course of the better-educated than the low-educated (Román et al. 2007).

At the same time, a ‘privatisation of risk’ is occurring (Koopmans 2007); in recent years especially, people are being held personally responsible for more and more things and being forced to make their own choices. This is the case in the social security system, for example, where the chance of a sizeable drop in income as a result of what were in the past publicly insured risks such as illness and unemployment appears to be rising. Where people have to make choices, they need knowledge and information on which to base those choices. The introduction of Young People’s Information Points in libraries could be an indication that libraries are assuming this role.

The counterpart of individualisation is social cohesion. This is a frequently used term, which also has many definitions. To the extent that there is a common thread running through these definitions, it lies in ‘coherence of a social or political system, the affinity that people feel to that system and their mutual commitment or solidarity’ (De Hart 2002a: 9). Social cohesion can be expressed in strong group loyalties which may be at odds with notions of social or cultural diversity and individual freedom.

Some authors (e.g. Etzioni 1993; Putnam 2001) observe reducing social cohesion in Western societies. Others counter that social cohesion is not declining but changing. According to this view, people probably still feel commitment and solidarity (or at least as much as they did) but in a different way: they rely more on friends than on family, for example, and support given to others tends to be ‘more short-lived, more informal and more horizontal in nature’ (De Hart 2002a: 11).

One of the factors used to illustrate waning social cohesion is the decline in membership of social organisations, especially trade unions, political parties and the traditional Christian Church. It is true that the numbers of members of these institutions are falling, but against this, membership of other organisations is growing more quickly (De Hart 2002b). It would seem that what is happening is not so much organisational fatigue as a shift towards more thematic organisations, in which face-to-face contacts play a less prominent role and membership of which carries fewer obligations and is of shorter duration.
The forms of social participation included in the Time Use Survey (TBO) almost all show a downward trend (see table 3.2). A specific form of social participation which is important for the public library is voluntary work. Time use surveys show that 32% of people in the Netherlands do voluntary work, and that the Dutch spend an average of three-quarters of an hour per week doing so. There are indications that the number of volunteers is falling slightly, and that the enthusiasm among young people in particular has diminished (Dekker et al. 2004). The suspicion is that lack of time on the part of those in work, deferral of voluntary work until the demands of family and work reduce, and an attitudinal difference between older and younger generations all contribute to this. This would suggest that voluntary work is mainly something for older people, but also that the decline in the number of volunteers will continue (Knulst & Van Eijck 2002).

More than a third of the organisations which use volunteers have too few of them, but this shortage is not equally pressing in all sectors, nor for all kinds of function. Administrative functions are difficult to fill, and it is proving more difficult to find volunteers in the care and help sector than in the cultural sector, for example (De Hart & Devilee 2005). Whether libraries, which have traditionally made regular use of volunteers, are also facing recruitment problems is difficult to say on the basis of these studies. However, if the decline in the number of volunteers continues, libraries will probably be affected by it in the future, if this is not already the case.

Where there are signs of a change in the form of participation towards more active, more local relationships, the way in which the public library fulfils its function as a platform for meeting and debate offers an opportunity for an interesting public role. The changing attitude in the population to long-term memberships of traditional organisations could however also have an impact on the way in which they view library membership. If this line can be extrapolated, joining a library will perhaps become a less natural choice, especially in the longer term, but this need not result in less library use.

3.7 Informatisation

The number of Dutch households with a computer grew strongly in the 1990s. In 1990 30% of people aged 12 years and older had a computer in their household; by 2000 this had risen to 70% (Huysmans et al. 2004). In 2006, 84% of households had a PC. There is a clear correlation here with household income: in the 20% of households with the lowest income, 75% had (access to) a PC in 2006, compared with 94% in the highest income brackets (StatLine, consulted on 13 April 2007). Comparable differences are found according to education level and age, but the gap is smaller. PCs are most commonly found in households with pupils and students, virtually all of whom have access to a PC at home (97% in 2003, Huysmans et al. 2004). Many people also have access to a PC and Internet outside the home, especially at school and at work.
In 2006, virtually all (95%) computers in households had Internet access. In 1997 this was only just over a quarter. Internet connections are also becoming faster: in 2006, 66% of households had a direct connection via ADSL or cable, whereas in 2002 60% of home Internet users had an analog connection (StatLine, consulted on 13 April 2007). This acceleration has led to a steady increase in the amount of data traffic, in turn leading to an increase in the user-friendliness and possibilities of the Internet, a trend which is set to continue.

Using a computer at home has become a very regular activity, as chapter 6 will illustrate with figures. Of people who used the Internet in the first three months of 2006, 94% used it for communication (e-mail, chatting, telephony; see table 3.3); 90% used it to search for information. The Internet was also used widely for commercial products, especially Internet banking (67%). Government websites are visited by more than half the users, but since the survey took place in April and May, the months when people submit their tax returns in the Netherlands, these figures are likely to be higher than in the rest of the year.

Table 3.3
Internet activities in the last three months, 2006 (as a percentage of all people who used the Internet in the last three months)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total communication</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sending/receiving email</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telephoning via internet</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other, e.g. chatting/instant messaging</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total information</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>searching for info on goods and services</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use of travel services</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>News and Current Affairs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use of travel services</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work, Vacancies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work, vacancies</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commercial Products</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total commercial products</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet banking</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial transactions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buying/selling goods</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total government</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>browsing government agency websites</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>downloading official documents</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sending filled-in documents</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entertainment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total entertainment</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>games/music</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>downloading software</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CBS (StatLine), consulted on 17 April 2007
As people become more adept at using computers and also begin using them more for entertainment and for household affairs, they increasingly begin dealing with things at home for which they would previously have gone to the library. Libraries are seeing this change particularly in relation to searching for information, but downloading music at home is also already having an impact: borrowing figures for music CDs increased until 2001, but have been falling swiftly since then (see table 5.1). The service offered by libraries in this area has been rapidly overtaken by technological advances. There is a broadly shared consensus that lending of DVDs will undergo a similar development in the coming years.

3.8 Conclusions

The main results of our exploration of trends in the population that are relevant for public libraries are as follows.

− The population will continue to grow in the coming years, though probably at a slower pace than in recent decades.
− The age profile of the population is changing; the proportion of over-65s will increase steadily. Older people will remain active for longer in all kinds of areas.
− The ethnic diversity in the population will increase further. Among non-Western ethnic minorities the share taken by the four ‘traditional’ groups will gradually reduce.
− The concentration of ethnic minorities in the population is greatest in the four largest cities (G4), but will remain roughly constant over the next 20 years. In other municipalities, by contrast, the percentage of ethnic minorities will increase. The share of non-Western ethnic minorities in the total ethnic minority population, currently greatest in the G4, will decline there and increase mainly in the surrounding larger towns. The percentage of younger non-Western ethnic minorities will fall, especially in the G4.
− The education level of the population will continue to rise, but not at the same pace as in the 20th century. People will however stay in the school system for longer and will more often go on to further education.
− The number of disadvantaged pupils is likely to fall, in line with the trend in recent years. This is due in part to the strict application of the criteria, which means that the problem remains a real one. There are essential differences between ethnic minority and indigenous disadvantaged children; only the former group are making up their disadvantage.
− Efforts by the Dutch and European authorities to encourage lifelong learning are expected to lead to an increase in the number of adults following courses and further training after leaving full-time education.
− The level of prosperity has increased, and with it the amount spent on leisure activities. In addition, there is a group of people who have difficulty making ends meet, which has grown in recent years despite the fact that the percentage of households with a low or minimum income is falling again. People on low
incomes have traditionally been a focus of attention for public libraries. Increasing incomes mean that people will more often buy books instead of borrowing them, which will of course have an impact on library services.

- More people are combining employment and care tasks, mainly due to the increased labour market participation rate among women. The government objective is to raise the latter rate even further.
- Working parents have less free time than in the past; by contrast, the growing group of older people have ample free time. People spend less of their leisure time reading, and in recent years also spend less time watching TV, but on the other hand spend more time at the computer.
- Households are getting smaller. More people will live together without having children in the future, and more people will also live alone.
- Attitudes to membership of associations and organisations are changing. Memberships are becoming more temporary and more subject to change. This is reflected in changing attitudes to voluntary work; there are signs that this is in decline, but also that it is taking on a different, more project-based form.
- Most Dutch households have a computer. Older people and the low-educated are slowly but surely catching up in terms of computer use. Almost all people who use the Internet use it to search for information and to communicate.

Libraries will be faced in the coming years with a population whose composition is changing further, and which in particular is older and more diverse in terms of cultural background. Within that population, certain groups will demand extra attention, such as those with low literacy, new citizens and disadvantaged school pupils. In addition, the public library can provide more services than in the past to a less urgent group of people who are engaged in study outside an education establishment.

People will also expect different things from the library in the future: a digital service which adds value to what is available elsewhere. Library users are also becoming more and more used to having choices, and this will be reflected in their expectations of the service provided by the library: that service will have to fit in easily with their fairly busy lives between work, household and free time, and will have to offer scope for customisation to which people have become accustomed. This means that library services will have to be made more easily accessible outside normal opening hours and from people's own homes. Lengthy memberships will become less the norm, and here again the library will have to meet the changing expectations and needs of clients by offering appropriate choices. As regards social participation, which appears to be developing towards more activist, local and temporary engagements, the public library could play a role based on its function as a place for meeting and debate. Here again, it is important that the library keeps pace with new developments and the changing wishes of citizens.
Notes

1 Pupil weighting forms the basis for calculating the extra staff requirement to combat disadvantage in schools. Indigenous disadvantaged pupils in primary schools have a pupil weighting of 1.25. Ethnic minority disadvantaged pupils in primary schools have a pupil weighting of 1.9. A score with a weighting above a certain threshold can qualify the school for extra staff (for further details see Vogels & Bronneman-Helmers 2003, chapter 2). In practice, a school with indigenous disadvantaged pupils finds it much more difficult to rise above the threshold than a school with ethnic minority disadvantaged pupils. Since indigenous disadvantaged pupils rarely occur in very large concentrations in schools, the chance that those schools will receive extra staff is much smaller. A new weighting scheme is in fact coming into effect in October 2008, in which only the education level of the parents plays a role; ethnic background will cease to be relevant as a factor.

2 Although this difference between men and women is reducing.
4 Trends in communication and information

4.1 The information society: an embarrassment of riches

If the trend in communication and information in the last few decades had to be summarised in one short phrase, an appropriate choice might be an embarrassment of riches. The famous eponymous book by Simon Schama (The Embarrassment of Riches, 1987) about Dutch culture in the Golden Age deals with the striking tension between the accumulation of capital in the prosperous young nation and the Calvinist religion which warned against the corrupting influence of wealth and preached the purity of materialistic abstention. Since neither money nor religion were about to disappear from the arena, it was important to arrive at a peaceful coexistence, something which, according to Schama, the Dutch culture of the 17th century managed to achieve in a highly individual way.

The surfeit of information in the 21st century arouses similar feelings of unease. Never before has so much information been so readily accessible. This can be seen as a good thing, but the surfeit – by definition, more than is necessary – also raises questions, for example concerning the grounds on which people should select information – something which is essential given the sheer quantity of information available. Is one source better than another? How can we assess the value of sources? And are there not increasing amounts of chaff among the corn? Can we assume that information that is presented as reliable actually is reliable, in the sense of being free from hidden political, economic or other interests? The unease thus relates to both the quantity and quality of the information. The public library, which has the aim of assisting people in their quest for information and culture, appears to derive some of its raison d’être from this discomfort. The question here, however, is whether the public library is able to channel and harness the surfeit of information, or whether it will itself become swamped.

We shall save that question for later chapters. In this chapter we are concerned with developments in media and communication. How and to what extent the public library is able to fulfil its five core functions is greatly influenced by those developments. Changes in media use may make it necessary for the library to provide services in a different way. It is also possible that technological or economic developments (or more likely, an interplay between the two) mean that one of the functions can be performed so well by another party that the added value of service delivery by the library disappears.

In this chapter we present an outline of relevant developments in communication and information. We start with an overview of the internationalisation that has taken place in the media and communication landscape and then discuss in turn the developments in a technological, administrative/legal, economic and socio-cultural
4.2 Internationalisation

Internationalisation, or globalisation, is a process which has been under way for centuries but which has acquired a new dimension with the expansion of transport possibilities and the growth in information and communication technology (ICT). Some observers (Castells 2000) perceive fundamental changes in the social structure, culture and economy due to the emergence of what they call the ‘global network society’. Whether an entirely new social organisation is being created, or whether it is more a case of a continuation of the existing social order with new resources, the fact is that financial flows move around the world more quickly, businesses more readily relocate their production capacity to low-wage countries, and tourism is acquiring an ever more global character.

In the world of media and information, too, internationalisation of itself is nothing new. The telegraph, the radio, films and television have all fostered cultural exchange from the moment of their arrival. But here again, the internationalisation appears to have acquired a new intensity with the emergence of the Internet. On the one hand, technological innovations and economic upscaling have led to internationalisation of the media supply. On the other hand, the influx of ethnic groups has prompted a demand, including in libraries, for media that are not immediately ‘Dutch’ in origin.

The other face of internationalisation is the emergence of multimedia multinationals, some of which have branches in the leisure industry. This phenomenon been accompanied by concerns about freedom of information and freedom of expression (about which more later in this chapter). In the Netherlands, the concentration of ownership in the media mainly relates to newspapers, where a few concerns dominate virtually the entire market (Commissariaat voor de Media 2003, 2004; Commissie Mediaconcentraties 1999; Rutten & Buijs 1999). In addition, international free-trade agreements open the way for what is sometimes called cultural imperialism: there are many countries in the world where American television productions and films fill the tv screens night after night (McBride 1980).

Even more than film, radio and television, the Internet is a global medium. More and more information and services are crossing national borders along the digital highway. The rapid growth of the Internet has taken place largely outside the sphere of influence of national states. The power of the network lies in its unregulated nature. Not only does the technology work on a global scale, but so does the user. The Internet enables people to build contacts in different countries through discussion lists and chat rooms or to take part in computer games with each other across wide distances. Audio and video exchange programmes have led to worldwide distribution of audiovisual entertainment. It has become possible to obtain information from the other side of the world at low cost without having to leave the comfort...
of one’s own home. Libraries have also felt the effects of this in the form of rapidly dwindling demand for products such as music CDs and, more recently, films on DVD.

It is in fact not by definition the case that global use of ICT leads to the creation of a global culture. And technology is only produced on a large scale once there is a need for it within a culture. The fact that many world citizens can if they so choose now share the same experiences in the area of news, films, television series and music thanks to the mass media, does not imply that cultural differences have ceased to exist. In practice, globalisation and localisation go hand in hand. Moreover, modern technology also offers possibilities for sustaining a local culture or the culture of a group which lives in a diaspora. In the latter case ICT, with satellite television and Internet, actually provides the infrastructure needed for a reduction in scale (Van Dijk 2001: 31).

4.3 Technological aspects

As stated, the rise of the Internet has been very influential. This is the primary form in which digitalisation is of importance for the future of the public library, but not the only form. The conversion and transmission of information as series of ones and zeros has led to a revolution in information and communication. First and foremost, it has led to the emergence of a ‘common currency’ for (combinations of) text, image and sound. This makes combining, storing, copying and sharing these forms of information a good deal simpler and cheaper. It also has a positive impact on the quantity, speed, accessibility and personalisability of information.

− Quantity
The networking of computers via the Internet has given an enormous boost in a short space of time to global information output (or ‘content’ as it is now called). Researchers and students at the University of California in Berkeley attempted to quantify the total information output in 1992 and 2002 (Lyman & Varian 2003). Where the information concerned is stored on carriers (the majority of the information exchange, such as by telephone, then disappears), the total volume of information in 2002 is estimated at 5 exabytes: 5 billion gigabytes. That is equivalent to 500,000 times the entire book collection of the Library of Congress. The researchers also estimated that the volume of information produced worldwide roughly doubled in the period 1999-2002, equivalent to an increase of around 30% per year. Since then, the pace of this growth only appears to have increased (IDC 2007).

− Speed
Owing to the way in which digital information can be transmitted, information today travels much faster than a few years ago. This makes it possible to communicate much more quickly today from (virtually) every corner of the world. As a result, much more and much more recent information is available than ten years ago at any given moment and in virtually every given location. Technological developments in communication resources mean that geographical distances
can be more rapidly traversed by information. Digitalisation has led to what The Economist in 1995 strikingly termed ‘the death of distance’ (Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg 2003: 26). Although it is often said that this has made the world smaller, the increased connectivity means that there is a sense that society has in fact become larger (cf. Burgers 1988).

Accessibility

The Internet enables information needs to be met more rapidly. For the young generations in particular, the Internet is the natural tool to use when they want to ‘quickly look something up’. Typing in a couple of key words in Google, YouTube or Wikipedia often generates something that is useful or interesting. The possibility of full-text search provides an accessible addition to the unfamiliar content-based classification systems of libraries, museums and archives. Although going to the library or consulting an encyclopaedia may deliver more in terms of reliability and completeness, for many people this does not justify the higher costs in terms of time and energy. Not only is the Internet always ‘open’, unlike the library, but the difference in the quality of the information found and its importance appear not always to be recognised. On top of this, sharing information and music, films, urls, and so on, legally or illegally, has taken off in a major way. Books, cds and videos have of course always been swapped and copied, but in the digital world the scale on which this occurs and the ease with which it can be done are of a different order.

Personalisability

Electronic programme guides (EPGs), RSS feeds, intelligent agents... in the digital world it is becoming easier and ever more normal to create information and cultural activities geared to one’s own interests. The slow but sure rise in the popularity of smartphones, which as well as mobile phone calls and sms messages also allow mobile e-mailing and Internet use, support this trend with hardware. Based on your search behaviour in Google, the books, cds and dvds you have clicked on on Amazon or Bol, or your borrowing patterns from libraries, intelligent software applications generate a list of reading, viewing and listening tips tailored to match your profile. It should be noted here that the ‘push’ variants (unsolicited recommendations) are currently more popular than the ‘pull’ variants, for which the user themselves has to take action (such as RSS).

As well as these benefits, digitalisation also has a number of major disadvantages. One is that the increased speed and specific technological aspects of digital information also raise the question of longevity. On the one hand, more information is accessible and digitalisation can increase the longevity of sources. On the other hand, 70% of the information on the Internet stays there for less than four months (Manguel 2006: 28), and the transience of information is acquiring an entirely new dimension, which could be a cause for concern. Digital information carriers – hard disks, cd-roms, dvds, tapes – also have a finite physical life (maximum 20 years). Technological standards are also changing constantly, so that the information con-
tinually has to be migrated from old to new systems in order to remain accessible in the long(er) term.

In short, the life of stored data follows two conflicting curves: one where capacities go up and one where longevity goes down (IDC 2007: 11).

Book
How do these trends translate into the world of the book and the library? The continued existence of the book is the subject of much speculation. Some commentators predict the death of the printed media; others, based on the history of the media, believe that this is unlikely. It is a fact that when new media emerge, the old media almost never disappear, but change their form or function (Briggs & Burke 2002; DeFleur & Dennis 2002). When radio and television were introduced, for example, newspapers began providing more background information, while radio began focusing more on rapid news and music when television largely took over the function of entertainment medium. What does happen is that the popularity of a medium falls away sharply and remains at a lower level, as happened with cinema film, which enjoyed its highpoint in the 1920s and 30s.

The book has already weathered many storms as a physical carrier of textual and visual information since the time of Gutenberg. There are several grounds for assuming that books will still be being produced and sold in the distant future. Currently, in fact, more new book titles are published each year in the Netherlands than ever before (almost 20,000) (Nederlandse Boekverkopersbond 2007: 5). The e-book reader, which is used to download and read texts in electronic form, is at the moment still a gadget for the ‘happy few’, though it undoubtedly has the potential to bring about great changes. As soon as e-book readers come onto the market which combine an easily readable screen with an attractive, easily accessible range of e-books and a pricing structure that is comparable with that of mobile telephony (making a loss on the hardware but earning this back via the software), developments could move at a rapid pace. There is already a slow but sure trend towards reading less on paper and more from the computer screen. Books and magazines, especially in the scientific arena, are increasingly published both in paper and digital form, and subscribers to scientific journals can now often choose between paper, digital or both. Newspapers also offer combination subscriptions, with a digital format during the week and both paper and digital formats on Fridays and Saturdays.

According to Thompson (2004), the ‘silent revolution’ in the book world will be the arrival of publishing on demand, the ability to produce a book at a reasonable price but in very small print runs. This will enable innumerable niches to be served with new publications and will add a new dimension to the publishing service. This could certainly have an influence on public libraries with regard to locally interesting publications, since it will be easier and cheaper for them to offer locally relevant collections. Many rights-free texts are already freely available on the Internet, for example from www.gutenberg.org, where around 20,000 titles are available to download.
It is not yet clear how far this will affect the market for paper-borne versions of older texts, and developments will undoubtedly be influenced by developments in relation to the e-book referred to earlier.

Library
Libraries have also not escaped the influence of digital developments. The membership and lending administration is computerised virtually everywhere. Members can often extend their borrowing online, and can sometimes create their own virtual space, within which they can receive tips on books that may be of interest to them based on their own borrowing behaviour and that of other members. The buying of books by public libraries is also a largely digital process, with orders placed online with NBD/Biblion, the central book supplier for public libraries in the Netherlands. For some years now these books have been equipped as standard with an RFID (Radio Frequency IDentification) chip, simplifying the lending and administration process. Borrowers can often carry out the process themselves, without the help of library staff, who can then occupy themselves with other activities, such as providing information.

It is precisely in this role as a supplier of information that the public library has acquired a fearsome opponent. With the computer as a household media centre into which text, images and sound come in from many different sources, the orientation of users is shifting. They are focusing less on specific media or institutions as suppliers of information and more on the content itself, using utilities such as Google as the gateway to the plethora of information and cultural content available (Wubs & Huysmans 2006; Huysmans & De Haan 2007).

Institutions such as libraries, archives and museums are responding to this trend by jointly offering digital portals such as Het geheugen van Nederland (‘The memory of the Netherlands’). Searching for an item displays the combined collections, ranked in order. For the time being, only the digital signature can be provided for much of the material which comes up, not the work itself. This is due in part to a digitalisation process that is still ongoing, and in part to legal constraints: libraries are often not permitted to provide access to the digital content they purchase outside their own building, even to their (paying) members.

The consequences for the public library are however not restricted to the functions ‘reading and literature’ and ‘knowledge and information’; the cultural function of the library is also feeling the effects of technological change. In many cultural areas, the Internet offers a world of information with a speed, convenience and format (moving image) which is often not to be found in the (digital) library, or only to a limited extent. Classical ballet and classical music, theatre, film, popular music … typing in a single search term on YouTube often produces a treasure chest of surprising finds: performances from long ago, now deceased musicians, comic’s, dancers, conductors and so on. The character of Web 2.0 sites such as YouTube and Wikipedia has both advantages and disadvantages. The great advantage is that these sites can develop in a short time into encyclopaedias offering space alongside
the canon for a great deal of popular culture and amateur content. For example, on Wikipedia users can garner a great deal of information about pop icons such as Britney Spears and Jennifer Lopez which is nowhere to be found in traditional encyclopaedias, including references to their official websites and other Internet resources.

On the other hand, an important drawback is that information on the Internet is generally no more than fragmentary.¹ Large quantities of small items of information have been made available, but contextualisation – how does this piece of information fit into a larger whole? – is generally minimal. It is on this front in particular that there are opportunities for public libraries, given their traditional expertise as information professionals. If this context can be delivered to the user’s home in digital format – either in the form of digital monographs or in the form of good quality information on websites – a real need can be met.

The advantage of the public, non-commercial character of the public library is the absence of suspicion of commercial ends which taints a company such as Google. The launch of the pretentious Google Books project aroused a fair amount of opposition from publishers and librarians (e.g. Jeanneney 2007). In collaboration with a number of major libraries in the United States and Europe, the Internet search giant placed large numbers of books which were out of copyright on the Web in digital format and with full-text search facility (see books.google.com). Despite the public mission of the project – ‘organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful’ – there was no getting around the suspicion that the company’s main purpose was to derive financial benefit for itself.²

Digitalisation means that libraries are having to fulfil their custodian task in a new way. Technological developments not only create the possibility of converting materials to digital format, thus protecting them and rendering them easier to make available to others, but also create a need, with the continuous renewal of applications and versions, to ensure the accessibility of digital material. The National Library of the Netherlands (KB) addresses this problem through its e-depot, though this is limited mainly to scientific publications (www.kb.nl/dnp/e-depot/dm/dm.html).

Although its primary role is not to be a custodian, we cannot omit a mention in this context of the Digital Library for Dutch Literature (Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren, www.dbnl.org). This site provides access to many primary and secondary sources on Dutch cultural history. A start was made in 2006 on the ‘Thousand Masterpieces’ (Duizend meesterwerken) project, in which approximately 300,000 pages of material are being converted to digital format. Not only important literary works have been chosen for this project, but also important non-fiction works from the Middle Ages to the present day.

4.4 Administrative and legal aspects

From an administrative and legal perspective, public access, plurality/diversity and independence/objectivity have always been the most important principles underpin-
ning the media and information policy. As explained in chapter 2, these principles are rooted in modern ideas about democracy and the role that citizens play in it. In order to guarantee the functioning of democracy, it is important that people are able to inform themselves independently and freely. Unfettered access to diverse, good-quality, reliable information is an important principle, of which the first core function of the public library, ‘knowledge and information’, is an expression. A diverse and free press, a public broadcasting system at arm’s length from commercial and political interests, and a public library are elements which are protected by law in many countries (see Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg 2003), although the reality can sometimes be rather awkward (see chapter 2).

The way in which that openness, plurality and independence are guaranteed varies considerably from country to country. Several mixed forms of public and private sector are possible in the provision of public services. One option is to fund a basic provision from the public purse, as is the case with the public broadcasting system and public library network in the Netherlands, with the market providing supplementary services. An entirely different option is to give the market its head entirely, with public institutions providing those services that are socially desirable but which the market is not providing. The public broadcasting system and public library network in the United States are good examples of this approach.

In practice, the choice for one of these options and the way in which it is put into practice is greatly influenced by the design of the political system and the structuring of the welfare state (cf. Hallin & Mancini 2004; Huysmans 2006a: 14-15). The following three welfare state models can be distinguished in the West.

- The liberal model (Anglo-Saxon countries): this model is characterised by the dominance of ‘the market’ and the precedence given to the commercial media. In line with the liberal political ideology, the media are aimed at a mass public consisting of autonomous individuals rather than at sections or groups in society (as happened in the past in the ‘pillarised’ social system in the Netherlands). The independence of journalists and programme makers from commercial and political interests is regarded as crucial and is enshrined in law and/or the Constitution. Regulation by the government is kept to a minimum.

- The democratic/corporatist model (Northern and Central European countries): in this model there is a historically developed coexistence of media allied to specific social and political groups and the commercial media. The state carries a major responsibility for the configuration of the media system. That system must reflect the social diversity, either by each grouping having its own publication channels, or by all groups being proportionally represented on an overarching regulatory board. Freedom of expression goes hand in hand with strong government support and regulation of the press and broadcasting system. Within this model, a further distinction can be made between the Scandinavian countries, traditionally having a social-democratic welfare state, and the countries of continental Europe, where the welfare state is organised along strongly corporatist lines (interwoven with civil society). Commercial broadcasters still have very limited room for manoeu-
The degree of interconnection between civil society, politics, commerce and the media is also reflected in the funding and ideological underpinning of the public library network. In the Scandinavian and liberal countries in particular (in Western Europe the latter group is represented by the United Kingdom and Ireland), the access threshold is kept low thanks to a large network of public libraries and little or no membership fee. In the traditional social-democratically governed north of Europe, the motive is to raise the standard of the low socioeconomic class. In Anglo-Saxon Europe (and in North America, Australia and New Zealand) the liberal equality principle – access for all, whether socioeconomically low, middle or high – is the leitmotif.

In the last two decades, partly under the influence of the European Union, a trend towards liberalisation has begun within all models (Hallin & Mancini 2004). In all countries where there have traditionally been ties between social or political groups and the information media, those ties have weakened. The liberal EU legislation and regulation is based on the premise that the market should have primacy and must first and foremost be able to operate freely. Only when the outcome is not optimum in the light of the desired social objectives (what economists refer to as ‘market failure’) is there a reason for the government to regulate and to supplement or correct the market. If that reason is not transparent, the operation of public sector institutions can be described as causing ‘market disruption’ (see Broeders et al. 2006; Doyle 2002). EU treaties in fact include provisions on the media and information which protect the national policy freedom with a view among other things to protecting freedom of expression and plurality.

Freedom of expression, information gathering, receipt of information and privacy also all enjoy protection. In the Netherlands, that protection is enshrined in the Constitution (most recently amended in 1983), and more broadly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR 1950), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1975), and the UN Millennium Declaration (2000; Bardoel & Van Cuijlenburg 2003; De Meij et al. 2000; Dommering 2000).

Efforts are under way at European and national level to adapt fundamental rights to the digital society (Commissie grondrechten in het digitale tijdperk 2000). Among
the aspects being considered are the protection of privacy in cyberspace, where fundamental rights as currently formulated can sometimes fall short, as well as the right to information. At the time of writing, however, this has not yet resulted in actual constitutional or legislative changes or in European treaties.

Book and library
One striking difference between the policy on books on the one hand and the policy on public libraries on the other is that the books policy is firmly rooted in the culture policy but, whereas this is de jure also the case for libraries, public libraries are de facto much more likely to seek recourse to the information freedoms described above.

Government policy on books can be divided into three domains:

− The general books policy. This includes (a) the Fixed Book Price Act and (b) copyright. The purpose of the fixed book price is to promote the wide availability of book titles (both publishing and distribution via a wide and diverse network of booksellers) using the principle of cross-subsidies. The fixed book price indemnifies publishers and booksellers against price competition on popular titles. The margin they earn on these titles enables them to publish or stock less popular titles. Copyright protects the intellectual property of a literary work or translation. This enables authors to earn an income by giving them a strong position in the negotiations on copyright with publishers.

− The specific literature policy. This is aimed at (a) ensuring the production of literature (by giving authors and translators an income); (b) ensuring the publication of works of literary value; (c) supporting the organisation of literary festivals; and (d) maintaining the literary heritage.

− The reading promotion policy. This policy seeks to promote the purchase and use of literature that has been produced by bringing the value of a command of the language (technical ability to read) and the reading of literature to the attention of the widest possible number of people in the Netherlands. In addition to the educational attainment targets with regard to technical and literary reading, a number of organisations – the Netherlands Reading Foundation (Stichting Lezen), the Netherlands Public Library Association (vOB), the Foundation for Writers in Schools and Society (Stichting Schrijvers School Samenleving (sss)), the Dutch Literature Promotional Foundation (Stichting Collectieve Propaganda voor het Nederlandse Boek, CPNB) and the Reading & Writing Foundation (Stichting Lezen en Schrijven) – are partners in seeking to create maximum attention for reading.

While the books policy is concerned with the intrinsic values that can be derived from reading and the ability to read and the value of the book as a carrier of culture, therefore, the library policy is focused more on freedom of information, as laid down in several international treaties to which the Netherlands is a signatory.
The public library is given more robust legitimacy in international fundamental rights than in less firmly established national culture policy. The UNESCO Manifesto, which was cited at the start of chapter 2, also follows this fundamental rights approach. This does mean that it is subject to the liberalisation tendency in the European Union (and beyond) outlined earlier; public provisions are no longer ‘sacrosanct’. In the liberal market ideology, the legitimacy of ‘market distortion’ is questioned, which is based on making available books and other carriers of information and culture available cheaply. Seeking recourse to fundamental rights does not offer enough counterweight to this.

An important legal question for the modern public library relates to copyright. This is a point on which discussion with rights-holders has been going on for a long time, resulting in the introduction of the lending right fee in the mid-1990s, but with digital content this is taking on a new guise. Libraries jointly purchase digital databases from publishers and related bodies so that they can make these available to their users. Since the actual databases remain with the owner and the library merely receives access to them, the owner is in a position to impose severe technical constraints on their use. Digital databases are at present almost exclusively accessible only in the library itself, for example; libraries are not permitted to allow their members to access these databases from their own home, so that the added value of digital information in this case is unusable. The underlying negotiation process is of course not public, and can therefore not be explained here. FOBID, the Netherlands Library Forum, recently published a manifesto addressing what they perceive as an imbalance in the copyright and shortcomings in copyright legislation. In particular, they ask for a more flexible approach to copyright to enable libraries, archives and museums to respond to the needs of their clients.

Two further developments which warrant attention here are the open source movement and the creative commons idea. The core idea in these related phenomena is the question of whether protection of intellectual property on the Internet is always desirable. Programmers often collaborate on the Net in the development of (open standards for) operating systems (Linux is the best-known example of this) and programs (see for example www.w3.org/Consortium). It is difficult in such a collaborative context, not to say impossible, to say for certain who is the intellectual owner of which part of the whole. From the basis of a public ethos – wishing to give cheap or free access to well-functioning products, or like the World Wide Web Consortium, to ‘lead the Web to its full potential’ – the intention is not to make money; esteem, building a good name in the community, is often enough. Creative commons (see www.creativecommons.org) is a movement that is trying to move intellectual property rights in this direction. Authors can themselves indicate to what extent they wish to protect their creative products or are willing to release them for modification by others and consequently give away part of their direct financial compensation.
Economic aspects

A number of economic developments are relevant for the future of the public library, some of which relate to the technological developments already described. Liberalisation, concentration and globalisation all influence the market for books and information. Digitalisation also affects the way in which these markets operate.

The diagnosis by Hallin and Mancini (2004; cf. also Doyle 2002: 19) that there is a trend towards liberalisation of media regulation, certainly applies for the Netherlands. The European Union was and is the driver of this trend. In 1989 the European Court of Justice ruled that commercial products also fell within the scope of freedom of information. As a result, commercial television and radio could no longer be refused by the member states. The participation of liberal parties in the successive coalition governments prepared minds in the Netherlands for the decoupling of public objectives and public funds in relation to information and media. The private sector is perfectly capable of meeting public objectives, provided it is properly regulated (Nahuis et al. 2005; Waagmeester & Huysmans 2006). The press has after all always operated as a free market and this has not undermined public objectives such as independence, accessibility and plurality, although the concentration of ownership and titles in the newspaper sector has increased (see Hagemann 1995).

Liberalisation of media markets manifests itself into related phenomena: concentration (or economic convergence, analogous to the technological convergence) and globalisation (Doyle 2002). Ownership of media companies has fallen into the hands of an ever smaller group of ever larger players in the last few decades. The Dutch Media Authority (Commissariaat voor de Media) has monitored the media concentration in the Netherlands since 2001. In its most recent report, the Media Authority observes a ‘law of three’ in all areas (regional and national press, radio, television, immediate distribution): more than 85-90% of these markets are in the hands of the same three companies (Commissariaat voor de Media 2007).

Economic concentration has important flipsides. In a market with too few active players, the plurality of information can be jeopardised. Minority groups can for example and counter insurmountable economic obstacles in a free media market, and thus have no access to the market, whereas based on democratic principles this may be desirable (Waagmeester & Huysmans 2006).

Although plurality is an important social aspect of information provision, the argument that concentration always leads to a reduction in plurality does need some qualification. Research has shown that more diversity in media markets can lead to more one-sided media consumption, because there is more opportunity for consumers to follow their own preferences exclusively (Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg 2003: 274). Competition similarly need not always lead to plurality of supply, but sometimes simply leads to more of the same, a concept described as ‘excessive sameness’. Concentration can also weaken negative market forces (Nahuis et al. 2005).
One striking economic feature is the development of the information market from a supply-driven to a demand-driven market. The market was traditionally characterised by scarcity of production and distribution resources. A not insignificant economic factor behind the creation of public libraries was the cost (and in some periods the great scarcity) of paper, which meant that ordinary people were not able to afford books. In the ether, only a limited number of radio and television programmes could be broadcast. And initially the transmission capacity of digital networks was also very limited. Digitalisation has largely eliminated the scarcity and has also created the possibility of interactivity. All of this has led to a shift in the ‘power structure’ in the market from providers to consumers. In the days when there were two national television channels and a total of ten broadcasters, the public broadcasting associations were assured of a wide reach among viewers. Now, a growing number of consumers have a choice of 35 channels or (if they have digital television or a satellite dish) even more. Encyclopaedias such as Britannica are experiencing competition from Wikipedia and newspapers from news sites on the Internet.

An added phenomenon is the rise of niche markets. Interactivity has made the interests of users more transparent for providers, making it easier for them to approach specific groups in a targeted way via specific channels or Internet sites. In other words, it has become cheaper to reach a niche market. As a result, there is money to be made from offering content to relatively small target groups, something which in the past was often not profitable. We shall return to this phenomenon, which is referred to as the ‘long tail’, later.

Another trend which has been apparent for some time is the tendency towards ‘free’. Free door-to-door newspapers have been around for a very long time, deriving their income from advertising revenue. Commercial radio and television are also funded from advertising and sponsorship. The arrival of the Internet is leading to a huge increase in the ‘free’ phenomenon. Peer-to-peer sharing, initially of music and then films, followed by Web 2.0 services such as YouTube, are putting pressure on the established music and film industry. News sites on the Internet and blog journalism are doing the same for the press. The spread of free newspapers on public transport is partly a reaction by the press to loss of market share (Spits, Dag in the Netherlands), but the market also has newcomers (Metro, De Pers; the latter is distributed free to homes in several towns and was for a time also available in libraries).

One benefit based on the idea of the public interest of the free availability of media and content is that a great deal of information and culture which people would otherwise ignore now receives attention. A disadvantage is the poorer quality, or at least the risk of this. Media which are funded entirely from advertising revenue often have smaller budgets than public providers for filling the same space with content, or a lower amount per hour of broadcasting time or per printed page. The trend also means – we will look at this in more detail below – an erosion of the position of public libraries, something which of itself is of course not problematic from a social perspective. The most important thing is that people are able to inform themselves...
and to develop, not where they do this. By contrast, the question of how they do this is relevant. As stated, providers that are funded wholly or partly from the public purse often have larger budgets and the freedom, when weighing what constitutes good information and good culture, not to be influenced by commercial interests.

Book

Economic developments have an effect on the book market in several ways. As described in chapter 3, most people have seen their level of prosperity increase, and with it their spending on leisure activities. They are able to afford more books, and financial constraints as a motivation for visiting the library will therefore apply for fewer people. As chapter 5 shows, people’s most recently read book is in recent years increasingly one they purchased themselves or received as a gift.

The shelf life of titles is reducing steadily, and at present appears to be only two to three months (De Haes 2005). The number of new titles published each year is also increasing year on year, leading to a decline in the presence of less recent books in bookshops. This development towards steadily increasing attention for hypes and bestsellers is generally not regarded as a positive trend in the book trade. For example, the annual report of the Dutch Booksellers’ Federation (NBb) argues that bestsellers still ‘account for only about 15% of sales’ (NBb 2006).

Research by the Dutch central retail industry board (HBD) shows that in 2006 consumers spent EUR 1,600 million on books, equivalent to an average of EUR 99 per person. Slightly more than half (55%) of this money was spent in bookshops, the rest via newspapers, at book fairs, and 7% via other channels, including the Internet. Although the amount that people spend on books has remained relatively stable over the last five years, this stability masks a fall in the number of books purchased of around 13%, and a rise in the price by 10% (www.hbd.nl).

The Internet bookshop is one of the greatest threats to the traditional bookseller. The sale of books via the Internet is still very small in comparison with the volumes sold in physical bookshops, but is rising steadily, as with all Internet purchases. A quarter of the 1,324 people surveyed at the Frankfurter Buchmesse book fair in 2007 expected that within 50 years digitalisation (by which they probably meant the rise of the Internet bookshop) would mean that physical bookshops no longer existed. Roughly half the existing bookshops have a website, and it is now quite common for bookshops to have a website in addition to their physical shop where customers can see what books are available in the shop and can order titles that are not immediately available from stock.

Internet bookshops are successful for several reasons. The prime reason is that they are able to serve the ‘long tail’ of the market effectively (Anderson 2005). A small number of titles – the bestsellers – account for the biggest volume of books sold. Vendors have focused their attention on these titles in recent decades because they were the most profitable. The remaining demand was of virtually no economic interest, because it involved far fewer copies per title and it was therefore not profitable to keep those titles on the shelves. But the interest in these titles covers an
almost endless number of titles and therefore, despite the relatively small amount of interest per individual title, together they account for a large share of the market. Internet bookshops are better able to serve this market.

One reason for this is their unlimited shelf space; unlike in physical bookshops, there is no limit to the number of books that an Internet bookshop can offer for sale. When purchasing books, the seller has no worries about the return on investment of a centimetre of bookshelf in his shop, and the number of titles offered is therefore almost infinite. The elimination of this constraint on supply has revealed a demand for non-bestsellers which is much greater than anticipated, and the long tail has proved to be perfectly profitable (Anderson 2005). Another advantage for the customer is that it is much easier to search through the stock of titles, because in principle any desired ranking can be created. A third advantage of Internet bookshops is the context that is provided with the titles viewed, in the form of reviews by other readers, and information of the type: ‘other readers who bought this title also purchased …’. In this way, Internet bookshops are able to make the information generated by their sales directly useful for customers.

The second-hand book has now also begun a digital life, among other things via Internet bookshops. Amazon and Bol, for example, also offer information on the availability of second-hand titles. This is of course extremely useful for titles which are no longer available new, but also makes it easier when choosing from titles that are still available; look at a title on Amazon and the price of a new copy appears, but also the price of any available second-hand copies. Apart from these large Internet bookshops, however, independent antiquarian and second-hand bookshops also have an Internet presence. Sites such as www.abebooks.com, www.antiqbook.com and www.boekwinkeltjes.nl allow users to search through the collections of any number of second-hand and antiquarian bookshops, and geographical obstacles in particular are removed. The advantage that the public library used to have over bookshops in its ability to supply older titles has thus diminished.

The effect of these developments on the price of books is limited in the Netherlands and elsewhere by the law on the fixed book price. This prevents bestsellers being sold more cheaply but also (in principle) prevents less popular books from becoming more expensive. The idea is that this promotes cross-subsidy: with a few strongly selling titles on their lists, publishers can afford to take the risk of publishing books by unknown authors or books whose circulation is certain to be small (see note 3).

Library
The reason for maintaining public libraries lies in the expected positive external effects. A comparable supply of books and other media at such low cost would not arise ‘of itself’ on the free market, and would certainly not be viable for any length of time; the costs of maintaining such a facility (buildings, collection, staff) would be too high and the returns too low. Of the EUR 561.5 million in income received by the combined Dutch public libraries in 2005, EUR 433.8 million, or 77%, came
in the form of subsidy. Libraries’ own income from contributions, fines and mobile services amounted to only EUR 73.7 million, 13% of the total income.⁴

Movements in prices on the book market naturally have a direct impact on the media budgets of libraries, but in addition it becomes more expensive for libraries to make available specialist information (collected and ranked by publishers). Libraries jointly purchase digital databases, but these too are very expensive, and in some circles there are doubts as to whether the costs are justified by the very limited use. Constraints placed on the use of these databases as a result of negotiations with suppliers are probably the reason for this. The confidential nature of the negotiations between the parties means that little information comes to light, but it is clear that those constraints limit public libraries in their function as a gateway to information and culture in the digital domain.

The role of the library in the information market is however important. As discussed earlier in this chapter, public libraries have traditionally sought justification for their existence in the right to information, as expressed in several international treaties and in the Dutch constitution. As a provider of information, the public library has a long history. However, the library also has an important role to play from an economic perspective, in correcting the information asymmetry on information market. Information asymmetry is a situation where one of the parties, the provider or the consumer, knows more about the product to be traded than the other party. The classic example is the second-hand car where the seller knows that it is on the point of collapse, something which is not always easy for the buyer to ascertain (Akerlof 1970). With information products, the consumer only knows whether they are useful after using them; this cannot be said with certainty beforehand because information is an ‘experience good’. Moreover, purchasing information is often also based on trust: it is difficult for the consumer to determine how slanted or reliable the information provided is; they have two trust the source to some extent (see Nahuis et al. 2005; Waagmeester & Huysmans 2006).

The growth in the amount of free media and the Internet has led to increasing concerns about the quality of the information encountered by citizens (school students are listed in first place in this context). The public library can play a role here as a provider of information. One of the solutions to information asymmetry is the reputation mechanism, whereby information providers build a reputation, for example for independence and reliability. Consumers make decisions based on this, in the absence of other (practical) methods of assessing quality in advance (Nahuis et al. 2005). The reputation of the public library as a reliable, independent source or provider of information is widespread.

According to research, however, public libraries often lose out against sources that are more easily and more quickly accessible (OCLC 2005). It is important that they continue to fulfil this function in a relevant way in the context of technological and economic developments. Particularly given the continuous budgetary pressure on library collections, this is no small challenge. Recent research on the collection policy of libraries in the provinces of Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland showed that
The library sector is more alert to economic aspects than in the past, for example in the area of fees. This economic aspect of accessibility is addressed and studied in different ways in different countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, library membership is free, yet despite this almost half the population are not members of a library and many of those who are do not use their membership. It is known from Belgium that there is a correlation between the level of a (minimum) membership contribution and the membership rates: the higher the contribution, the fewer members (Glorieux & Kuppens 2006). In the Netherlands, a sliding scale of fees is becoming more common (people who read more pay a higher fixed fee and a smaller amount per book/CD/DVD borrowed). At the same time, a discussion is also under way in the Netherlands on the merits of free library membership.

4.6 Socio-cultural aspects

Light communities, weak ties
The Internet has undoubtedly made it easier to find other people who share the same interests. Where in the 1980s community communication almost exclusively involved communication between people from the same neighbourhood or district, today the term used is ‘communities of interest’. People engage in new relationships, possibly anonymously, based on their personal interests. They chat in chat rooms, get to know the best friends of their own friends via e-mail or MSN, subscribe to newsletters from organisations in relation to their hobbies, post their views or comments on group weblogs, and interact with other people’s avatars in Second Life. There is no doubt that this is a socio-cultural phenomenon which could not have occurred without the technological infrastructure of multimedia. There are also possible downsides. If it is assumed that close social relationships based on face-to-face contacts are preferable to looser relationships, question marks can be placed against the many weaker, less durable ties in which people engage on the Web. Does a community not benefit more from strong ties based on interpersonal solidarity, so that people who are in difficulties for whatever reason can count on those closest to them? It is difficult to argue against this. On the other hand, weak relationships are often more important for the individual in getting all kinds of things done, such as finding a job, than strong relationships (Granovetter 1973).

People are increasingly engaging in less binding ties in their leisure time. This trend also means that people come into contact with others less often. A decline in face-to-face contacts is offset in part by the maintaining of contacts in the digital domain (see table 3.2). The sharing of and commenting on photos of a recent family reunion will today largely take place via the Web and thus be hidden in the time spent on the Internet (an increasingly unrefined portmanteau word).

New interactions also occur in relation to the user-generated content on Web 2.0 applications such as the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia and the audiovisual treas-
ure chest that is YouTube. Small contributions from many people, combined with good search facilities, together constitute a large and valuable Internet resource. Reputation mechanisms are also created which are analogous to those that exist outside the digital domain. Posts by individuals are evaluated by others, and after a while the most productive or appreciated authors will rise to the top. In short, initially ‘light’ communities and transient relationships can in time become stronger and longer lasting.

Acceptance of ICT
At the end of the 1990s, when it became clear that the Internet was going to penetrate people’s personal lives as well, and that daily life was about to change, fears were raised about a digital gulf between the ‘information haves’ and the ‘information have nots’. The question was whether the existing social dividing lines would not become even stronger in a digital era. And research did indeed reveal considerable differences in computer ownership and computer use between those who are socially better situated or integrated and those who were less so (see Van Dijk et al. 2000).

We now know that things have not turned out as badly as predicted. The digital gulf, at least as regards access to computers and the Internet at home, has almost entirely disappeared. On the other hand, there are still considerable differences in the use of ICT. Those differences are reducing in relative terms (women, people with a lower education level and older people are catching up), but in absolute terms there are sizeable differences in frequency and duration of use. In addition, people who began using computers early are still found to be better at dealing with hardware and software that people who began later. If greater computer skills translate into more personal gain in today’s information society, this means that the digital gulf – not a gulf in ownership, then, but perhaps in use and skills – still deserves attention. So far, at least, this latter gulf does not appear to be leading to wide social differences (De Haan & Huysmans 2006).

The concerns about growing social isolation as a result of the emergence of the Internet also appear not to be taking on the dramatic form that was sometimes forecast in the 1990s: ‘the communication paradox of modern society could be that while new communication technology in principle offers huge opportunities for meeting others, the chance of this happening in practice is declining in inverse proportion’ (Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg 2003: 30). These concerns are perhaps unfounded, since 94% of people who use the Internet do so among other things to communicate (especially e-mail; see table 3.3). Recent research shows that half of all (online) people aged between 13 and 18 years have made new friends via the Internet, while more than three-quarters have actually met one or more of these contacts (Duimel & De Haan 2007). And this is not reserved for teenagers; research among older people using the Internet revealed that a quarter of them have got to know new people via the Internet, while half then went on to meet these people in real life (Duimel 2007). Other research has shown that people who do not use e-mail feel more isolated and
find their social contacts more superficial than people who do use e-mail. E-mailers are also more positive about the quality of their social network. They say they have more people they can go to, and that they have more people around them who understand them. It therefore seems that digital communication above all improves the quality of strong social ties (De Haan 2004).

More transient information search behaviour?
Internet use by secondary school students has been a particular focus of discussion recently. Teachers complain that projects which appear to have been done very well in fact turn out to be nothing more than the result of cutting and pasting from the Internet. On websites such as www.scholieren.com enormous collections of book reviews and essays can be downloaded, and eager use is made of this facility (Verboord & Van Luijt 2007). Research commissioned by a major educational publisher showed that most school students tend not to verify information ‘plucked’ from the Internet in sources with a solid reputation (see Huysmans et al. 2006).

More generally, it is questionable whether the instant availability, 24 hours a day seven days a week, of an ocean of information does not make those seeking information lazy. Do they still go in search of physical sources which can only be accessed with investments of time, money and effort (i.e. a trip to the nearest library)? Little research has been carried out on this. Time use surveys show that in 2005 the Internet was still losing out to television and newspapers as a source for 17 topics (such as politics, sport and culture; De Haan & Huysmans 2007; see also § 6.4). A qualitative study of lovers of cultural heritage revealed that the older members of the group still consult archives, museums, libraries and encyclopaedias; the younger half reported that they could get most of the information they needed from the Internet (Huysmans & De Haan 2007). It is difficult not to see this as a harbinger of the information search behaviour of future generations.

Book and library
The consequences of these socio-cultural developments for the world of the book and the library are clear. The gigantic information output on the Internet has given books a fearsome competitor, in both fiction and non-fiction (see table 5.1). In particular the non-fiction segment in the library is losing ground rapidly. Attempts are being made by providing digital services to revamp the traditional offering.

We present a closer statistical description of the trends in the use of books and libraries in chapters 5 and 6. Here we discuss in broad terms the consequences of the socio-cultural trends we have outlined for the reading and borrowing of books. First and foremost there is the falling membership, especially among adults. It is quite possible that this is an expression of a wider trend in which people are less ready to commit to ‘official’ membership. It may also be that the weighing up of the costs and benefits of library membership produces a different result today from in the past. Only when people see the benefits of membership will they join, and it may be that, given the alternatives, they more frequently regard doing so as not worth the trouble.
The Dutch library sector reacted relatively quickly to the trend towards ‘light communities and weak ties’, with websites such as www.literatuurplein.nl (‘literature square’) and www.leesplein.nl (‘reading square’). The purpose of these sites, besides promoting reading, is to put readers in touch with each other to discuss what they are reading, and to surround the whole with a ‘shell’ of information on books, literary movements and authors. This site now has competitors on the Internet, from sites such as LibraryThing and Shelfari. On these sites, which have a clear Web 2.0 character, book lovers can enter their collections and assign keywords or ‘tags’ to them. Users can also join communities of interest (e.g. for fans of chicklit or political conservatives) and generate reading tips based on other people’s book collections.

The public library sees an important function for itself in promoting meeting and debate. This is given form in the organisation of lectures and discussion meetings. In the changing context and customs described above, the fulfilment of this core function, too, is taking on a different form. A good example is Nederland Leest (‘Holland Reading Event’), which was organised for the second time in 2007. The aim of this campaign is to challenge people to engage in discussion about a particular book. Libraries distributed the ‘prescribed’ book free to their members during the campaign, thereby also bringing a proportion of the ‘dormant’ members into the building. By organising reading groups, discussion meetings and other events, the library not only promotes reading during this campaign, but also acts as a promoter of meeting and debate.

The public library is also responding to the fact that communities are taking on new guises on the Internet, for example by allowing members to create their own digital space on library websites. However, this facility is nowhere near as advanced as with other players, such as Internet bookshops and sites such as LibraryThing. In order to continue fulfilling its social role here, the public library needs to invest a great deal of effort in making up the lost ground in the development of the digital library. This is of course an issue in other countries, too. Dutch public libraries can derive inspiration from interesting solutions in other countries (such as the ‘Library as Conversation’ project in the United States; see the ‘Intermezzo’ chapter).

4.7 Conclusions

The discussion of trends and developments in information and communication in this chapter has brought to light a number of points which are of relevance for the functioning of the public library. They can be grouped into technological, administrative/legal and economic developments.

Technological developments
- Digitalisation means that more information is accessible, is more rapidly available and can be personalised to a much greater degree. A point for concern is
how users can find their way through the huge volume of information. In this changing context, the function of the library as a source of reliable information is important, but it is also a challenge to continue playing a relevant role.6

- The democratisation of production and distribution resources is spawning interesting new phenomena, which are still very much in development.
- Technological developments such as e-books and publishing on demand will have an influence on the production of printed media, but it is unlikely that they will cause the large-circulation printed book to disappear.

**Administrative/legal developments**
- Decentralisation has had a clear impact on the structuring of the library sector. Developments in the welfare and cultural sector are important as well, because they can influence the tasks of the library and also increase the opportunities for collaboration with other agencies. Developments in the book policy and reading promotion policy are also important for the public library.
- Offering access to information in the digital domain meets with resistance from commercial players who hold the publishing rights and who are unwilling to open up their content to such a large group of users.

**Economic developments**
- Economic concentration and internationalisation are taking place in the media market, while the government has a role in seeking to ensure continued plurality of information resources. The Internet has led to the growth of niche markets, so that relatively obscure titles are much more readily available. The new market dynamic this has produced is something that libraries could learn from.

**Socio-cultural developments**
- The technological developments in media and communication have led to a totally new spectrum of contact opportunities, in the form of direct communication, social networking sites and sites where user-generated content can be posted and viewed.
- It has become easier to search for information in the digital era, but there are doubts about the quality of information on the Internet and people's ability to find their way through the growing mass of information available.

All these points affect the public library. In the later chapters we look in more detail at the point that is the most relevant for the core task of the library, offering access to information and culture.
Notes

1. A YouTube query using the word ‘Beethoven’ generated 26,100 hits in early July 2007. As well as concert fragments from Sviatoslav Richter and Yehudi Menuhin, among others (no date or place given), we also find clips by Chuck Berry singing ‘Roll over Beethoven’ and a live recording of the same number covered by rock group Status Quo.

2. By making part of the collection accessible in due course only on payment. Publishers and other holders of rights (authors) protested against what they saw as an attack on their rights. Google turned the usual procedure on its head in the way it dealt with rights; instead of only digitalising and offering those books which were free of copyright and other constraints, Google announced that it would be placing the collections of a number of major libraries (the university libraries of Michigan, Harvard, Stanford and Oxford and the New York Public Library; books.google.com/googlebooks/common.html) on the Internet in full-text version, with an invitation for any holders of rights to get in touch.

3. Whether publishers and bookshops actually use the additional margin for cross-subsidies is however doubtful; see Appelman & Van den Broek (2002).

4. Source: CBS StatLine, consulted on 31 August 2007. The remaining 10% consists of costs charged to other parties, interest and unspecified ‘other income’.

5. These differences were controlled for education level, and gender, household situation and labour market position.

6. We will return to this later in this study in the context of the promotion of ‘media wisdom’.
5 Trends in library use

As the brief historical review has shown (chapter 2), the Dutch public library system went through a period of rapid expansion from the second half of the 1960s onwards. In the 1970s, in particular, driven by the centralist approach of the Public Libraries Act 1975, the number of branches and the size of the collections increased considerably. The 1980s brought economic recession, government spending cuts and devolution of services to municipal level, ushering in a period of stabilisation. A slight downward trend in library use began in the early 1990s and continues to this day. This downturn is one of the reasons that public libraries are reflecting on how they fulfil their social task. The process of library renewal can be seen as an administrative answer to that reflection, in which (in the context of municipal control) more attention was given to the relationship between library services and the local education and welfare systems.

While there are indications that this relationship has been strengthened in recent years (Kasperkovitz 2006), few firm data are available on the number of people who are actually reached by these services. In addition, the public library can only fulfil its role as an information centre and a key feature of the local community in the future if its core task – providing access to information and culture – remains intact to some degree. We should therefore state in advance that this chapter deals mainly with the traditional service provided by the public library. We measure this on the basis of membership, actual borrowing figures and (occasional) visits to the library. Digital services, and other services which are provided within the building, such as exhibitions, lectures and provision of information, are largely left out of consideration. To underpin the vision of the future it would of course be desirable to present a picture of all services provided as part of the five core tasks of the library. However, few (trend) figures are currently available on the use of those services; and where such figures are available, they do not – relative to the lending figures – say enough about their social significance. On the one hand there is a pressing need for such figures, so that the development of the five core functions of the library can be mapped out in a balanced way. On the other hand, figures – for example a hundred visitors to a debate on a topical local issue – do not say enough about the importance of that debate for decisions taken in the local council. More and better ‘soft’ indicators are needed for this. At present these are gathered too sporadically, something that is also an issue in other countries (see Harris and Dudley 2005). In order nonetheless to provide some indication of the form taken by the service delivered by the public library in fulfilling these other tasks, and of the innovations taking place in that service, we have included a number of text boxes in this chapter containing examples for each core function.
We begin with a description of developments in broad outline. We look briefly at trends on the supply side: the number of library branches and the collections. We then compare these with developments in library use; trends in membership, numbers of books lent, borrowing frequency, library visits and computer use are all explored (§ 5.1). We then show that the downturn which began in the 1990s is not reserved for specific groups in the population. Trends in library use are broken down by characteristics such as gender, age, education level, income, degree of urbanisation, family situation and ethnicity. This enables us to refine the picture (§ 5.2).

Next we look at possible explanatory factors for the decline in library use. For each factor we examine whether these explanations hold water. Not all views can be supported with figures; where this is not possible, we will argue as well as possible why a particular explanation is less probable (§ 5.3).

5.1 Expansion and shrinkage

Supply: library branches

Heavy investments were made in the 1970s in regional expansion of the library network. One of the factors behind this investment drive was that provincial library centres were made legally responsible from 1975 for providing library services in rural areas. From 1979 to 1991 the number of branches increased by more than a quarter (from 914 to 1,167; see figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1
Number of public library organisations and branches (including main branches, 1979-2005)

Source: CBS (various years); VOB (bibliotheekonderzoek.nl), consulted on 23 October 2007
The number then began to fall in 2000. After a brief revival in the period 2000-2002, the number of branches fell to 1,083 in 2005, though this is still considerably more (18%) than in 1979. These branches were operated by 350 library organisations in 2005, a number which has since shrunk further as a result of the creation of basic libraries. Based on declarations of intent and merger plans, it is likely that in 2009 152 basic library organisations will remain (Kasperkovitz 2008).

Supply: collections

The development with regard to the branches is mirrored by developments in the total Dutch library collection (figure 5.2). At the end of the 1970s, the collection totalled around 30 million items, of which 96% were books (which is not the same as titles; that number was far smaller because libraries obviously to some extent hold the same titles). Over the next 15 years or so the collection grew to 45 million; at that time, the relative growth of audiovisual and other media (including sheet music) meant that books accounted for 93% of the collection. Between then and the turn of the century the number fell slightly, but since then it has been falling more steeply; in 2005 the total stood at 37.2 million, of which 32.8 million (88%) consisted of books, 2.4 million (6.5%) audiovisual/digital material and 2.0 million (5.4%) other media. The relative decline in the number of books is due entirely to a reduction in the number of books for adults; the proportion of books for young people has remained constant throughout the entire period at roughly a third of the total collection. What the figure does not show is the renewal rate; at present, the norm in the sector is that at least 10% of the collection must be replaced each year.

Figure 5.2
Collections of public libraries, 1979-2005 (x 1000)
Materials appear to have become more expensive, because the amount spent by libraries on media rose between 1999 and 2005 from EUR 60.7 million to EUR 79.5 million (CBS StatLine, consulted on 18 September 2007), while the size of the collection fell during that period. It is of course not impossible that there has been greater rationalisation in recent years and that despite a net shrinkage of the collection more materials have been purchased.

It is known from figures from the Netherlands Public Library Association (VOB) that in 2005 the collection for adults contained roughly twice as many works of fiction as informative materials, while the collection for young people contained two and a half times as much fiction as informative material.

Different offering
With its various core functions, the library offers more services than simply lending, for example offering a space for meetings and exhibitions. It is difficult to provide as much of an insight into these activities as into the lending and membership figures, quite simply because the latter have been collected more often and for a longer period. The figures from the VOB do however provide some information. For example, in 2005 more than 3,000 information day sessions were organised, along with almost 10,000 cultural activities, including talks by authors, and 7,500 exhibitions. Sadly, nothing is known about the number of visitors to these activities.

Within the core function ‘development and education’, libraries have extensive contacts with education establishments. The VOB keeps a record of this, so we know that in 2005 libraries worked together with an average of 80% of early school and preschool establishments in their catchment area, with 90% of primary schools and 85% of secondary schools. One result of this collaboration was that almost a million pupils visited the library during school hours that year.

Use: subscribed users
The trends in library use show the same tendency as the data for the supply side: first expansion, then shrinkage. It is not simple to ascertain whether one is the cause of the other, but it is logical to assume a relationship; after all, if a library disappears from a neighbourhood or village, it becomes more difficult for residents to visit a library. British case studies illustrate that closing library branches leads to loss of library visitors (Grindlay & Morris 2004a). Similarly, if the collections shrink, there is less choice and membership becomes a less appealing proposition. A converse effect, whereby falling usage figures impact on the supply, is also by no means impossible; the public library sector derives only a limited proportion of its funding from membership income (and fines for overdue returns), but a modest fall in net income can still put a library’s budget under severe pressure. Moreover, a reduction in library use through rationalisation can also lead to cuts in the collection, if materials that are rarely borrowed are removed from the shelves. The possibility that demand patterns affect the supply side can therefore not be entirely ruled out.
The VOB, in conjunction with Statistics Netherlands (CBS), keeps a record of the number of subscribed library users. It can be seen from the figures that the number of library members in the Netherlands, after rising sharply until the mid-1990s, has been falling steadily over the last ten years (figure 5.3). The more steeply declining curve for membership rates also shows that population growth to some extent masks the decline in library membership. To what extent membership fees may have risen is not possible to say: differences in the systems in use between and ‘within’ libraries (different fees for frequent and infrequent borrowers, special rates for specific target groups) mean it has become more and more complicated to work out what membership actually costs a library user.

Figure 5.3
Subscribed library users 1975-2005 (absolute figures and as a percentage of the population)

Use: lending figures
The total number of items lent by all Dutch public libraries rose from 113 million in 1975 to 186 million in 1990. After this a decline set in, reaching 135 million in 2005. On average, each subscribed user borrowed 39 items in 1975 (shown on the right-hand axis of figure 5.4). This rose to 44 items in 1988, before falling back again to 33 in 2005.

Although the number of items lent per member is now well below its level in 1975, the increase in the number of members means the total number of items lent is much higher than 30 years ago. It is also striking that the number of items lent per member began to fall earlier (from 1988) than the absolute number of items lent (around five years later). This is because of the increase in the number of members during that period. The general conclusion is that members use libraries less
intensively than in the past, and that despite a fall in the number of members, that number is still higher than in the 1970s. If we compare these two measures with the heyday of the library, the early 1990s, we see that both have fallen.

Figure 5.4
Lendings, 1975-2005 (absolute and average)

Recent statistics from the library sector provide an insight into the types of materials that people borrow (table 5.1). The number of items lent fell by 15% between 1999 and 2005, with adults being ahead of young people in the downward trend, as was the case with the fall in the number of subscribed users. The number of books lent in the non-fiction segment declined much more steeply than in the fiction segment. For many people, online utilities such as Google and Wikipedia will have taken over the role of informative books.
### Table 5.1
Public libraries: subscribed users and items lent, 1999-2005 (in thousands and percentages)\(^a\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>change vs. 1999 (%)</th>
<th>2001 change</th>
<th>2005 change</th>
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<tr>
<td>subscribed users (x 1,000)</td>
<td>4,328</td>
<td>4,328</td>
<td>4,069</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>-9</td>
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<td>young people</td>
<td>2,054</td>
<td>2,081</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-9</td>
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<tr>
<td>adults</td>
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<td>2,247</td>
<td>2,070</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>items lent (x 1,000)</td>
<td>158,167</td>
<td>152,022</td>
<td>134,624</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-15</td>
<td>-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books</td>
<td>144,697</td>
<td>137,871</td>
<td>121,786</td>
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<td>-16</td>
<td>-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books for young people</td>
<td>59,880</td>
<td>58,252</td>
<td>54,251</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>-9</td>
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<td>fiction</td>
<td>48,660</td>
<td>47,612</td>
<td>45,055</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>-7</td>
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<td>non-fiction, reference</td>
<td>11,220</td>
<td>10,640</td>
<td>9,196</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-18</td>
<td>-21</td>
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<tr>
<td>books for adults</td>
<td>84,817</td>
<td>79,619</td>
<td>67,535</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>-18</td>
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<td>49,117</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-16</td>
<td>-14</td>
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<td>-27</td>
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<td>magazines</td>
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<td>4,919</td>
<td>5,426</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-10</td>
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<td>audiovisual media</td>
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<td>7,205</td>
<td>6,059</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>-9</td>
</tr>
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<td>music CDs</td>
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<td>3,848</td>
<td>2,329</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-35</td>
<td>-28</td>
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<td>videos and DVDs</td>
<td>1,272</td>
<td>1,449</td>
<td>2,631</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>102</td>
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<td>CD-Is, CD-ROMS</td>
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<td>1,331</td>
<td>743</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-44</td>
<td>-44</td>
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<td>other audiovisual</td>
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<td>576</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-41</td>
<td>-38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sheet music</td>
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<td>567</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>-27</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other items lent</td>
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<td>1,461</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-41</td>
<td>-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>items lent per subscribed user</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books for young people</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books for adults</td>
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<td>35.4</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>magazines</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audiovisual</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sheet music and other</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(a\) From 2001 onwards the figures no longer include ‘people’s libraries’; this does not have a significant influence on the comparison with 1999.

Source: VOB/CBS (2007) SCP treatment

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Use: borrowing frequency and library visits
Not all library members actually use the library, just as not all people who use the library are members. Library membership is not a requirement for using all its services, for example reading newspapers and magazines. Since the usefulness of the public library is ultimately manifested in its use, we focus here where possible...
mainly on library users. However, the figures available force us to discuss that use primarily in terms of borrowing, a focus which may not fully reflect the other forms of library use. On the other hand, borrowing books is undoubtedly the most extensive form of library use.

The CBS figures show the broad picture, but say little about the nuances of library use. Two long-term studies provide a greater insight here. The Time Use Survey (TBO) has been conducted by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP together with a number of partners since 1975; every five years, around 2,500 Dutch citizens aged 12 years and older keep a diary for a week in which they record their activities every quarter of an hour, in addition to filling in a questionnaire about their time use. This provides an insight into how much time the Dutch spend on work and in the household, what they do in their free time and how that time use has changed – or remained the same – over time.

SCP has also carried out research every four years since 1979 into the use of public provisions (the Amenities and Services Utilisation Survey, AVO). In this survey, around 14,000 respondents aged six years and older living in more than 6,000 households (one in every thousand) are interviewed about their use of social and cultural amenities such as theatres, youth welfare offices, childcare facilities, etc. This survey thus offers an insight into the use of amenities such as the public library, but also into developments in households over the last 25 years.

Participants in both surveys are asked about their use and membership of public libraries. In the AVO respondents were asked whether they ‘sometimes’ borrow books from the library to read themselves, and in another question are asked whether they have borrowed books ‘in the last four weeks’. This provides information on the relationship between borrowing and membership, and on regular and less regular borrowers. The TBO provides most information on library use, as respondents report when they went to the library, regardless of what they did there (figure 5.5).²

The percentage of people reporting that they sometimes borrow a book increased slightly up to 1995 (AVO), since when it has been falling. The percentage reporting that they had borrowed a book within the last four weeks has been falling for longer and more steeply, and the number of respondents in the TBO reporting that they had visited the library during the survey week has also been falling since 1995. The time visitors spend in the library has however remained fairly constant, at just over three-quarters of an hour per week (TBO). These trends correspond with what the CBS figures showed, namely that the borrowing of books has been declining since the 1990s, and that people who use the library do so less frequently.
Increased efforts have been made in recent years to strengthen the function of the library as a place to be and experience things. With this in mind, the buildings are being designed differently from the buildings of the 1970s and 80s, with their strong focus on the lending function. A coffee corner or café is today no longer an exception in a library, and the presence of comfortable armchairs by the window where people can sit and read a book or newspaper has become a permanent fixture in the public library, along with the exhibition department (for an overview of facilities for specific groups, see Kasperkovitz 2006). The Time Use Survey shows that roughly 10% of people who had visited a library during the survey week were not members. Little in the way of a trend can be discerned in these figures between the different survey years, partly because this is a fairly small group of people. It can therefore not be concluded on the basis of these figures that there has been an increase in visits to libraries for reasons other than borrowing materials. So far, this has in any event not been enough to make a noticeable difference to the decline in library visits (see the bottom curve in figure 5.5), although the possibility is of course not ruled out that an increase in visits for ‘meeting and debate’ has partly compensated for a further fall, for example due to online extension of borrowings.

Regular use is made of other people’s library membership. Around 12% of people who sometimes borrow a book from the library or have someone else borrow for them to read themselves are not themselves members, a percentage which has remained constant throughout the years (AVO). This generally involves using a library card belonging to a fellow household member, although that 12% also
A centre for development and education

A library is not primarily an education establishment. However, thanks to their collections, expert staff and extensive network, libraries are a source of enrichment for all forms of education, both formal and informal. Moreover, libraries are free to develop courses and provide teaching themselves. Libraries are also in an excellent position to organise or support a wide range of courses in the field of cultural and media education at various levels (Guideline for basic libraries, p. 27)

School pupils, especially those at primary school, are the biggest group of library users. Traditionally there have been strong links between primary schools and public libraries, and although more difficult to reach, secondary school pupils are also a core target group. The recent attention for lifelong learning means there is now a focus on a wider group under the header ‘development and education’. Preschool children and adults following courses or other forms of education now also explicitly fall within the group that libraries wish to reach with this function.

The service provided by libraries can be divided into products for institutions (schools, creches) and for individuals. Libraries provide collections especially for schools; sometimes the public library even provides the entire school literature and media library services. Classes are also given guided tours of the library, or a presentation about the possibilities of the digital library.

For individuals, libraries offer large numbers of courses; these are not aimed just at school pupils, but are also open to people wishing to learn about digital applications, whether for their leisure time or to help them improve their labour market position. Libraries now also work together with adult education institutes in several localities, a cooperative venture which offers promise not just in terms of scope, but also in terms of resources and services.

A good example of cooperation between the library and primary schools is the ‘Brede School Bibliotheek’ project in the town of Hoorn in which three primary schools are working together with the library to create a ‘library for and by primary school pupils’. In this project, pupils from year 7 were able to apply for a ‘job’ as a librarian. The selected candidates received library training and now run the library. Each school receives the key to the building for a week every three weeks. All years visit the library during the course of that week to return books and borrow new ones. New activities have also arisen spontaneously, such as readings and guidance in looking for books.

The public library in Amsterdam is collaborating with the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NIZA) to offer a course entitled ‘Dubbelklik: Yo Kaapstad’ (‘Double-click: Yo Cape Town’). This programme comprises a documentary about two Amsterdam hip-hop artists who took a trip to South Africa. When they spent some time in the townships, they discovered that the raps of the local hip-hop artists were not about money, cars or beautiful women, but about essential things such as gangs, AIDS or poverty. The children taking part in the programme write their own raps, which they also record. Each year around 60 school classes take part in this project, and the pupils are very enthusiastic.
Non-use: non-borrowers

Ranged against those who use the library on someone else’s membership card is a group who, though members of a library, never borrow any books (figure 5.6). The turnover among these ‘non-borrowers’ is much higher, which means it is a precursor to ending library membership (Stalpers 2004). The percentage of members who had not borrowed any books in the four weeks preceding the survey has been rising since 1983, an indication that the frequency of library use by members is reducing. The figures from the Time Use Survey (TBO) support this; here again, the percentage of members who had not been to the library during the survey week, after being stable throughout the 1980s, has been rising since.

Figure 5.6
Library borrowing and visits by membership, 1975-2005 (in percentages)

The Amenities and Services Utilisation Survey (AVO) also shows that the number of members reporting that they never borrow books to read themselves is rising steadily, though the number of people involved is smaller. It may be that these people are subsidising members of the library, but it is certainly not impossible that they will decide at a later point in time to give up their membership.

The reducing intensity of library use is also reflected in the number of books that people borrow. Library members in the AVO survey who sometimes borrow a book took home an average of 3.1 books in the four weeks prior to the survey in 2003; non-members who sometimes borrowed books borrowed an average of 1.1 books. The figures for both groups were considerably higher in 1983, at 5.2 and 3.1, respectively. It may be that the introduction of lending right fees in the period 1995-1996, which in many libraries resulted in borrowers having to pay a fee per book borrowed,
made borrowers more choosy in the books they selected. Nonetheless, the figures also show that the downturn in the number of books borrowed has continued since then.

**Use: computer and Internet**

One in five people (19.7%) used a computer in the library in 2003: 5% of non-members and 43% of members (AVO). These numbers were all slightly higher in 1999. The difference in computer use in the library between people who do or do not borrow items is comparable. Although library catalogues have for many years only been available for consultation via a computer, more than half the people who sometimes borrow books do not use this facility; instead, they find books that interest them by wandering along the bookshelves, either searching specifically or simply browsing, or by looking in the trolley or rack containing recently returned books.

**Table 5.2**

Computer use in the library, by membership and computer activity, population aged 6 years and older, 1999-2003 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999 member</th>
<th>1999 non-member</th>
<th>2003 member</th>
<th>2003 non-member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>computer used</td>
<td>to consult catalogue</td>
<td>to use CD-ROM</td>
<td>to consult external databases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-member</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-member</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (AVO'99-'03)

Library members naturally use computers in the library more often for consulting the catalogue (they will more frequently be at the library in order to borrow a book), but for the other possible uses the digital service is of more interest to non-members than members (table 5.2), and will often be the main reason for this group visiting the library. In 2003, for example, 29% of computer users who were not members of the library used the computer for the Internet, almost 12 percentage points more than the comparable use by members. As well as consulting the catalogue, this is also the only application that is used to any extent; very few users consult CD-ROMs or external databases.

Usage figures for a number of digital services provided by Dutch public libraries are available for the last two years. The website www.bibliotheek.nl attracted around 1.3 million visitors per year during that period. Data from the Library Information System (BIS, see www.bibliotheekonderzoek.nl) show that the number of visits to library websites itself was higher, but also more volatile: 11 million in 2004, 34 mil-
Trends in library use

lion in 2005 and 21 million in 2006. Many of these hits will relate to the extension of items borrowed, but what proportion these form of the total is not clear. What is known from www.bibliotheek.nl is that the purpose of this use is often to find the address or website details of the user’s local library.

Libraries also use the GIDS system, a database in which the local library and its partners can store addresses and products of local organisations in order to create websites featuring information on the local area. The number of organisations in this database has increased almost tenfold within the space of two years. Tests by the Consumentengids consumer magazine, which is available via the computers in the library, were viewed 61,000 times between autumn 2006 and autumn 2007, a fall compared with a year earlier. There has been a similar fall in the use of a number of other digital databases to which the library offers access.

One exception to this downward trend is in the use of Krantenbank, a digital archive of the main Dutch daily newspapers. Roughly a million articles are requested from this database each year, and since Krantenbank can be accessed directly from schools, so that it is no longer necessary to go physically to the library holding, the number of articles requested has increased sharply. As with the use of al@din (about which more later in this chapter), and the as yet incomplete www.schoolbieb.nl school library website, the use of Krantenbank clearly follows the school calendar, with a decline in use in the summer months and a sharp increase in September and October.

Various digital databases provide information on books and authors as well as offering access to reviews, articles and excerpts. These sites receive between 600,000 and 2 million hits per year. One exception is Meer over Media (‘More about Media’, MoM), a database containing reviews, texts from book covers and portraits of authors, and published by NBD Biblion. Since access was improved, MoM has been receiving roughly one and a half million hits per month.

The figures on the use of the digital library raise a number of questions and problems. The different forms of use that are measured (page views, questions answered, articles called up) make comparisons difficult; further harmonisation here would be welcome. The decline in the use of various services in 2006 to 2007 also requires an explanation. What is however clear from the various examples is that where access to a digital service improves, for example the making available of the Krantenbank newspaper database in schools, its use increases markedly. It is thus likely that the use of other services would also be fostered by learning from these examples and improving accessibility.
Résumé
Library use is declining in all measurable forms: memberships, visits by members, borrowing and the number of books borrowed have all been falling since the 1990s. This has happened in spite of an increase in libraries’ media budgets, a more or less stable number of branches and a collection that is shrinking less rapidly than the number of endings. Use of computers in libraries also shows a downward trend as the penetration of computers with (broadband) Internet connections at home increases, a subject which is discussed in chapter 6.

5.2 Trends in library use based on personal characteristics

The broad outlines of library use as described in section 5.1 make clear that the traditional services of public libraries have been losing ground over the last 15 years. This naturally raises questions about the underlying causes. Why is it that in a population that is still growing, the number of library members is falling?

A first step towards an answer is to analyse the trends for different subgroups. If the trends differ between men and women or between young and older people, for example, this could provide pointers for an explanation. In addition, there are a number of assumptions in the library sector about library use which are not always correct. This section therefore serves as a sort of reality check: to what extent are public libraries able to reach different sections of the population with their services?

Gender
Library membership and use are higher among women than men in all years of the AVO and TBO surveys. Membership among men has been falling faster since 1995 than among women, as has the percentage of male visitors to the library (figure 5.7). In 2005 (TBO) only just over six men were members of a library for every ten women, compared with nine men for every ten women in 1995, and eight men for every ten women in 1980. For every ten women who had visited the library during the TBO survey week in 2005, fewer than four men did so. In 1995 five men went to the library for every ten women, and in 1980 the proportion was seven men for every ten women. This difference begins at an early age: girls (living at home) are more often members of a library in all survey years than boys, and also visit the library more often. The increased labour market participation rate of women evidently does not mean they are no longer able to visit the library, possibly because Dutch women often work part-time.
Young and old

Whether or not people sometimes borrow books is greatly dependent on age. As figure 5.8 shows, young people are the most frequent visitors to the library; this declines sharply from around age 10 until their early 20s; it then rises slightly again until around the age of 40, probably due to parents accompanying their children, after which library use declines again. Library membership is lowest among older people. The curve in the figure shows the average for all seven AVO survey years.5 2003 is the only year in which the percentage of library visitors in their 20s was notably lower than in the earlier years.

The high participation by young people and children is undoubtedly helped by a free or cheaper membership. The usually strong ties between schools and libraries, especially primary schools (see chapter 3), will also contribute to greater library use by these age groups. Once people have to begin paying (in full) for their membership, the library evidently loses its attraction for many of them. Nonetheless, it is clear that in the teenage years, too, when membership is still (partially) free, interest is already falling sharply.
The trend in recent years shows a comparable picture for memberships, borrowing books in general and borrowing books in the last four weeks. Figure 5.9 shows the trend in recent borrowing of books by different age groups. After increasing until the early/mid-1980s, a decline in library use can be observed in all age groups, at least from 1995 onwards, and for even longer among young people. Membership figures, and actual library visits as measured in the Time Use Survey (tbo), show more or less the same trend. The sharp fall among teenagers and young adults is striking, beginning as it did as early as 1983, well before the introduction of the Internet (more about this can be found in § 5.3). The decline among children and older adults only began in the early 1990s.
Storehouse of knowledge and information

Well-informed citizens have an advantage in many areas over less well-informed peers in their region, town or country. Our society has become so complex that without sufficient knowledge and information it is becoming increasingly difficult to take part in social life as a responsible and assertive citizen. It is not for nothing that the terms ‘information society’ and ‘information era’ are in common currency. Political and government actions are also inaccessible to citizens who are not aware of what is happening at those levels. It is therefore crucial for the democratic process and social cohesion that the threshold to that knowledge is as low as possible and that citizens are enabled to find their way through this labyrinth in a neutral way. Particular groups of users, such as children, the elderly and the disabled often have special information needs which the basic library must also be able to meet. (Guidelines for basic libraries, p. 24)

Libraries fulfil this function in many different ways. The non-fiction collection is an obvious example, as is the provision of information. Information points are present in many hybrids today, focusing on special topics such as youth, government or care, often in collaboration with other institutions. An interesting example of a new way in which the information task of the library is being fulfilled is al@din.

Al@din is a digital question and answer service offered by libraries. In the past it was necessary to go to the library in person in order to put a substantive question. Later this was possible by telephone, and since 2003 users can ask questions via e-mail, and more recently also via chat, which are initially answered by librarians in their own region. If they are unable to provide an answer, the question is passed on to specialised teams, organised by topic. For example, there is a special Legislation and Law team and an Economics and Employment team. The aim is to answer questions within 24 hours, or at least to respond and give an indication of when the answer will be provided. Answers are incorporated in a database on the website. Questions to which al@din does not know the answer are placed in a special ‘brain-breakers’ section of the website. Many countries have comparable services, which as far as is known to receive only a fraction of the number of questions processed by al@din (Hillebrink 2006b). In the period from autumn 2006 to Autumn 2007, almost 80,000 answers were sent out, slightly more than half the number in the previous year. A major media campaign, specifically targeting the young, led to a sharp increase in the number of questions at that time. The al@din website also allows users to browse answers to earlier questions. The 720,000 visits to the al@din website in 2005 may well have provided an answer in many cases, without leading to a registered question and answer.
Figure 5.9
Borrowed at least one book in the last four weeks, by age, population aged 6 years and older, 1979-2003 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>≤ 11 years</th>
<th>12-19 years</th>
<th>20-34 years</th>
<th>35-49 years</th>
<th>50-64 years</th>
<th>≥ 65 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (AVO'79-'03)

Education level
Better-educated people use the library more often, but the level of use is falling for all education levels (figure 5.10). The differences between education levels are reducing, because the decline is steeper among the better-educated population groups. Borrowing, memberships and library visits show comparable trends.

The AVO survey, which also includes primary school pupils, shows falling library memberships at all education levels, except among primary school pupils. The same applies for borrowing books to read oneself, and to an even greater extent for borrowing books in the preceding four weeks, where a slight fall is also observed among primary school pupils.
Lower, middle and higher income groups
People in higher-income households are more often members of a library, and more often borrow books (figure 5.11). Of those living in low-income households, 29% were members of a library in 2003 and 20% had borrowed one or more books in the four weeks prior to the survey. The corresponding figures for respondents in households with a high income were 43% and 28%. In all three groups, borrowing is falling. The differences become narrower over the years because library membership and use are falling more steeply among the higher income groups.

People in households with higher incomes more often borrow books without themselves being a member of the library than people in lower-income households. The percentage of non-borrowers is lower in higher-income households. This suggests that higher income groups use their library memberships rather more efficiently, more often using available memberships, both their own and those of others.
Figure 5.11
Borrowed at least one book in the last four weeks, by income, population aged 6 years and older, 1979-2003 (in percentages)

Source: SCP (AVO’79-’03)

Town and countryside
People both in large cities and in rural areas borrow less than they did two decades ago. The decline in the four largest cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht is slightly larger relatively speaking than in medium-sized towns and smaller municipalities (figure 5.12). On the other hand, in more recent years (between 1999 and 2003), the fall has been slightly greater outside the four largest cities. On balance, the mutual relationship has remained unchanged: people in the least urbanised municipalities borrow the most, followed at a short distance by medium-sized municipalities and at some distance by the four largest cities.
Parents of (young) children
Children are most often members of a library, followed by mothers and cohabiting women without children (tbo). Cohabiting men without children and the over-65s are least often members of a library. All groups show a comparable and by now recognisable trend over the years, in which the difference between men and women is also visible: the reduction has been steep in recent years among fathers and cohabiting men, while virtually no decline is apparent among mothers and cohabiting women without children.

The AVO survey also shows that parents are more often members of a library than adults without children, and that the chance of parents being members of a library is greatest when their children are aged between 7 and 12 years. This leads to the suspicion that parents follow their children in their membership: children aged between 7 and 12 years are the most frequent library users. However, the converse could also be the case, namely that library use is greatest among children of parents who go to the library. We shall return to the issue of ‘renewed memberships’ (adults who have not been a member for some time but who return to the library when they have children) later in this chapter.
Ethnicity
It is known from earlier research (Huysmans 2006b) that there is a difference in library use between ethnic minority and indigenous Dutch citizens. The increase in library membership and use among Turkish and Moroccan Dutch citizens since the mid-1990s is striking, given that the figures in all other groups have fallen (table 5.3). Whereas in 1995 there was still a wide gap between the percentage of subscribed users among indigenous citizens and Turks and Moroccans, this difference had completely disappeared by 2003 (but compare the persistent differences found in another study, table 5.4). Moreover, the percentage of recent borrowers among Turks and Moroccans in that year was slightly higher than among indigenous Dutch citizens, though the difference is not statistically significant.
Table 5.3
Membership of libraries and recent borrowing of books, by origin, 1995-2003 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>recent borrowing of books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turks and Moroccans</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surinamese and Antilleans/Arubans</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other ethnic minorities</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indigenous Dutch</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (AVO'95-'03)

To gain a greater insight into the differences between indigenous and ethnic minority groups, we use the survey of the life situation of ethnic minorities (LAS) which is carried out jointly by SCP and Statistics Netherlands (CBS). For this survey, four groups of working age ethnic minorities (Moroccans, Turks, Antilleans/Arubans and Surinamese) living in the 50 largest municipalities in the Netherlands were approached in 2004 and 2005, together with a control group of indigenous citizens (roughly 800 respondents in each group). Among other things, the respondents were asked about their free time, the division of tasks within the household and the use of amenities and services, including the public library.

Table 5.4
Library visits by origin, population of 50 largest towns aged 15 – 65 years, 2004/2005 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>library visits by visitors</th>
<th>last 12 months</th>
<th>once a week or more</th>
<th>once every one or two weeks</th>
<th>once every three or four weeks</th>
<th>once a month or less</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turks</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroccans</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surinamese</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antilleans/Arubans</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indigenous Dutch</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (LAS'04/’05)

Participants in the survey were asked whether and how often they had been to the library for their own use during the preceding 12 months. Two-thirds had not done so, while a third had visited the library on one or more occasions. 60% of those who
had visited the library had done so once a month or less; 21% did so at least once every two weeks.

Of the various ethnic groups, the indigenous group and Moroccans had been to the library most often at any given time in the preceding 12 months, Surinamese the least often. A comparable difference emerges in the regularity of library visits: Moroccans visit the library most often (on average once every 2 1/2 weeks), Surinamese the least often (an average of once every four weeks). The difference between men and women is bigger in some groups than others: Moroccan women barely visit the library more often than men, whereas in the Surinamese group there is a considerable difference, as there is in the population as a whole. Turks are the only group where men visit the library more often than women.8

It also emerges from the LAS survey that younger members of ethnic minorities go to the library more often than their older peers; where 62% of 15-19 year-olds had been to the library in the 12 months prior to the survey, this applied for only 18% of 55-65 year-olds.

Figure 5.14
Number of library visits per year, by age and origin, residents of the 50 biggest municipalities, aged 15-65 years, 2004/2005 (in percentages)

There are however considerable differences according to ethnic origin. The indigenous group show a markedly different library visiting pattern from the total urban population. Whereas the level of library use is low among young indigenous people and increases slightly towards their middle years, the reverse trend is seen among ethnic minorities: in these groups, and especially young Turks and Moroccans, the
library is visited frequently by people below the age of 25 years, but rarely once they are above that age. Undoubtedly reading skills, in Dutch or the language of origin, play a role for older Turks and (to a slightly lesser extent) Moroccans. This problem is much less pronounced for ‘mature’ Surinamese and Antilleans (Turkenburg & Gijsberts 2007), whereas they also visit the library infrequently. Of more importance than reading skills, therefore, would appear to be whether the person in question grew up in a ‘reading culture’.

Whether Moroccan and Turkish children aged under 15 years also make more use of the library cannot be pinpointed with this study. (It would be interesting to know whether there is a difference based on ethnic origin in library use by primary school children, where the total use is much higher.) Additionally, we can only guess at the reason why Turkish and Morroccan teenagers use the library so much more than indigenous teenagers. It may be that the latter group more often have access to the Internet at home, and that there is therefore less need for them to go to the library. It may also be that ethnic minority teenagers more often use the library as a place to study. Members of ethnic minorities tend to live in smaller houses, and in Turkish and Morroccan households in particular the number of square metres per person is considerably lower than in indigenous households (Kullberg & Ras 2007). This could be a reason why Turkish and Morroccan teenagers go to the library more often. What is in any event clear is that this group continue to use the library in a phase of life when indigenous teenagers have turned their backs on the public library en masse, and that they are therefore an interesting ‘target group’. Given the anticipated further spread of people of Turkish and Morroccan origin across the larger towns outside the four largest cities (see chapter 3), their frequent library use is something that could be specifically targeted by libraries in those towns.

Encyclopaedia of arts and culture

Thanks to its broad approach to the arts and culture, the public basic library occupies a central position within local cultural life. Arts and culture are what bind people together, but at the same time what distinguish them from each other. The public library belongs to everyone, and is therefore also a place where the cultural expressions of people from different cultural backgrounds must be given voice. Through their cultural expressions people get to know each other. Sharing cultural achievements results in peaceful confrontations, mutual understanding and respect. The cultural function of the basic library therefore extends to non-Western culture. (Guideline for basic libraries, p. 32)

The way in which the cultural function is fulfilled by the public library is generally twofold: a mix of its own offerings and collaboration with cultural institutions. In the collaboration with museums, theatres and music venues, relationships are established which can lead to mutual increases in reach, and which enable the library to draw the attention of groups which may not have been aware of it to other cultural facets. Other activities are also organised in libraries,
from theatre performances to exhibitions, which offer ample opportunity for focusing attention on the collection held in relation to a specific theme.

In the province of Noord-Brabant, people presenting their library card receive a discount for entrance to cultural activities such as performances, exhibitions and day trips. This project is being implemented by the provincial services organisation Cubiss, in collaboration with the cultural promotion agency Uit in Brabant and the provincial authorities, and was commissioned by the library directors in the province. For cultural institutions, this is a good way of bringing their offering to the attention of hundreds of thousands of library members in the province of Noord-Brabant.

Résumé
When broken down by a number of characteristics, it is found that library use is not decreasing equally rapidly in all groups, and that the decline in some groups has been under way for longer than in others:

− the fall in membership and borrowing is more marked among men than women;
− the fall in borrowing began as early as 1983 among teenagers (12-19 years) and young adults; in other groups it began later (1991/1995);
− the downturn is more marked among those with the highest education level; it is less strong among the low-educated, but their library use is also falling; the difference between education levels is thus reducing;
− library use is declining in all three income groups, but becomes more marked as income increases (cf. education);
− library use is falling at more or less the same rate in large cities and in medium-sized and smaller municipalities;
− Dutch citizens of Turkish and Moroccan origin are the only group to contradict the downward trend; library membership and recent library use have increased in these groups, partly as a result of the age profile of these groups (younger) compared with the indigenous population;
− Dutch citizens of Turkish and Moroccan origin also show a different trend in library use by age: unlike the indigenous population, library use in these groups is high among teenagers and virtually absent among older adults. Factors that play a role here are difficulties with the language and not having grown up in a ‘reading culture’.

5.3 Explanatory factors
The trends in library use by different population groups have brought a number of things to light. In the first place it is noteworthy that, with the exception of just one group (Dutch citizens of Turkish and Moroccan origin), library membership and use are falling across the board. This appears to suggest that there are factors at work – the digitalisation of media and information is an obvious candidate – which affect
the entire population. Arguments in favour of this include the sharper fall in groups which were the first to embrace the digital media: the more highly educated and higher income groups, young people and young adults.

An argument against digitalisation being the only explanatory factor is the observation that for many groups the decline began long before 1995. The popularity of libraries has been falling among young people and young adults since as long ago as 1983, whereas the Internet only became a ‘home medium’ in the second half of the 1990s (and even then with limited transmission capacity via the telephone line with dial-up modem). The rising trend among Dutch citizens of Turkish and Moroccan origin – who are also increasingly online – also contradicts this. Other diagnoses also refer to a decline in the popularity of reading which has been under way for some time (Knutlst & Kraaykamp 1996), a trend which is related among other things to the rise of television as a leisure time medium and the reduced amount of leisure time in some segments of the population, especially those in the middle age categories (see Breedveld et al. 2006 and www.tijdbesteding.nl).

In short, it is too simple to assume that there is just one explanatory factor behind the declining popularity of the public library. In this section we discuss a number of possibly mutually reinforcing explanations. Some of them relate specifically to the library sector (introduction of lending right fees, introduction of membership fees for young people), while others apply to the entire media landscape. In each case we indicate whether the factors proposed are substantiated by research, or – where no research is present – make a comment about the plausibility of the explanation offered.

Generational decline in borrowing and reading?
If it is true that a decline in reading is taking place, in the sense of less frequent and less intensive use of printed media\(^\text{10}\) as carriers of information and culture, then it is no more than logical that this should affect libraries. However, there is some controversy as to whether such a decline in reading is actually happening. Booksellers and publishers rightly point to the rising numbers of published titles and sales figures in recent years. Researchers (including the authors of this study), counter this with the argument that publishing and selling are not the same thing as actually reading. Figures from both the AVO and TBO surveys, produced using differing measurement methods and question formulations, show that the reading of printed media, and especially newspapers, has been dwindling in popularity since the middle of the 1970s, and possibly longer (cf. Knulst & Kraaykamp 1996; Huysmans et al. 2004; Huysmans 2007; www.tijdbesteding.nl).\(^\text{11}\)

In chapter 6 we look at this trend in more detail. What is important for the discussion here is that the research shows that younger generations begin with a lower level of reading frequency and reading time than older generations and do not start to read more as they grow older. This would appear to suggest a generational decline in reading. Here we explore whether there is evidence for a similar generational effect in the decline in library borrowing.
For a deeper insight into generational differences we use birth cohorts, divided into groups each of eight birth years. We do the same thing with age, creating age groups of eight years. This corresponds with the intervals between the survey years, enabling us to compare borrowing of library books by successive generations on the basis of the figures in boxes in table 5.5. We see that of the birth cohort 1942-1949, when it was aged between 30 and 37 years (in 1979), 30% had borrowed a book from the library to read themselves during the preceding four weeks. If we follow the horizontal line within the box, we see that eight years later, at the age of 38-45 years (i.e. in 1987), this figure had risen marginally to 32%. Another eight years later the figure had fallen to 24%, falling again (in 2003), at the age of 54-61 years, to 20%. In other words, this cohort broadly follows the pattern that is found for the population as a whole (see figure 5.8).

If we read table 5.5 vertically, we obtain an impression of the differences in library use for successive cohorts at the same age (i.e. in roughly the same phase of life). Starting with the same 30% for the 1942-1949 cohort at the age of 30-37 years, we see that 31% of the next cohort (1950-1957) eight years later, when it had reached the same age category, had borrowed a book during the preceding four weeks. Another eight years later the figure was 27% for the next cohort, and in the final measurement, when the birth cohort from 1966-1973 had reached the age of 30-37 years, the figure had fallen further to 17%. The pattern for library membership is comparable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Cohort</th>
<th>6-13 yrs</th>
<th>14-21 yrs</th>
<th>22-29 yrs</th>
<th>30-37 yrs</th>
<th>38-45 yrs</th>
<th>46-53 yrs</th>
<th>54-61 yrs</th>
<th>62-69 yrs</th>
<th>70-77 yrs</th>
<th>78-85 yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>t/m 1917</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1918-1925</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1926-1933</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-1941</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>1942-1949</td>
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<td>1950-1957</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-1965</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-1973</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-1981</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982 en later</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

Source: SCP (AVO’79-’03)

It is clear that the youngest cohorts begin (at the age of 6-13 years) with a high level of use. People who were of school age when the Public Libraries Act was introduced in 1975 visited the library often during their youth. But the habit of borrowing books
proves not to be a permanent one. In 2003, 17% of the group born between 1966 and 1973 (who were then aged 30-37 years) had borrowed a book in the preceding four weeks, less than all cohorts before them at the same age. In 1979 the figure for this cohort was 71%, depicting a decline which is only exceeded by the cohort that comes after them, showing that within the space of 16 years the percentage had fallen from 71% to 15%.

A decline in library use is visible in all cohorts, but is less dramatic in the older cohorts, who never used the library in large numbers, than among younger cohorts. The figures also make clear that there is no question of a revival in library use in any cohort. The assumption that people join the library again when they have children of their own is contradicted by these figures (see also figure 5.8). If such a phenomenon is occurring, then the decline in library use among members of the same cohort without children is evidently so great that it is completely masked.

In the same figure 5.8 it appeared as if library use was reasonably constant after the age of 40. As cohorts age, however, the level of library use declines in all of them. This means that library use actually declines as the years advance, but that the ageing population compensates for this decline: the proportion of older people who go to the library is falling less quickly than the proportion of younger people, and since there are relatively more older people in the total population, the net use remains reasonably constant. Given the predictions concerning the population profile, it is likely that even if the proportion of older people using the library also declines, the growth in the size of this group in absolute terms will continue to compensate for this decline for some time yet.

Podium for meeting and debate

Whether it is to discuss weighty themes such as integration, social cohesion or good citizenship, or a very human need for contact, we cannot do without a place where meetings can take place between people and cultures. Part of the essential role of the public library is to provide such a meeting place. The social function of libraries comprises all activities aimed at establishing contact between individuals and between groups. The simple fact that libraries are public buildings creates ample opportunities for such meetings, which can be exploited by creating a reading room, or a reading café with good facilities such as a coffee corner. The library can literally offer space for social debate by organising discussion evenings. Social cohesion is strengthened by organising activities aimed at (civic) integration or at raising the status of a neighbourhood. (Guideline for public libraries, p. 40)

This function of the library goes back to the earliest days, when the emphasis lay much more on the group reading and discussion of books. In modern libraries, there is increasing attention for the social function. The opportunity to read newspapers and magazines in the library whilst drinking a cup of coffee is widely used, particularly in the large cities. In addition, libraries
project themselves as places for discussion, by organising lectures and meetings, often with a link to other functions.

Libraries also do a great deal in relation to integration and emancipation. In the Laakkwartier district of The Hague, for example, an emancipation project was organised (*Het heft in eigen handen*) together with the emancipation organisation Importante. The project helped women from the Laakkwartier district, a relatively invisible group, to improve their self-confidence and assertiveness. Participants were very enthusiastic, and the project led many of them to begin studying, take up voluntary work or start their own businesses.

**Competition for reading books from other media and the Internet?**
One of the explanations put forward for dwindling library use is that the printed book faces increasing competition from other media, especially the Internet. Naturally, this is linked to the foregoing explanation, but the emphasis is different. We discuss this topic in more depth in chapters 6 and 7. Here it will suffice to observe that television and the computer have had an impact on reading and information search behaviour, and therefore on the public library. These effects differ for fiction and non-fiction, however, and are not the same for all age groups.

**More buying and giving of books, less borrowing?**
The decline in the borrowing of books is sometimes also ascribed to the increase in prosperity, which means people have begun buying more books. And indeed, people’s most recently read book is increasingly one they have bought or received as a gift and comes less and less often from their own book collection or, since 1995, from the library (see also Hillebrink & Huysmans 2007b). The reduction in reading is therefore less apparent in bookshops. By contrast, this trend reinforces the downturn in library borrowing figures: not only are people reading less, they are also less likely to borrow the books they do read.
Some differences emerge when the figures are analysed by education level. However, these differences are not uniform (table 5.6); although the better educated more often buy books themselves than those with a secondary or lower education level, the increase since 1980 has not been greater among the better educated.

Table 5.6
Origin of most recently read book, by education level, population aged 12 years and older (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purchased</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gift</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purchased</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gift</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purchased</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gift</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (TBO’80-’05)
The decline in the use of the library as a source of the most recently read book is smallest among the lower-educated (28%), but the increase in buying the most recently read book or receiving it as a gift is greatest in the middle group.

Dissatisfaction with service provided?
One reason for the declining use of public libraries could lie in people’s dissatisfaction with the service or service delivery they receive from the library. An SCP survey of quality in the services sector (Kwaliteit van de Quartaire Sector, KQS) in 2006 provides some information on this. The survey measured public satisfaction with publicly funded or maintained amenities such as care, education, housing, judicial and police services, municipal services, employment and the public library.

Half the respondents in this survey had occasionally visited the library in the preceding year. They were asked for their opinion on various aspects of the service provided by the library that they visited most (table 5.7). Library users were most positive in their views on the staff, in particular their friendliness, and on the accessibility of the library. They were less positive regarding the opening times and the collections. These results are almost identical to those in the customer satisfaction surveys carried out within the library sector itself (see www.bibliotheekonderzoek.nl; cf. also Kasperkovitz 2006); respondents in those surveys, too, were most appreciative about the staff and least about the opening times and the topicality of the collection (VOB 2004). Another aspect that received a relatively lukewarm response from participants in these surveys – probably because they had never taken part – was not included in the KQS survey, namely the activities organised by libraries and the information they provide on those activities.

Table 5.7
Opinions of visitors on aspects of public library services, 2006 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>poor/moderate</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>very good/excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>size of the collection</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accessibility of the collection</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quality of the books and other media (CD/DVD)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provision of information</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expertise of staff</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friendliness of staff</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accessibility of library</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opening hours</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affordability (contribution, borrowing fees)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>availability of Internet in the library</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library website</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading room (layout, number of newspapers and magazines)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (KQS’06)
There are small differences in opinions on the services of the library depending on personal characteristics. Women, who go to the library more often and borrow more books, are less enthusiastic about the availability of titles. People with a lower education level (and with a lower income on average) more often assess the affordability negatively. Older library visitors are more positive in their opinions than younger visitors, especially about the staff and opening hours. Parents of children aged under 12 are less positive in their views about the library, especially regarding the quality of the collection and the opening hours. People in smaller municipalities are less positive about the collection, especially its size, but the staff are evidently friendlier there.

The respondents in the KQS survey who had not visited the library during the year prior to the survey were asked what the main reason was for this. For almost half of them (39%) the main reason was that they buy books themselves if they want to read; 19% said they were too busy, while 17% had no interest in reading. The cost of using the library and the opening hours prevented hardly anyone from visiting it, despite the relatively negative views of users on the opening hours. British research into the role of opening hours revealed a similar difference: although great dissatisfaction with opening hours is regularly measured, non-users rarely cite this as a reason. The very limited amount of empirical research that has been carried out here nonetheless suggests a negative correlation between the more limited opening hours and numbers of items lent (Grindlay & Morris 2004b). In localities in the Netherlands where opening hours have been extended, much greater visitor numbers are often recorded, although this often takes place in conjunction with a facelift of the branch in question, and it may be this which is responsible for the increase in visitor numbers.

Men reported slightly more often than women that their reason for not going to the library is that they have no interest in reading. Below the age of 65, people prefer to buy books and are more often too busy to go to the library. People with a lower education level buy books less often and more often have no interest in reading. There are no significant differences according to degree of urbanisation.

To the extent that an insight can be obtained into the satisfaction of library users from the KQS survey and the customer satisfaction surveys of the libraries themselves, this appears to be reasonably stable. The degree of satisfaction with libraries which emerges from these surveys does not explain why memberships and library use are reducing. One explanation for this may lie in the design of the two surveys, in which the opinions of people who do not use the library are not represented (customer satisfaction surveys), or are represented to only a limited extent (KQS). If the people who use the library are positive in their views on it, the level of satisfaction will not fall even if the group of respondents providing this answer shrinks steadily. The small group who give up membership or use of the library each year is difficult to identify. Especially in customer satisfaction surveys, where frequent visitors generally have a greater likelihood of being included in the survey, this could produce a distorted picture. Thorough research into the opinions of non-users and those
giving up membership and use could provide more insight into this, but to date such research has not been carried out on a national scale.

Another, more economically coloured explanation may be that people’s opinions are ultimately less of a determinant for use, but that the perceived utility is more decisive. It is quite feasible to assume that people who do not use the library are just as positive in their views on it as those who do use the library, but are able to obtain what the library has to offer more simply elsewhere. This could mean that what libraries have to offer (to the extent that these people are aware of this) does not match their needs, but also that the restrictions are such that it is simpler for them to pursue a different path to arrive at the same point (see chapter 7). The fact that many people report that they do not use of the library because they prefer to buy their books themselves is an example of this. The reading experience is ultimately the same, but buying a book takes less effort because it does not have to be returned or extended and there is no fine to pay for returning a book late. It also has the advantage that the book remains in the house after it has been read, enabling it to be re-read if desired, and it looks nice on the bookshelf. For most people, these considerations appear to outweigh the higher financial outlay.

Introduction of the lending right fee?
The (almost) free lending of books has long been a thorn in the flesh of authors, who have to live from the sale of their books. However much libraries contributed to promoting reading and therefore to boosting sales figures, the feeling remained that there was unfair competition between libraries and bookshops. After a long debate, lending right fees were finally introduced in 1995/1996. A small amount is levied on every book lent which is paid to the holders of the copyright.

Many libraries passed these costs on to the client by charging a financial contribution for each book borrowed. This may have contributed to the decline in the lending figures. Borrowers who had previously taken home a pile of books from which they would then make their selection were now, according to this argument, making a selection before going to the lending counter. However logical this explanation may seem, it is not supported by the figures presented in figure 5.4. If this explanation held water, one would have expected to see a sharp fall after 1995/1996 followed by a consolidation of the number of lendings. No figures are available from Statistics Netherlands (CBS) for the years 1996 and 1997, so there is no way of knowing for certain whether or not this actually happened. However, developments in 1998 and subsequently suggest a continuous fall since the middle of the 1990s, to which the period 1996-1997 does not form an exception – though it may be that the effect reinforced the trend somewhat.

Introduction of contribution for young people?
Explanation for the limited use of libraries by young people and young adults who used libraries on a large scale early in life, is sometimes sought in the fee structure. Library membership is free for children, but from the age of 18 a contribution has to
be paid (some libraries also charge a reduced fee before this). As the arrangements vary from library to library, it is not possible to say anything about this with any certainty based on the currently available figures. On the one hand it is plausible that the costs of membership play a role in whether or not people join the library, but on the other hand the decline in library use sets in from around the age of 12, an age at which library membership is still free almost everywhere. As will become clear in chapter 6, teenagers read relatively little and spend a lot of time on the Internet. The library may consequently offer less added value for them. The high library use by Turkish and Moroccan teenagers is intriguing in this regard, and further research into this could contribute to a better understanding of this aspect.

Less subsidy?
In the first joint agreement (Koepelconvenant) between central government, the provincial and local authorities, the parties agreed that there would be no spending cuts in the public library network during the period of the library renewal project. If the national figures published by Statistics Netherlands (CBS) are used as a yardstick, it is difficult to speak of a cut in spending: the subsidy paid to the library network rises year on year. This does not offer the fact that there are wide differences between local and provincial authorities. The Library Renewal Monitor (Monitor Bibliotheekvernieuwing) 2005 reveals that 29% of the responding local authorities maintained or increased budgeted spending on public libraries between 2004 and 2005. The same applied in five of the 12 Dutch provinces. In both cases, therefore, a majority of municipalities/provinces maintained or increased budgeted spending on public libraries (Kasperkovitz 2005). Where spending cuts were made, staff were shed, savings were made on renewal of collections, opening hours were restricted and sometimes branches had to close (the national figures show a modest reduction in the number of branches from 2003 onwards; see figure 5.1). The reduction in the total combined library collection (figure 5.2) may also be connected with this, but need not by definition point to spending cuts; it could also be the result of rational collection policy (clearing out and not replacing out-of-date titles) and, in the recent period, of upscaling and mergers in the library landscape. It may also be the result of combining collections and removal of duplications in the collections of what were previously separate library organisations.

The absolute amount of subsidy does not tell us very much; all manner of price increases first have to be taken into account. For example, the price of books may have increased, as may the price of labour (generic pay rises in the sector), and of course there are the costs of accommodation: central libraries are often in A-locations, which have become more expensive in recent years. Further research into the increased costs of accommodation, labour and collection-building is needed in order to be able to say with greater certainty whether the subsidies in recent years have kept pace with the increased costs. What is in any event clear is that those costs have
not fallen. In municipalities where subsidies have been frozen or have even reduced, therefore, it would seem certain that the quality of service will have suffered.

**Source of inspiration for reading and literature**

*Writing, reading and speaking the same language strengthen the sense of belonging together. Command of foreign languages enables us to learn about what is going on elsewhere and to test the ideas of others against our own beliefs. Language is moreover the instrument of literature and of the humanities.*

*The ability to read critically is the most important key to unlocking the hidden treasures of the library. Reading is an indispensable skill for those who wish to satisfy their curiosity by establishing relationships between different texts, or who are in search of new insights. There is no better environment for this kind of activity than a library. Books and printed information are the traditional core products of the library. No other institution can match this.* (Guideline for basic libraries, p. 36)

In addition to the collection, which is of course an important element of this function, libraries also develop many specific services in relation to reading and literature. These services often relate to the promotion of reading. Examples include the easy reading forum for children with reading difficulties (and their parents and teachers), campaigns associated with the national book week and the annual Nederland Leest (‘Holland Reading Event’) campaign, in which members of libraries receive a title free of charge.

A surprising example is the ‘grandchildren’s surprise box’ (logeerkoffertje). Grandparents can borrow this from the library when their grandchildren come to stay. It contains picture books, CDs with songs, books for reading aloud, etc. It has to be returned to the library after two or three weeks, but librarians usually put in a few surprises as well which can be kept.

**Résumé**

A number of possible explanations for the reduction in library use are explored in this section. In summary, we can say the following about this:

– there is an unmistakable generational decline in the reading and borrowing of books. This suggests competition for printed media from other media, especially the Internet – though this only affects books in the non-fiction segment. Libraries also face competition from the fact that people buy more books and receive more books as gifts and borrow less; it is uncertain whether the reduction in subsidies in some municipalities plays a role in the decline in library use;

– the fall in borrowing and membership cannot be attributed to increased dissatisfaction with the service provided by libraries. Users are satisfied. Those who no longer visit the library choose alternative methods, but still tend to have a positive image of the library;
the introduction of lending right fees in 1995/1996 did not lead to a faster reduction in library use in that period.

5.4 Conclusion

Library use is falling in all measurable forms: memberships, visits, borrowing and the number of books borrowed have all been falling since the 1990s. This is happening despite an increase in the media budgets of libraries, a more or less stable number of branches and a collection which is shrinking much less rapidly than lending from it. Computer use in libraries also shows a downward trend as more and more households own a computer with (broadband) Internet connection.

This decline is more marked in certain groups. For example, the library is losing ground more rapidly among men, people in work and the better educated. The trend is also downwards among older people, those with a lower education level and women, but is less steep. Only Dutch people of Turkish and Moroccan origin exhibit an opposing trend; not only is their use of libraries increasing, but it is also strikingly high among teenagers and young adults.

Based on the analyses, a number of explanations put forward for the downturn can be questioned. The introduction of lending right fees in around 1996 and the partial passing on of these fees to borrowers (a contribution per book borrowed) will not have done anything to boost lending, but no clear ‘extra effect’ can be observed. The suspicion that declining satisfaction with libraries explains the fall in their use also finds no support in the figures. Buying books and receiving books as gifts (more precisely, the most recently read book) do show a clear increase at the expense of the borrowing of books from the library. There is also a generational decline in borrowing. Younger generations, which grew up with a larger library than preceding generations, go to the library more often when young, but the use of the library by this group declines more rapidly when they reach adulthood, and as adults they visit the library less often than older people. Analysis at the level of birth cohorts reveals no evidence of a ‘return effect’, whereby adults rejoin the library when they themselves have children.

In the next chapter we explore the changing media use and information search behaviour of the Dutch, as a context for the trends in library use found in this chapter. These analyses will make it possible to visualise in chapter 7 how and to what degree libraries may be able to reverse these downward trends.
Notes

1 No online figures are available on StatLine for the period 1996-1998. The figures for 1998 have been added from CBS publications.

2 One drawback of the Time Use Survey is that it focuses on one specific week.
Customer satisfaction surveys show that only 27% of those who visit the library do so weakly, while 58% visit the library only once every two to three weeks. A proportion of the regular library visits therefore remain invisible in this survey. On the other hand, the design of the customer satisfaction surveys carried out by the sector means they lead to an overrepresentation of regular visitors.

3 Also because it is impossible to ascertain whether these non-members go to the library to borrow items using other people’s membership cards.

4 With the exception of 1975, when the numbers of respondents were fairly small.

5 This was done so as to increase the number of respondents for each age group, and it is justified because the variation between years is not great.

6 ‘Low’ means up to EUR 14,000 per year; high is EUR 35,000 or more; adjusted for inflation, 2003 price levels.

7 The five groups of ethnic minorities are represented in the survey to a roughly equal extent: 23% Turks, 22% Moroccans, 19% Surinamese, 20% Antilleans and Arubans and 16% indigenous (after weighting). The members of ethnic minorities are mostly from the first immigration generation: 64% of the 4096 respondents were not born in the Netherlands. The respondents comprised the same number of men and women. The survey targeted only people aged between 15 and 65 years. Around a quarter of people in the survey were aged below 25 years, and roughly equal groups were aged between 25 and 34 years and between 35 and 44 years. 12% of the respondents were looking for work, and the same number were housewives; 14% were in full-time education. Those in work (49%) mainly worked at the lower and middle level: 34% and 32%, respectively. 55% lived with a partner or spouse, and 46% lived in a family with children. 19% lived with parents or other family. Indigenous respondents in the survey were more highly educated, especially if current pupils/students are left out of consideration (see the catching up in education level by ethnic minorities, chapter 3). Turks and Moroccans have often attained only primary school level or have no school certificate; Surinamese and Antilleans have a higher professional or university education less often than indigenous citizens and are more often found in the middle segment.

8 In a European study it was found that Turkey was also the only country in which men go to the library more often than women; see the intermezzo chapter with the international comparison.

9 Computers and Internet connections occur less frequently in Turkish and Moroccan households than in indigenous, Surinamese and Antilleans households (Avo survey).

10 This definition thus limits borrowing to the borrowing of printed media. Reading computer screens is left out of consideration.

11 One of the objections to measuring the time spent on reading in the Time Use Survey is that the measurement focuses entirely on one week in October. The holiday period, when people read more, is left out of consideration, giving an underestimate of the actual time spent reading. Initial, provisional analyses performed on the Time Use Survey from 2006, which included measurements throughout the calendar year, showed that people do indeed read more in the holiday months July and August than
in other months (though the time spent reading in the winter months of January and February is even higher). However, the analyses also show that the month of October gives a good approximation of the average level of reading over 12 months. This removes the objection to the October measurement in the old Time Use Survey (up to and including 2005).
Intermezzo: The public library abroad

Just how unique are the developments that have taken place in the use of public libraries in the Netherlands? Are libraries in other countries going through similar developments, and if so, how are they dealing with them? It may be that experiences in other countries could serve as a source of inspiration for the Netherlands.

Since library statistics are also available at European level, we can see how the use of Dutch libraries compares with that of our neighbours. Figure I.1 shows the percentage of the population interviewed in 31 European countries who reported that they had visited the public library in the 12 months preceding the survey. The percentage for the Netherlands appears to be on the high side (60%), based on what we know about memberships and borrowing rates (see chapter 5). However, it is plausible that the factor (though it is unknown which) which leads to an over-representation of Dutch library visitors in the survey also played a role in the other countries.

Residents of the Scandinavian countries visit the library most often. The further south and the further east in Europe people live, the lower is the average number of library visits (see also Huysmans 2006a). The former Eastern Bloc countries do not display a comparable pattern (it is questionable whether they ever did), and wide differences are sometimes found even between countries which until recently formed part of a greater whole, such as the Baltic states, or Slovenia and Croatia.

Everywhere in Europe, women visit the library more often than men1, with the exception of Turkey. In the Netherlands, too, Turkish men go to the library more often than Turkish women, and deviate in the same way from other ethnic groups (see § 5.2).

Visits to the library decline over time in almost all countries, but to the smallest extent in the Scandinavian countries; in Sweden, for example, 74% of people aged over 55 had been to the library at the time of the survey, compared with 81% of Swedes aged between 15 and 24 years. The United Kingdom is the only country where library visits increase slightly between the ages of 40 and 54, as they do in the Netherlands.

In virtually all countries studied, people living in the countryside visit the library less often; the exceptions are the United Kingdom and Iceland, where no fewer than 98% of rural respondents had been to the library. Unfortunately, no information is available on the special power of rural libraries in these countries. The difference between medium-sized and large cities is less universal, but in most countries residents of the large cities visit libraries the most often.
Statistics are available on library use for a number of countries. It will come as no surprise that these countries are found mainly in the upper section of figure I.1. Comparing trends is difficult because the public library system is organised in very different ways in different countries and is subject to diverse national developments.

Table I.1 presents the available figures for a number of countries. If the limited availability of data for the Netherlands means we are forced to restrict the figures on library use to lending figures, this applies to an even greater extent for an international comparison. Naturally, a comparison between different countries has to be treated with a healthy degree of caution owing to the different methods of measuring used.

The first thing that becomes apparent from the figures is the wide variation between different countries. The average Australian visited the library five times per year in 2003, people in Finland almost 13 times. In 2000, Americans borrowed an average of six items per year, New Zealanders and Danes more than twice as many. There are also substantial differences in the size of the collections in relation to the size of the population. The United Kingdom had fewer than two items per inhabitant
in 2000, Finland four times as many. The correlation between lending and collection size is clearly not a one-to-one relationship: in Denmark, the collection per head of the population is considerably greater than in New Zealand, but the lending figures are comparable.

Closer study makes clear that Finland scores highest in this comparison in all respects and in all years. The digital library also appears to be successful in Finland: in 2006 there were more than 50 million visits to library websites, almost double the figure in 2001 and equivalent to more than ten visits per inhabitant per year. In the broader comparison of library statistics, too, Finland has already been portrayed as the country with the best libraries (Libecon 2004). In that same comparison, the Netherlands came in in joint tenth place. Scandinavian countries scored higher in most cases, the Anglo-Saxon countries often considerably lower, with New Zealand as a striking exception as regards lending figures.

The trends are not universal; some countries show reasonably stable lending figures. In Finland and Denmark this is because the fall in the lending of non-fiction books is roughly equal to the increase in the lending of other types of material. The lending rate for fiction for both children and adults has remained more or less stable in Finland since 2001, but the lending of non-fiction fell by 8% over a period of five years for adults and 14% of children. On the other hand, the lending of other materials rose so strongly that it almost entirely compensated for the fall in absolute numbers. The lending of other media categories has also increased sharply in recent years in Denmark and Sweden. In Sweden, 93% of the collection consists of books, and in relation to the size of the collection audiovisual media are lent much more often; where a book was lent an average of 1.4 times in 2006, the figure for audiovisual materials was 3.7 times. Total lending is however falling steadily in Sweden, which in this regard has been virtually in step with the trend in the Netherlands for a number of years.

The biggest fall in lending takes place in the United Kingdom. Although no figures are available for the most recent years, the decline is steep up to 2000, and there are no indications that this trend has been reversed. Several authors (Moore 2003; Goulding 2006: 16-18) ascribe this fall to the deep spending cuts in the British library sector since the 1980s, and refer to the time lag which occurs: the effect of spending cuts is reflected in library lending and visits only after a number of years, and persists for a long time.

The United States is the only country where the library appears to be on an upward trend: both the number of lendings and the number of visits have been increasing for years. As yet there is no explanation for the difference compared with the other countries for which figures are available. The lack of detailed statistics or other background information makes it more difficult to analyse this difference. What is known is that the time spent on reading is also declining in the US (National Endowment for the Arts 2007), which does not make it easier to explain this trend. It is not known whether the collection in American libraries has grown in line with this trend; however, as there is a clear difference in the size of the collection in Scan-
In Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries, it is unlikely that the American collection will be the largest. The Netherlands in fact also ranks with the latter Anglo-Saxon group in terms of collection size.

A large-scale user survey was carried out in Flanders in 2004 (Glorieux et al. 2006). Trend data are not available, but the survey does give a detailed picture of library use in Flanders, which in some respects differs surprisingly from that in the Netherlands. The survey was carried out among a sample of active adult members, who were only given a questionnaire if they happened to be in the library during the survey period. They included relatively few older people, and all age groups below the age of 60 were overrepresented among the library users compared to the Flemish population as a whole. The library use by people in work was also higher than average. As in the Netherlands, the use of libraries by the better educated and women was higher.3

The trends in library use in the Netherlands are of course unique in relation to other countries, because library sectors are by definition subject to national policy. However, there are a number of trends which go beyond national borders, such as the rise of the Internet and increased individualisation. International comparative library research is however still in its infancy, and little is therefore known about possible causes of the differences found.

The collections of Dutch libraries are relatively small, but in terms of lending the Netherlands occupies a middle position. The steady fall in library lending is not found in all countries. In the UK it has been under way for a considerable time, and is also much more marked, but there are many countries where a shift is taking place in the types of materials lent, leading to relative stability in lending on balance, or in some cases even to an increase. In the Scandinavian countries, for example, a decline in the lending of books is offset by an increase in lending of other materials. Why this should have occurred in those countries and hardly at all in the Netherlands is unclear. What is in any event clear is that the decline in lending is not as inevitable as is sometimes assumed on the basis of the Dutch situation.

A number of interesting library innovations are taking place abroad. We will discuss two of them here, which are relevant for the Dutch discussion.
Table I.1
Library visits, lending and collection size per head of the population for a number of countries

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* In these countries the statistics cover the second half of the year stated and the first half of the subsequent year. This means that what is shown in the 2000 column actually relates to 2000/2001.


Participatory networks: The Library as Conversation
This project is organised by the University of Syracuse in the United States, with support from the American Library Association among others. It is based on the idea that knowledge is created through conversation and that libraries, because they are concerned with knowledge, are therefore also concerned with conversation. The programme is almost entirely virtual, and is aimed at giving the library a new role in the newly created digital context, particularly in the light of the changes in that context that have come in with the introduction of Web 2.0. The task of the library and the librarian is essentially to facilitate conversations. Through policy, action, programmes and instruments, participating librarians can enrich, record, store and disseminate the conversations that take place in their community. In this way they will meet the expectations of citizens to be able to participate in topical discussions within their community. These expectations also have an impact on the information needs of citizens. The combination of public debate and information provision
Intermezzo: The public library abroad

The project is currently in the initial phase, and efforts are under way to create a collecting place for materials, policy, examples and software which can contribute to the reorientation of the library system based on the premise of participation and networking. (http://ptbed.org/)

Idea Stores

Public libraries in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets have been transformed into ‘Idea Stores’: networks of libraries, adult education institutes and information centres. The borough is hoping to achieve three objectives with this initiative: library renewal, lifelong learning and community renewal. Idea Stores are intended to be a place where people go to develop further in all aspects of their lives. They are located in shopping areas and are situated under one roof with amenities such as crèche facilities, cafes and exhibition areas. The Idea Stores are the result of a large-scale study which showed that residents needed a modern, high-quality library which offered a wider range of services; it needed to be easy to combine a visit to the library with a shopping trip. The emphasis in the Idea Stores is on user-friendliness, modernisation, extensive opening hours and an improved collection, the budget for which has already been doubled. The project has been made possible thanks to a major financial investment by the borough, but is also supported by various charitable institutions. The first Idea Store was opened in May 2002. There are currently four, with a further three in the pipeline, all in the same borough. So far, however, the initiative has not been copied by other libraries, even in other parts of the same city. The reason for this is unclear.

These two projects focus explicitly on new aspects of library services (or aspects which have been pushed firmly into the background in recent decades), such as the social function of the library and the place that the library occupies both within a community and in the lives of individuals. In the Library as Conversation project this takes place mainly digitally or virtually, while in Idea Stores it is precisely the physical presence of the library that is central (see also Koren 2004 and Council on Library and Information Resources 2005). In both projects, libraries have much more to contribute to people’s lives than lending books; what they bring is connection. The projects look for ways of keeping the public library relevant in the changed environment, and of adapting the library to that environment. In doing so, use is made of the traditional strengths of the library, and there is a strong sense of what the library can contribute.

Conclusions

Public libraries in several countries are confronted with comparable developments to those in the Netherlands. Resources are often limited, and the rise of the Internet and a decline in reading form the context in which libraries have to operate. There are wide differences between Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries (those for which figures were available) in the intensity of library use and at the size of the
available collections. The Netherlands occupies a position somewhere between these two groups. A decline in borrowing figures is however not visible everywhere, and where it is occurring, the downward trend is generally not as marked as in the Netherlands.

The UK, for a long time the star of the class, has for many years been confronted with a marked drop in library use, and now presents a very stark view of what can happen as a result of long-term spending cuts. Although this correlation cannot be demonstrated unequivocally, researchers are agreed that these spending cuts are at least part of the reason for the decline (Grindlay & Morris 2004a).

On the other hand, the UK also offers a striking example of library renewal, in the form of the Idea Stores, which connect the library to its environment, in new buildings and with an extensive collection. Like the Participate treats Networks project, this initiative shows how libraries can fulfil their role in society in a new way in the changing context. The strong impulse that Scandinavian libraries have managed to give to the lending of new media can also serve as a source of inspiration for Dutch libraries.
Notes

1 Although the differences are not always statistically significant, the percentage of female library visitors is always higher than the percentage of male visitors.

2 The Libecon project, an initiative stimulated by the European Union in which library statistics from various EU countries were harmonised, ended in 2004.

3 The German data could not be included in the table, because the numbers cannot be traced back to the population. The number of libraries involved in the figures stated for lending, etc., is known (10,931), but not what proportion of the population they serve. However, the trends are positive: the volume of lending, the collection and the number of visitors all increased between 2000 and 2006, while the number of items lent per borrower rose in that period from 36 to 49 per year, though it is unclear whether the number of libraries covered by the figures also increased.
Chapter 5 showed that the core task of the library, namely making information and culture accessible to everyone – primarily in the form of books and other printed media – is confronted with waning popularity. With the exception of young Dutch people of Moroccan and Turkish origin, memberships, borrowing and visitor numbers are falling in all sections of the population, albeit more quickly in some groups than others. Several possible explanations for the downward trend were discussed in chapter 5, with the emphasis being on internal factors such as library collections, opening hours and lending right fees.

We have saved one possible explanation for a separate chapter, namely the changing media use and changing information needs of the Dutch. This is an external factor – libraries have little control over it – but one which touches on the essence of the public library and for which no good answer appears to have been found as yet.

In this chapter we discuss a number of aspects of the changing media use of the Dutch. We first outline the developments over the last 30 years. Three clear trends can be identified in this period: the gradual decline in the reading of printed media; the rise of television; and the rise of the Internet. We show differences in the speed with which and the extent to which these changes have taken place in different age groups. Finally, we look at differences in Internet activities in different age groups, which leads us to the different media preferences for information and relaxation. This makes clear the popularity of the Internet as a medium for information for different age groups.

6.1 Changing media use since the 1970s

Gradual decline in reading of printed media
Technological developments have led to major changes in media use by the Dutch over the last few decades. The total time that people devote to media has remained reasonably constant since 1975 at around 19 hours per week, but the distribution of that time across the different media types has changed. Following the emergence and broad acceptance of television, the arrival of the computer and the Internet resulted in a second major shift. Both developments have had an influence on the reading of printed media: books, newspapers and magazines.

Table 6.1 shows the time spent on reading as a main activity. A distinction is made here between ‘participation’ and ‘time spent’. Participation is the percentage of people who read during the study week; time spent is the actual number of hours per week people spent doing so. The table is limited to reading as a main activity; the extent to which reading is combined with other activities is not shown here. Multi-tasking by young people in particular (Foehr 2006) may be a factor in several forms of media use.
Since 1975 there has been a decline in the reading of printed media (books, newspapers and weeklies, magazines and free newspapers, printed advertising material). Not only is the percentage of people who had spent a quarter of an hour or longer reading during the survey week declining steadily, from 96% in 1975 to 81% in 2005, but less time is also spent on reading, not just by the population as a whole – readers and non-readers together – but also by readers alone (table 6.1). In 1975 people spent more than six hours per week on average reading; in 2005 it was less than four hours. The (shrinking) group of readers also spent less time doing so in 2005 than in 1975.

It must be borne in mind when interpreting the figures in table 6.1 that the apparent increase in the reading of books between 2000 and 2005 probably artificially inflates the time spent reading books and thus reading as such. See www.tijdbesteding.nl for a substantiation of this suspicion.

There are clear differences between reading books on the one hand and reading newspapers and magazines on the other. The percentage of book readers felt less sharply over the period studied. The figures for reading newspapers sometimes beg the question of whether free newspapers distributed on public transport, such as Metro and Spits, are included. They are included in the figures presented here, but the

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**Table 6.1**

Reading as a main activity, population aged 12 years and older, 1975-2005 (participants in percentages, time spent in hours per week)

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</table>

*a* A change in the method of measuring reading of books between 2000 and 2005 probably artificially inflates the time spent reading books and thus reading as such. See www.tijdbesteding.nl for a substantiation of this suspicion.

Source: SCP (TBO’75-’05)
Time Use Survey (TBO) does not suggest any major effect of these publications on the reading of newspapers. The time spent reading newspapers and magazines also declined, and more quickly than the reading of books. In fact in the subgroup ‘readers’ there is no decline in the time spent reading books at all; people who read books spend as much time doing so as in the past, though the group has shrunk in size.

Table 6.2
Read a book in the last 12 months, by genre, population aged 12 years and older, 2000-2005 (in percentages)

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<td>16</td>
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<td>thriller</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>hobby/other leisure book</td>
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<tr>
<td>gardening, DIY</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference work, (puzzle) dictionary, atlas</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other topics</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none of the above/don’t know</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (TBO’00-’05)

The last two editions of the Time Use Survey asked about the genres in which people had read a book in the preceding months (table 6.2). Thrillers had been read by far and away the most people, followed by literary and romantic books. Two surveys provide too little information to identify clear trends, but with a degree of caution some developments can be discerned. A strong increase seems to have taken place in the reading of thrillers, with a corresponding fall in the reading of romantic novels and strip cartoons. The reading of literary and young people’s books has remained fairly stable. Non-fiction books in all genres survey are read by fewer people in 2005 than in 2000. This corresponds with the lending figures produced by libraries (see table 5.1) and suggests that it is not so much the library that people are shunning when it comes to finding information, but more the book. Reference works and atlases have received fearsome competition in recent years from Wikipedia and Google or Yahoo!maps, and these figures appear to support this trend.
There are differences in the reading of fiction and non-fiction based on education level (figure 6.1). More than 70% of those who had read a book in the preceding 12 months in one or more of the genres included in the survey had read fiction (73% in 2000, 72% in 2005), and around 60% non-fiction (64% in 2000, 59% in 2005). Better-educated people read both fiction and non-fiction more frequently (figure 6.1), though the difference compared with the lower-educated is greater for non-fiction than for fiction. The better-educated read a quarter more fiction than the lower-educated, and almost a third more non-fiction. The better-educated had also read a larger number of the genres included in the survey in the 12 months prior to the survey: 3.2 compared with 2.2 for those with a lower education level, which explains why the better-educated score higher for both types.

Initial increase in watching television
The decline in the time spent reading books, newspapers and magazines since 1975 is partially related to the increase in the time spent watching television (Knulst & Kraaykamp 1996; Huysmans et al. 2004). Television viewing time rose between 1975 and 1995, but fell by one and a half hours per week between 2000 and 2005 (see table 6.3). The rise of commercial broadcasters in the 1990s led to a small increase in total television viewing time, but its main effect was to reduce the amount of time spent watching public broadcasters.
Table 6.3
Watching television, listening to radio and music as main activity in leisure time, population aged 12 years and older, 1975-2005 (participation in percentages, time spent in hours per week)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>watching television: participation</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watching television: time spent</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which public broadcasters</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commercial broadcasters</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listening to radio and music: participation</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listening to radio and music: time spent</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time spent by participants listening to radio and music</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (TBO’75-'05)

Older people have more free time than other groups and therefore watch the most television. Young people and those with a lower education level spend most time watching commercial broadcasters (Huysmans et al. 2004; Breedveld et al. 2006; www.tijdbesteding.nl).

The reduction in time spent listening to the radio and music is substantial (table 6.3). In 2005, the percentage of people for whom this was the main activity at any point during the survey week had fallen by 59%. The time spent on this activity also declined sharply. People who did still listen to the radio or music also spent much less time doing so in 2005 than in 1975. Of course, listening is often a secondary activity, and therefore not shown in these figures. All the time spent listening to the radio in the car or to music whilst doing the washing-up, for example, is left out of consideration; technological developments in recent decades mean it has become much simpler to listen to a radio or one’s own music at any time whilst performing other activities.

Rapid rise in Internet use since 1995 and now also a fall in TV viewing time
The fact that television viewing figures have reduced since 1995 is due in large part to the rise of the Internet. In the stable media time budget, a clear shift can be discerned between these two activities. The onward march of computer use, and in more recent years of the Internet, is clearly reflected in people’s use of time (table 6.4). Between 1985 and 2005 the percentage of people using a computer at least once a week (not counting work and school) grew from a small minority to a large majority. Since 2000 this growth has taken place entirely in online computer use; offline computer use has not increased since 2000, and has in fact fallen sharply among computer users.

Computer users in 2005 spent more than five and a half hours per week of their leisure time at their PC. The lion’s share of that time was devoted to online activities.
Here again there are wide differences between younger and older people (see www.tijdbesteding.nl for further figures).

### Table 6.4
Computer use in leisure time as main activity, population aged 12 years and older, 1985-2005 (participation in percentages, time spent in hours per week)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>computer use: participation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offline</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer use: time spent</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offline</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer use: time spent by participants</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offline</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (TBO’85–’05)

### 6.2 Pace of change in media use among young and old

The broad trends outlined in section 6.1 for printed, audiovisual and digital media show a fair amount of divergence by age. The SCP study *Achter de schermen* (‘Behind the screens’) (Huysmans et al. 2004) contained a detailed exploration of the underlying factors. The most striking finding of this study was the wide variation in the adoption of new media by young and older people. Older groups largely remained faithful to public broadcasters and printed media and show relatively little interest in commercial radio and TV channels or the Internet. Young people, who grow up in a world of commercial broadcasters and the Internet, use these new media much more intensively and devote relatively little time to public broadcasting services and printed media.

Since 2000, the last TBO survey year on which *Achter de schermen* was based, the pace of these developments has accelerated. The amount of free time that young people spend on their PC has risen to match the level of their television viewing time, i.e. they devote roughly the same amount of time to both media. The lion’s share of the time spent on the computer is online, and much of this online time is ‘social time’, devoted to instant messaging (MSN). Girls are ahead of boys in this trend; for their part, boys devote more time to online gaming (see also Duimel & De Haan 2007).
Another trend which has developed since 2000 is that several older groups have begun using the Internet more. As table 6.5 shows, however, there is still a marked difference in the amount of time spent on the computer by young people and adults of different ages. All age groups spend most time on games, word processing and manipulating photos. As regards online activities, most time is devoted to communication (e-mail and various instant messaging applications), games and searching for information.

Table 6.5
Time spent on computer activities by computer users as main activity in free time, by age group, population aged 12 years and older, 2005 (hours per week)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offline Activities</th>
<th>all</th>
<th>12-19 years</th>
<th>20-34 years</th>
<th>35-49 years</th>
<th>50-64 years</th>
<th>≥ 65 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>word processing, etc.</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>games</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watching film/DVD</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listening to CDs, MP3s</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>photos, etc.</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-mail</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chat MSN ICQ</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>games</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watching broadcasts</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listening to radio</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>news/newspapers</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet banking/shopping</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>searching for specific information</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surfing</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (TBO’05)

The differences between age groups are wide. For example, e-mailing is more something for adults, with young people preferring instant messaging (MSN). Young people also mostly play games, both online and offline, although the over-65s also devote a relatively large amount of time to offline games. The middle age groups more often search for specific information and are the most frequent users of online banking and shopping.

Table 6.6 shows how total media time is divided in percentage terms between the three groups of media identified here. In each case, a breakdown is given by generation, i.e. a group of people born in a particular period. The table can be read in three ways:
− reading the table horizontally shows how in one generation (presented here in groups of ten birth years) the balance shifts between printed, audiovisual and digital media;

− reading the table vertically shows the status of that balance in successive generations in the same survey year;

− reading the table diagonally, from top left to bottom right, it is possible to follow the age groups through different survey years (the 1914-1923 birth cohort was of the same age in 1975 as the 1924-1933 cohort ten years later). To make this easier, the blocks have been made the same colour.

Table 6.6
Media use by birth cohort, population aged 12 years and older (in percentages of total leisure time spent on media as main activity)\(^a\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914-1923</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-1933</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-1943</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-1953</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954-1963</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-1973</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-1983</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV, video/DVD, radio, audio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914-1923</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-1933</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-1943</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-1953</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954-1963</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-1973</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-1983</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and Internet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914-1923</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-1933</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-1943</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-1953</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954-1963</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-1973</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-1983</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) The Annex to this chapter contains a table which uses the same layout to show the number of hours per week devoted to the three media categories.

Source: SCP (TBO 1975-2005)
By reading the table horizontally it is possible to see how the balance between printed, audiovisual and digital media has changed over the years in each generation. For public libraries, the trend for printed media is of course of primary importance.

Studying the figures teaches us a number of things. Starting with the block for printed media, we see that the percentage of free time devoted to these media per birth cohort remained broadly the same between 1975 and 1995, since when it has dipped downwards. More important, however, are the vertical and diagonal comparisons. The vertical dimension shows that people born from the middle of the 1950s onwards spend relatively less time on printed media; these percentages dipped sharply starting from the 1954-1963 cohort.

When reading the table diagonally it becomes crystal clear that each new generation, when it reaches the age of the previous generation (i.e. ten years later), devotes much less of its free time to printed media. For example, the 1954-1963 cohort was aged between 12 and 21 years in 1975, and at this latter age devoted 28% of its leisure time to printed media; the next cohort (1964-1973) had reached the same age category in 1985 but spent only 18% of its free time on books, newspapers and magazines. The figures for the next two cohorts are 11% and 8%, respectively. The same trend can also be observed in earlier generations.

The findings for audiovisual media are rather different. Reading table 6.6 horizontally reveals that the percentages for these media also remained roughly unchanged per generation in the period 1975-1995. Since 1995, again like the printed media, the figures have fallen. Vertical comparison shows (leaving aside the oldest cohort) slightly increasing percentages for the years 1975-1995. In other words, each new generation spent a relatively greater proportion of their media time on television in particular. The year 2005 shows a different picture: here, the youngest cohort suddenly devotes only half its free time to audiovisual media, whereas earlier cohorts devoted a greater proportion of their time to these media. Diagonal reading produces the most intriguing finding. In each of the series we see a fall between 1995 and 2005, which in percentage terms increases steadily for the younger cohorts.

What lies behind this can of course be seen in the block for the computer and Internet, which completes the picture. Whether the table is read horizontally, vertically or diagonally, the percentage of free time devoted to the computer and Internet increases. This gives a good indication of how much the relative amounts of time spent on the different media have changed in the two decades since the first cautious beginnings of offline computer use in 1985. In all cohorts, the time spent on digital media (since 2000 actually only online use) has risen sharply, but much more sharply in the young than the older cohorts – though the changes in the older cohorts are also not negligible. Absorbing the significance of the changes revealed by diagonal reading shows what is going on here: in older generations, too, a modest revolution took place between 1995 and 2005 in the use of media in leisure time.
6.3 Motives for media use

As well as the amount of time people devote to media, it is of the utmost relevance here to know which media they choose for which purposes, and which shifts may have occurred in this. The rise of the Internet, as demonstrated in the preceding section, could have an impact in a range of areas. It was shown in chapter 3 how broad the spectrum of Internet activities is (table 3.3). What that table also shows is that searching for information, after communication, is people’s main activity on the Internet: 90% of Internet users had used the Internet for this purpose in the three months prior to the survey.

In the 2005 edition of the Time Use Survey (TBO), respondents were asked about the purpose for which they used particular forms of media. The results can be seen in figure 6.2. Books are used mainly for recreational purposes: escapism and relaxation; they occupy second place (after television) as a source of relaxation, and are the most frequently cited medium for escapism (35%).

Figure 6.2
Media used by purpose: population aged 12 years and older, 2005 (in percentages)

Paper sources are barely used any more for information purposes; for most people the Internet is the primary medium. 54% of people use the Internet if they want to find out about something, while 21% use a paper source for this, usually the newspaper. As remarked earlier, the decline in the lending of non-fiction works is thus not so much due to the fact that people no longer go to the library for their information, but that they no longer use books for this. People do however still associate the library mainly with books (OCLC 2005). The limited extent to which digital informa-
Changing media use

Sources are used in the library (see table 5.1) suggests that the library has not (yet) managed to deliver a useful service on a large scale in the transition from paper to digital sources.

If we analyse the use of media by age group, a number of significant differences emerge. For the sake of clarity we will restrict ourselves here to ‘relaxation’ and ‘to find out about something’ as the reasons for media use (figure 6.3). Young people use the Internet more often than older people for both purposes, but the difference is much greater for finding out about something than for relaxation. Fewer than 10% of young people in the survey used a book, newspaper or magazine if they wanted to find out about something; almost 80% used the Internet for this. People in their 40s also mainly use the Internet for this. By contrast, only 19% of people aged over 65 use the Internet to find out about something; 38% use a book, newspaper or magazine for this.

Figure 6.3
Media used for relaxation and information, 2005, population aged 12 years and older (in percentages)

The book is considerably more popular in all age groups as a source of relaxation, but here again there is a clear correlation with age: 15% of 12-19 year-olds use a book for this purpose, compared with 35% of those aged over 65. For people aged under 20, the Internet is also a more widely used medium than books as a source of relaxation.
6.4 Media as sources of information on specific themes

It emerged from section 6.3 that the Internet is a widely used medium for searching for information, especially for young people. The Time Use Survey (TBO) contains questions on the sources that people use for information on a range of topics. This enables us to look more specifically at media used for information purposes and at trends in that use.

Table 6.7
Media used for information, population aged 12 years and older, 1995-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source used (%)</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>average number of topics (out of 17) searched by users</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>newspaper, newsmagazine, magazine</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>radio, TV, teletext</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (TBO '95-'05)

Table 6.7 shows the percentage of people in the survey who used a particular media type to find information on one of 17 topics presented in the survey (ranging from local politics to financial news, the arts and sport). The use of paper and audiovisual media can be seen clearly losing ground to the Internet, which is a source of information for a growing percentage of the population. The average number of topics for which people consult printed media, radio and television has also declined. The Internet is the only medium to show an increase here. If the media are viewed separately rather than grouped as in the table, it emerges that in 2005 the Internet had already overtaken newsmagazines, other magazines and teletext/cable newspaper as a source of information and was hard on the heels of radio. However, television and newspapers were still more widely used as sources of information (De Haan & Huysmans 2007).

Here again, there are wide differences by age (table 6.8). The use of paper media is declining sharply especially among the young: in 1995 85% still used a newspaper, magazine or newsmagazine for information on one of the 17 listed topics; by 2005 this had fallen to 65%. A decline can also be seen in the older age groups, but is more limited. The rise of the Internet as a source of information shows an inverse correlation with age, though the turning point is already at age 50; it is only above that age that the number of people using the Internet as a source of information falls significantly. If we look at the number of topics for which information is searched on the Internet, the differences between the age groups under 50 years are again not
so marked. This is partly because young people generally search for information on fewer topics. The interest in information on traffic and consumer affairs (to name two of the 17 topics included in the survey) is likely to increase as time passes. The consequence of this is that people aged between 20 and 65 years on average also search for information on more topics on the Internet than teenagers.

Table 6.8
Media used for 17 topics of information, by age, population aged 12 years and older, 1995-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>source used (%)</th>
<th>average number of topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>newspaper, newsmagazine, magazine:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-19 years</td>
<td>85 80 65</td>
<td>5.9 6.0 5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-34 years</td>
<td>95 95 85</td>
<td>10.1 9.9 8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49 years</td>
<td>96 94 89</td>
<td>11.6 11.0 9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64 years</td>
<td>95 95 91</td>
<td>10.3 10.9 10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 65 years</td>
<td>96 95 89</td>
<td>10.3 9.3 9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>radio, TV, teletext:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-19 years</td>
<td>95 94 89</td>
<td>8.9 8.9 7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-34 years</td>
<td>98 98 95</td>
<td>11.9 12.1 11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49 years</td>
<td>97 97 95</td>
<td>11.0 11.4 11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64 years</td>
<td>98 98 96</td>
<td>10.0 9.7 10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 65 years</td>
<td>99 98 96</td>
<td>9.9 8.4 9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-19 years</td>
<td>- 42 55</td>
<td>- 2.4 3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-34 years</td>
<td>- 32 57</td>
<td>- 2.9 4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49 years</td>
<td>- 29 45</td>
<td>- 2.8 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64 years</td>
<td>- 12 27</td>
<td>- 1.9 3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 65 years</td>
<td>- 4 7</td>
<td>- 1.3 1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (TBO’95–’05)

6.5 Conclusions

Public libraries have begun to secure a presence on the Internet as a way of giving new form and content to their core task. Many libraries offer their members remote access to their catalogues, so that they can do their searching from home. Despite this many people, especially in the younger generations, no longer see the library as the gateway to information and culture; that role has been taken over by their PC or laptop with Internet connection and Google.
In this chapter we have shown what has changed in the last 30 years in the broader use of media, as a context for a better understanding of the decline in library use itself. We can summarise the findings in a number of points:

− for the population as a whole, the time spent on media in leisure time has remained strikingly constant since the 1970s. Within that time budget, however, a gradual reduction in the reading of printed media up to the year 2000 was accompanied by an increase in television viewing time and (from the mid-1980s) computer use. Since 2000 there has been a rapid increase in online computer use, which now appears to be taking place mainly at the expense of watching television.

− There are particularly wide differences based on age. Comparison of younger and older age groups reveals that the newly emerging media are consistently embraced first and most enthusiastically by the young.

− These age-related differences arise primarily (though not exclusively) because younger generations adopt innovations more naturally in their activity patterns than older generations. The declining popularity of media that have been in existence for a long time is also largely generational in nature. If the proportion of time spent on old and new media is examined, the picture remains remarkably constant within generations as they grow older.

− There is a clear division of tasks between media in meeting the needs of users. Books are still popular as a source of relaxation and escapism. For information, most people use the Internet.

− Printed media are used less for information purposes than ten years ago, while the Internet is used for this more and more. Young people as well as people of middle age use the Internet as a source of information on more and more topics.

By outlining trends in media use and classifying them conceptually we have attempted to indicate how people have responded to innovations in the available media. Those innovations have manifested themselves first and foremost outside the public domain and in the commercial domain (commercial television, a substantial part of the Internet), and therefore outside the sphere of influence of public libraries. It is therefore no surprise that the balance in time use has shifted to the detriment of the library, whose services are still focused primarily on the public domain. However, the analyses in this chapter also provide pointers to support the argument that a further decline in the use of the library as a gateway is not an unavoidable and automatic process. This thought will be developed further in chapter 7 in what we will call there the ‘desirable future projection’.
## Annex to chapter 6

Table B6.1  
Media use as main activity by birth cohort, population aged 12 years and older, 1975-2005  
(in hours per week)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>reading</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914-1923</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-1933</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-1943</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-1953</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954-1963</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-1973</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-1983</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1993</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TV, audio</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914-1923</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-1933</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-1943</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-1953</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954-1963</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-1973</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-1983</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1993</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>computer</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914-1923</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-1933</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-1943</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1944-1953</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1954-1963</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1964-1973</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-1983</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1993</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Bron: SCP (TBO’75, ’85, ’95, ’05)*
The future of the public library

The title of this chapter may perhaps give the impression that the future of the public library is assured. But does the public library really have a future? This is a question which has to be asked. The public library, as a product of the Enlightenment, can be seen very much as a ‘modern’ institution – that is, modern in the sense associated with the Enlightenment. If on the other hand we follow some theoreticians in describing the present era as ‘late modern’ or even ‘postmodern’, then the library is more of an ageing, grey-haired dame. History offers plenty of examples of organisations which were highly successful for a long time but which ultimately no longer fitted in with the changed spirit of the times and disappeared. Why should the public library not also share this fate? In this chapter we explore two possible future projections for the public library in ten years’ time, as well as the consequences for the normative task of the library. This leads us to the undesirable consequences that further decline in library use could have for society. From this basis we go on in the next chapter to make a number of suggestions to enable the library sector to fulfil its socially relevant task in a useful way in the changing environment.

In this chapter we first summarise the trends which emerged in the preceding chapters (§ 7.1). This forms the starting point for the exploration of the future. Section 7.2 presents the results of an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) of the present public library system. This provides the starting situation for the development of the future projections. In the next section (§ 7.3) we present an analytical model for the future exploration. This model lists the variables that determine whether a user chooses to use the services of the library or the services of an alternative provider, such as a bookseller or a website. At the heart of the model are two variables: the costs (in terms of money, time and energy) incurred by users in using the library or alternative service providers, and the benefits (the degree to which libraries and their ‘competitors’ are able to provide what users want).

In section 7.4 we work from the premise that the present trends as described in chapters 5 and 6 will continue at their present rate, and that public libraries will not succeed in responding adequately to the changing environment. The balance between costs and benefits shifts in this projected future situation to the detriment of the library. In the second projection (§ 7.5) we outline a possible future for the public library in which the identified trends proceed at a much faster pace, and in which library use decreases rapidly rather than gradually. This picture explores a situation in which most forms of library services are taken over by other parties. Although this is not a very likely future, especially within a period of ten years, such a view is useful for making clear what the consequences could be if the public library should disappear altogether.
Based on these two future projections, in section 7.6 we discuss the undesirable consequences of a further decline in library use, and thereby the public support for the widely as an institution. We take the mission of the public library as a starting point, as outlined in chapter 2 and operationalised in nine criteria of good functioning.

In both projections we discuss separately the five core functions set out in the ‘Guideline for basic libraries’ (Richtlijn voor basisbibliotheken) in December 2005, viz.:

- a storehouse of knowledge and information;
- a centre for development and education;
- an encyclopaedia of the arts and culture;
- a source of inspiration for reading and literature;
- a podium for meeting and debate.

In the concluding section 7.7 we discuss the consequences of a future in which the public library no longer exists, and lay the basis for the suggestions for policy in chapter 8.

7.1 Six key trends

As a backdrop to the future projections we will be presenting shortly, we list the developments which in our view will be decisive for the future of the public library. These developments lie primarily in the area of innovations on the supply side (chapter 4) and the speed with which these are integrated by different sections of the population in their everyday lifestyles (chapters 5 and 6). The demographic and socio-cultural trends (chapter 3) are certainly also relevant, but given their often longer history, they can be regarded as the backcloth against which the following six trends take place.

1. From limited supply and limited access to information to a surfeit of supply and wide access.
   This trend was initially instigated partly by libraries themselves, but in recent years has been driven mainly by commercial broadcasting media and the Internet. There is more information available on the ‘open web’, for which no professional mediation (e.g. by a librarian) and therefore no collection-building, is needed.

2. From analog to digital media and information provision.
   Content is increasingly seen as separate from the carrier; it is the content that is sold or lent, not the carrier. This is creating a need to develop different sales and lending models. It is for example also important to maintain digital stocks of the innumerable titles which are rarely borrowed (‘the long tail’, see § 4.5). If a manifest demand arises these titles can be printed and published in very small runs or even individually (printing/publishing on demand).

3. From public law to private law operation of the media and information market.
   In many European countries the government plays a less controlling role in the field of media and information, partly in the light of European Union regulations. The public accessibility of content is therefore less adequately safeguarded, though this does not automatically mean it reduces. Private providers (publishers)
do however have a tendency to protect their content as well as possible from general distribution, thus posing an obstacle to the public mission of public libraries.

4 From a general to a customised service.
Individual users are regularly approached with offers based on their own previous purchasing or borrowing behaviour and that of others,\(^1\) and generally experience no problems with this. Protecting the privacy of the user, something to which public libraries have always attached great importance, is considered more important by librarians than by library users (OCLC 2007), as borne out by the large amount of personal information that people share with others on networking sites such as Hyves and Facebook. It may be that people are unaware of the potential consequences of this openness. On the other hand, the very strict restrictions imposed by libraries on themselves, for fear of compromising the privacy of their clients, probably goes rather further than necessary, both from a legal standpoint and as regards the expectations of their clients.\(^2\)

5 From use of printed and audiovisual to digital media.
This trend is taking place primarily – but by no means exclusively – among the younger generations and the better educated. The boundary between digital media and printed and audiovisual media is becoming increasingly blurred, as the latter are increasingly incorporated within digital media; in other words, written and audiovisual content are increasingly finding their way to the user via digital channels.

6 From allocation to consultation and conversation.
Allocation encompasses the ‘broadcasting model’, in which content flows from a central organisation to widely dispersed receivers, and in which the central organisation determines the theme, timing and speed of the information transmission (see Bordewijk & Van Kaam 1982; Van Dijk 2001). With consultation, content also flows from a central organisation to users, but it is the users who determine the theme, timing and speed of the transmission (visiting websites, downloading content). In the case of conversation, content flows back and forth between users (social networking sites, peer-to-peer sharing of content, sharing links). What is today called Web 2.0 is a combination of consultation and conversation (e.g. Wikipedia, YouTube, Flickr, LibraryThing).

Implications for public libraries
What are the implications of these six trends for public libraries? Digitalisation and other developments (especially individualisation) are leading to fundamental changes in the orientation of younger generations of users in particular towards the media and information. The added value of an ordered collection of physical information and culture carriers is diminishing. Library collections are increasingly seen as a limited fraction of the total, compared with the rapidly growing volume of information that is available outside the library.

Whatever one’s views of this development are, this is the lesson that must be drawn from the falling lending figures. Where users in the past saw added value in an insti-
tution which organised the supply of information and culture for them, they are now becoming increasingly accustomed to organising the content themselves, in a way that suits them (albeit perhaps in a less ordered, incomplete and more transient way).

From the basis of its public task, the public library now faces the challenge of seeking out users and assisting them in organising their own content, rather than assuming that users will continue to come to the library for its content. Only if the library enters the field of view of users will the conditions be created for bringing them into contact with both the physical and digital library collections.

Classification of content

Pars pro toto the consequences of the six trends can be described as marking the transition from hierarchical decimal classification systems, via the word cloud of Aquabrowser, to the tag clouds of today (figure 7.1). In the first variant of information organisation, metadata relating to the collection are added to the material by experts. A professional classification system is used for the physical organisation of books and other materials on bookshelves (Shirky 2005). Dutch public libraries use the SISO system, in which a four-digit code plus the first four letters of the author’s name are used to classify items.

The Aquabrowser, which is used by the digital public library (www.bibliotheek.nl), allows associative searches. Based on metadata allocated to the collection – still by librarians – a ‘cloud’ of related search terms and spelling variants is generated automatically. Clicking on the surrounding search terms brings up a new search cloud and new hits for this term.

Tag clouds are the latest variant of the classification system. The fundamental difference compared with the other two is that the metadata are not allocated to a collection by experts on the basis of a mutually agreed system. Instead, this is done by the users of a site themselves, who are usually also the people who add the content (images, film clips, music, but also texts) to a site. After some time a cloud of related search terms can be generated automatically, with the size of the search term indicating its relative importance (i.e. the fact that many people have allocated this keyword in combination with the stated search term) (Mathes 2004).

All systems have their advantages and disadvantages. The biggest disadvantage of tag clouds (especially in the eyes of librarians) is their chaotic character. There is no authority to comb through the system. For example, no checks are carried out on spelling or typing errors and almost synonymous search terms occur (‘book’, ‘books’, ‘book volume’). This disadvantage is being gradually countered by the combined knowledge of many users: provided sufficient people assign keywords, the chaff automatically separate itself from the corn (Shirky 2005).

Whatever the case may be, it is clear that tag clouds, and in a broader sense user-generated metadata, are in the ascendant. Put differently, organising and sharing content is increasingly becoming a social process which takes place between users. In the digital world, users are less oriented towards central institutions which organise and deliver information. Experts such as librarians and institutions such as the library play a more modest role than in the past in this social organisation of content.
7.2 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

What is the starting position of the public library in our exploration of the future? In this section we work up the findings thus far in an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for libraries in the near future. We perform a SWOT analysis for this (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), a widely used method for taking a snapshot of the situation of an organisation, person or, in this case, sector. Internal factors are the strengths and weaknesses of the sector; external factors can be divided into opportunities and threats. The analysis is based on the results of the preceding chapters and discussions with experts from the sector (see also capped rate). We discuss the four elements for the public library in general and also for each core function. The result of the analysis are presented in brief in table 7.1.
Table 7.1  
SWOT analysis of public library sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>internal</th>
<th>external</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>positive</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strengths</td>
<td><strong>general</strong></td>
<td><strong>opportunities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>large number of users; widely known; low-threshold; the building as location</td>
<td>general ageing (of users and staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>traditional expertise in supplying information</td>
<td>long-tail dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>arts and culture</td>
<td>immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>existing collection, known to specific group of users</td>
<td>knowledge and information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reading and literature</td>
<td>helping people to find their way through the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relaxation and escapism; reading pleasure is the main reason for visiting the library</td>
<td>surfeit of information; promoting media wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>meeting and debate</td>
<td>arts and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the large numbers of visitors</td>
<td>central position in the cultural field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>development and education</td>
<td>reading and literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intensive use by primary school pupils; good contacts with primary schools</td>
<td>good starting position for developing into centre of expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td><strong>weaknesses</strong></td>
<td><strong>threats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>general</strong></td>
<td>general utilisation; high client expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>declining lending and membership</td>
<td>failing user numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>loss of young members; no demonstrable return in later life</td>
<td>ageing of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>limited opening hours</td>
<td>development of competing digital services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘bookish’ image; broadening of function is regarded as alien to the sector</td>
<td>knowledge and information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>use of the existing digital offering is very limited</td>
<td>Internet as fast, easy, widely used source of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reading and literature</td>
<td>publishers not willing to pass on digital content to users at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>limited availability of ‘sprinters’.</td>
<td>reading and literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>meeting and debate</td>
<td>rise in purchasing of books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the extent and social impact of this function is difficult to assess</td>
<td>greater emphasis on current titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>development and education</td>
<td>younger generations read less and less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>limited use by secondary school pupils; cf. more difficult contacts with secondary schools</td>
<td>the e-book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>development and education</td>
<td>copyright-free texts available on Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: SCP</td>
<td></td>
<td>development of virtual meeting platforms on Internet (including for sharing of content)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strengths**
The greatest strength of the library is without doubt the large group of people who use its services. Millions of people are members of the library, borrow books there or go there for other reasons. The public library is familiar to the public. In addition, in many localities the library is situated in a centrally located building, which because of its neutral image is undaunting to enter.
A number of aspects of the traditional way in which the librarian’s task is fulfilled constitute a strength within specific functions. The expertise in ‘reading and literature’ and ‘arts and culture’ certainly fit this bill. The skills and knowledge of the librarian are however also of value within the function ‘knowledge and information’. Information professionals in the library guide people to reliable information, and although this now takes place in a situation of a surfeit rather than a scarcity of information, this core task is still potentially a strength. The library collection is also a strength in many respects. This naturally applies for the fiction collection, for both adults and children, but also for the collection on the arts and culture and other non-fiction.

Public libraries maintain cooperative relationships with education establishments, especially primary schools. New collaboration is also being sought in many places with preschool institutions and institutes of adult education in order to serve people outside the full-time education system as well. The physical building is often a key element here. The building as a meeting place plays a positive role for millions of people with regard to the function ‘meeting and debate’.

**Weaknesses**

The declining use of libraries, in terms of lending volumes and memberships, the only terms on the basis of which trends can be mapped out in detail, is a weakness for the public library. This decline occurs in virtually all sections of the population (chapter 5). After the intensive library use a primary school, many young people at secondary school abandon the public library, and only a slight recovery can be discerned in later life, at around the age when people have children themselves. Library use is also falling among the growing group of older people, who read a relatively large amount.

Opening hours are regarded as limited, and in smaller municipalities in particular it is difficult to extend these hours substantially within the existing financial frameworks. It is often difficult to meet the demand for the latest books, the ‘sprinters’. The library still has a ‘bookish’ image, and although efforts are under way within the sector to broaden its function, these are not infrequently regarded as alien to the sector, both within and outside the sector.

The digital information sources that are present in the library are used too little. The fact that databases can only be consulted in the physical library building is a serious limitation. The presence of the library on the Internet is not always equally visible for users. A number of respondents attribute this at least in part to the relatively limited ICT skills of the present staff. As a consequence, the role that the library plays in the information domain appears to be reducing, especially among the young, who make extensive use of digital sources.

It is difficult to chart the move towards functions other than lending books, because few data are available on the offering and take-up of those other functions. This is a weakness in legitimising the library, and in projecting it as an institution which does more than merely lend books.
Opportunities

Population ageing presents an opportunity for the public library over the next ten years, because older indigenous Dutch people read more and have more free time. Although library use is declining in this group, too, it is doing so less quickly than in younger generations. As the older generation will account for an ever larger proportion of the Dutch population over the next few years (see chapter 3), this constitutes an interesting target group with a great deal of as yet untapped potential.

The ‘long tail’ dynamic resulting from digitalisation is an opportunity for the library to meet the demand for obscure and hard to find materials. Libraries will need to be able to develop a successful service to meet the demand for books other than the top-10 bestsellers, in a comparable way to Internet booksellers and antiquarian bookshops. Since the prices for second-hand books on antiquarian bookseller sites are generally fairly low, it is important for libraries to be competitive by working at around cost price.

Immigration offers an interesting opportunity for the public library. Library use is increasing among people of Moroccan and Turkish origin, contrary to other groups in the population (chapter 5). In this population segment, young people in particular are frequent visitors to the library. We have not been able to identify incontrovertibly the underlying reasons for this; the impression in the sector is that Moroccan and Turkish parents regard the library as a ‘safe’ place for their children, especially their daughters. This may also apply for new groups of immigrants (e.g. of Afghan, Iraqi and African origin). These are thus groups for which the library could be of importance in the future.

Although the role of the library as a gateway to knowledge and information is under pressure due to external competition, the traditional expertise of the library in searching for reliable sources still offers an opportunity in this era of excessive information. The library can help people find their way through this access, and boost their ‘media wisdom’.

Due to their usually central location and widespread familiarity, the possibility of cooperation with cultural institutions is an opportunity for public libraries. The building often provides space for exhibitions, where possible linked to the library collection. There are also opportunities for cooperation in relation to the function ‘meeting and debate’, especially in view of the current attention for social cohesion. Its wide-ranging collection and general association with reading puts the library in a good position to develop further as a knowledge centre for reading and literature. The Lisbon targets have focused more attention on lifelong learning, opening up the way for exploring new cooperative ventures.

A number of these opportunities will require adaptation or updating of the competences and skills of library staff. Given the anticipated substantial outflow of staff who will be retiring in the coming years, libraries could recruit new staff who are able to grasp these opportunities.
Threats
The declining use of libraries, in the measurable forms on which subsidising bodies often also focus (i.e. membership and lending figures) could pose a threat to library income. The large number of members enable the public library to fulfil its other functions; if that membership shrinks, the library will become a less interesting partner for cooperation for other cultural institutions, and it will be able to reach fewer people with activities such as exhibitions and performances.

The average age of library staff is fairly high compared with other sectors. The outflow into (early) retirement which will begin within a few years is likely to demand extra efforts in order to find new, suitable staff. Given the staff shortages in other sectors, the competition on the labour market could consequently be a problem.

The expectations of users are changing; people are becoming more and more accustomed to customised services and to having choices. A visit to the library must moreover be fitted into busy lives. If alternative means of obtaining a book or information are simpler, users will use them. External parties could develop (digital) services, and new Web 2.0 applications could emerge which affect the core tasks of the library, as is already happening in relation to the delivery of information.

The debate surrounding the rights to digital content limits the role the library can play as an information channel. Existing agreements with publishers mean it is possible to only a very limited extent to make digital information held by the library accessible to users at home. This threatens the performance of its knowledge and information function by the library in the digital era. In addition, rights-free texts are increasingly being made available via the Internet.³

Younger generations consistently read less than the generations before them. In addition, active marketing in the book sector seems to have led to greater emphasis on current titles than was the case in the past, though longitudinal market figures to substantiate this impression are not available. Since libraries are not able to stock every book from the top-10 bestseller list in large numbers, readers are likely to try elsewhere and may not return to the library when they wish to read something not in the top 10.

Although it is as yet anything but clear whether the e-book will prove successful, it poses a potential threat to the library. A direct relationship could arise between publisher and end-user, in which the library no longer has a role to play (or, as with the digital music lending service (digileendienst) libraries would have to switch to the digital lending of books, which in due course are removed from the e-book reader can do). Even if an intermediate party could play a useful role in this process, it is questionable whether a libraries will be able to respond quickly and effectively to such developments. It is not readily possible at this moment to make an estimate of the speed with which the e-book may be adopted. This will depend on the market model introduced by the book’s sector. In the mobile telephony and the gaming industry, a market model in which the sale of subscriptions and software (games) compensates for the loss-making hardware, leads to rapid acceptance by users. It is
also extremely uncertain to what extent of the e-book will displace the printed book from the market. The most likely scenario is one in which the e-book and printed book will continue to exist alongside each other.

7.3 Costs and benefits for the user

As a basis for our description of the future of the public library we use an analytical model which places the user at its centre. The assumption here is that people use the library as a means of achieving certain goals, but that there are also alternatives for achieving many if not all of those goals. There are a number of factors which influence the choice between the library and alternatives; these are visualised in figure 7.2. We will discuss the model from right to left, i.e. against the direction of the arrows.

Figure 7.2
Model of user choice process

The choice between the library or an alternative service provider is made on the basis of a weighing up by the user of the costs and benefits. This is the heart of the model, which also forms the basis for the distinction between the probable and desirable future. The costs are the investments that the user has to make in terms of money, time and energy. For example, for adult users at least, there is a financial price to pay for library membership and a modest contribution is also often charged for each book, CD or DVD borrowed. In order to borrow books, users have to physically go to the library. This takes time, energy and perhaps also money for transport and parking. If users are restricted to office hours, the opening hours of most library branches are a serious limiting factor; a visit to the library is then in reality only possible during the one evening per week that the library is open. The cost of extending
borrowed materials also plays a role; in order to extend borrowing, the borrower has to go back to the branch within three weeks, again incurring costs. Digital extension defers the inevitable, but does not remove it: the borrowed items eventually still have to be physically taken back to the library.

The alternatives to the library service of course also involve costs, sometimes lower, sometimes higher. But costs are not the only factor; users are willing to incur higher costs if the returns are also higher than with an alternative. For example, some people choose to buy books rather than borrowing them. Although the costs are higher, the benefits outweigh those costs: people can re-read the book, it looks good on the bookshelf, and when first read it is still in pristine condition.

We should emphasise that these are perceived rather than actual costs and benefits. The judgment people make is determined by their expectations of the costs and benefits. The time that a visit to the library ‘costs’ will in real situations not fully correspond with the expectations that a potential user has in advance. This also applies for the benefits: the expectation that a new bestseller, for example, will already have been lent could dissuade someone from going to the library, whereas it is very possible that the book is in stock. Earlier experiences feed these perceptions. Good experiences with the collection and the staff of the nearest library will make renewed visits more likely; frustrations about books already lent out, an ageing collection and unfriendly staff, will conversely have a negative effect. In addition to their own experiences, users’ impressions also play a role: the stories that people hear from other library users and the image that people have of the library, even though they may not always be able to pinpoint precisely where that image comes from and what influences it.

On the far left of the model are the characteristics of the user. These characteristics can influence the balance between costs and benefits. People of advanced age may see going to the library as an ordeal, for example because they are infirm or have poor eyesight, whereas it generally presents no problem for younger people. Socioeconomic position is of course also important: for those with more disposable income, the costs will be less of an obstacle than for those on a minimum income.

As stated, we describe the two future projections separately for each core function, because different identified trends do not have the same or an equally great effect on all core functions. For example, we have seen already that the function ‘knowledge and information’ has come under severe pressure due to the digitalisation process, whereas the function ‘reading and literature’ has been much less affected by this than by a generational decline in reading. These two factors – digitalisation and the decline in reading – also have rather different outcomes for people from different social backgrounds.

7.4 The probable future: steadily declining public support

Our projection for the probable future of the public library is characterised by a steady decline in library use. There is a sense in the sector and among policymak-
ers that libraries are not yet managing to grasp the renewal process firmly enough. There is a great sense of urgency, but there are factors at play which – as with every cultural revolution – tend to impede renewal and are difficult to eliminate. Discussions with experts (§ 8.2) reveal that, contrary to expectations, more money is not the main answer. Most experts regard the slow pace of library renewal as a question of mindset. The new trends are registered and seen as important and sometimes threatening, but this leads to insufficient change in everyday practice, partly because library staff do not always possess the most up-to-date ICT knowledge and experience.

Given the ongoing changes in the digital environment, it seems likely to us that public support for the library will have declined further in ten years’ time. We shall analyse this development for the five individual core functions.

Knowledge and information
Of all the core functions of the public library, this one is under the most pressure. The analyses of the changing media and information use show that for many people the Internet has occupied a central role as a source of news and information within a relatively short space of time, especially among the young. For the time being, television and newspapers are more important sources of information on the Internet, but in the most recent measurement in the Time Use Survey (tbo) in 2005 the Internet was already close on the heels of radio. In terms of time use, the development of the Internet has been spectacular, rising from half an hour per week in people’s leisure time in 2000 to five times as much five years later. This development can be related to the structure of figure 7.2 as follows.

– Alternatives
Over the last 15 years the Internet has led to a marked increase in the alternatives to the non-fiction service provided by the public library. The availability of information has also grown sharply outside the Internet, partly through commercial radio and television channels and free newspapers (a few of which are also distributed via the library). The function of the public library as an intermediary between providers and consumers of knowledge and information has partially disappeared as a result.

– Library
The digital service provided by the combined public libraries (through sites and services such as www.bibliotheek.nl, www.leesplein.nl, www.literatuurplein.nl, www.schoolbieb.nl, www.muziekweb.nl, Al@din and Aquabrowser) have not yet draw the user numbers which had been hoped for. As regards the new Zoek&Boek service, which was introduced at the beginning of 2007, it is too early to say anything about its possible success. This service enables users to order books, CDs, DVDs and sheet music online and – even if they have to come from elsewhere – to collect them from and return them to their local library. Figures from the Netherlands Public Library Association (VOB) suggest a modest volume of deliveries in the first three quarters
of 2007, the period when the service was being rolled out (in fact at the time of going to press this roll-out had not yet been completed). In the first quarter 2,817 items delivered were; in the second quarter this had risen to 8,273 and in the third quarter 10,706.

As a result of these developments, the balance between costs and benefits of the library and the alternatives has shifted in favour of the alternatives.

– Costs
Consulting sources of knowledge and information in the library is generally free (although a modest charge is often made for Internet use). Having an Internet connection at home is considerably more expensive, though this is seen less and less as an investment and is increasingly regarded as part of the standard infrastructure of a household. On top of these fixed costs, the variable costs of searching for knowledge and information on the Internet are virtually nil. The convenience of being able to operate from home also plays a role. The costs of going to the library (also taking into account the limited opening hours) are evidently higher, though there is often a branch in the local vicinity. For older people and those with a lower education level, the costs of becoming familiar with searching for information digitally are often higher than for young people and the better educated, resulting in a different balance between costs and benefits.

– Benefits
The library has a good image among the population as a useful and almost self-evident institution and as a reliable source of knowledge and information. However, the content available on the library is also increasingly available outside the library walls. In particular, public administration information is freely available on the Internet, and an increasing number of thematic websites are being launched by public institutions which also have a mission to provide reliable information. Where libraries can offer genuine added value on the Internet – the ability to consult commercial databases – licences for home use by library members are too expensive or publishers are afraid of the combination of the large number of potential users and the possibility of illegal distribution of their content via the Internet. In addition, a great deal of material is available on the Internet which is not available in the library, particularly in relation to current developments in the area of popular culture. The critical user expects to be able to find and access that up-to-date information quickly. The 24-hour availability of information that can be delivered rapidly on the Internet means that users now also expect to be helped much more quickly by the library to find the information and knowledge they need.

The value of a well-organised (ideally!) and accessible (book) collection in practically every field of knowledge is different in a time of a surfeit of information than in a time of information scarcity. Theoretically, the organising and contextualising function of the library should for many be a welcome supplement to the unor-
ganised and fragmentary nature of information on the Internet, especially as not everyone possesses adequate Internet search skills. Yet there are so far no signs that the library has found an adequate response to the challenges posed by the Internet with an encyclopaedia such as Wikipedia, an atlas such as Google Maps, a video clip library such as YouTube and a search facility such as Google. The question (still to be investigated) is also whether the greater convenience of digital searches – full-text or with combinations of fields – has not made searching with the existing classification systems (ISIO, Dewey, etc.) too cumbersome in the eyes of users.

If the public library, as the diagnosis in the field suggests, is not able to respond adequately to the changing information search behaviour of its users, the balance of costs and benefits will shift further to the detriment of the library in the coming years. Younger and higher status groups will be more likely to abandon the library than older and lower status groups.

Development and education
The public library seeks to help everyone to achieve self-development, whether or not they are in full-time education. In theory, people who have left the education system are especially dependent on the service of the library. The usage figures give a different picture, however: a high level of use by primary school pupils and declining use by teenagers in secondary education. Figures from the Netherlands Public Library Association (vOB) suggest that the cooperation between libraries and early and preschool, primary and secondary education is fairly intensive; in 2005, libraries collaborated with 80%, 90% and 85%, respectively, of these institutions. For early and preschool education and secondary education these percentages are significantly higher than in 2004.

Library use is lowest in the further education age groups, after which it begins to rise again slightly. More and more libraries are working together with adult education institutes, thus bringing adults into the picture. The Lisbon targets for the European Union in relation to lifelong learning present an opportunity for the library as a useful collaborative partner for education, and it is plausible that this form of cooperation will be developed further in several places. The focus on preschool children is also being stepped up, and here again more cooperation with these institutions is likely in the coming years. It is uncertain what influence the forthcoming introduction of free schoolbooks in secondary education will have. It may be that schools will in future increasingly develop their own teaching materials. Libraries could offer support here. The development of this function is also associated with the place that knowledge and information and reading and literature come to occupy in the coming years.

– Alternatives
There are no signs that the school library is in danger of displacing the task of the public library. Rather, the relationship is a complementary one, and in some cases
produces useful collaboration. The fact that teenagers increasingly search for information on the Internet clearly also has an impact here.

– Library
The library is well aware of its potential as a collaborative partner for schools and other institutions. The chances of successful collaboration are increased because the main cooperation partners (also) have a tight budget. Providing services for secondary schools could focus among other things on fostering ‘media wisdom’.

The balance between costs and benefits is as follows.

– Costs
Membership fees for young members, sometimes from as early as 12 years old, undoubtedly play a role in the marked decline in library use by teenagers, though are certainly not the only factor; there are indications that large groups of teenagers stop renewing their membership long before they have to start paying membership fees. The costs in terms of time and effort also play a role for this group. For institutional partners, by contrast, it is precisely from the perspective of costs that the library can be an attractive partner. The role that time and effort play here is unclear.

– Benefits
The development of services takes place in liaison with institutional users and thus yields greater benefits. The expertise in the field of primary education could be developed to incorporate other education levels. At individual level, the library will be more successful in offering an attractive service for primary school pupils than secondary school pupils. The reduction in the costs of searching for information on the Internet and developments in literature education (a smaller number of books on the reading list) also mean that the library will be less useful for secondary school students.

Since ‘development and education’ has long been a highly developed branch of the library service, albeit targeted chiefly at primary schools, the library is likely to remain a useful cooperation partner in the delivery of this function in the coming years, with a well-used offering, though some decline in use by pupils and students appears inevitable. The greater use by specific groups of ethnic minority youngsters will not be enough to compensate for the haemorrhaging of use by other ethnic groups in this age category. The extension of the services provided to adults via adult education institutes will be substantial. There is also no reason to assume that the relationship with mainstream education will deteriorate; in fact, more intensive cooperation could lead to further improvements at local level. The mutual interest in collaboration is fostered by these historical ties, but also by the squeeze on the budgets of all parties. The library will therefore continue to play a role in ‘development and education’, though this is likely to be more in the area of reading than information.
Arts and culture
The extent and importance of the activities of the library in fulfilling the function ‘arts and culture’ are difficult to quantify. Some of these activities take place in the library building, such as exhibitions, writers’ meetings, theatre performances or concerts. Figures from the Netherlands Public Library Association (vob) show an increase between 2004 and 2005 for both exhibitions (from 7,231 to 7,400) and for other cultural activities (from 8,961 to 9,994). It is not known how many people visited these exhibitions and activities, and their often ‘open’ character makes this difficult to measure. The declining number of members and visitors to the library contains a threat for this function. The degree to which this function can be usefully fulfilled depends greatly on developments in other areas which, to use a modern term, ‘generate traffic’. Many visits to cultural activities probably result from the fact that someone goes to the library for a fiction or non-fiction book and takes in the cultural activity present ‘en passant’.

The fulfilment of this function also involves providing support for the amateur arts, and is thus dependent on the non-fiction collection (e.g. sheet music) and available expertise. The library offers support for various forms of amateur arts which take place elsewhere. The involvement in the amateur arts in the Netherlands has remained relatively stable over the years (see Huysmans et al. 2005), and it is therefore unlikely that the demand will change drastically in the coming years.

– Alternatives
There are innumerable opportunities offering activities in relation to arts and culture. Information and materials can also be found in places other than the library, for example in the bookshop, on the Internet (where more and more rights-free sheet music is available) and in archives. The growing body of information on the Internet, in particular, shifts the balance in favour of the alternatives to the library.

– Library
The library can draw attention to the other things it has to offer when organising activities in relation to arts and culture. In this way it can create added value compared with alternative providers. Cooperation with cultural/historical institutions such as museums and archives can raise the profile of the library as a centre of expertise.

The balance between costs and benefits is as follows.

– Costs
The costs of artistic and cultural activities in the library are generally relatively low for the user. Even membership is often not necessary. The costs of alternatives can however be much lower in terms of convenience and time. Downloading sheet music via the Internet is quicker than a visit to the library, and is not constrained by opening hours. Whether activities provided by other parties cost less in terms of time and effort is difficult to assess, but the difference is unlikely to be great.
Benefits
Customer satisfaction surveys show that there is limited awareness of the (cultural) activities organised by the public library. If the library is not able to increase that awareness, the perception of the library as a place where people may encounter these activities will remain limited.

How this balance is likely to develop is difficult to assess given the absence of trend data over the longer term. Without an effective way of informing potentially interested parties of what is being organised – and this appears to be the rub – the extent of this function will remain limited, and no major change in the balance between costs and benefits is anticipated.

Reading and literature
This is far and away the biggest core function in the present activities of the library, and also the easiest to measure. Lending of works of fiction is not the only way in which libraries fulfil this function; activities to promote reading also fall into this category. The number of visits by school pupils (mainly from primary school) rose between 2004 and 2005 from 0.90 to 0.98 million. The impact of these visits is more difficult to assess, though research carried out a few years ago showed that the activities organised by libraries in this area together with schools and parents are bearing some fruit (Kraaykamp 2002). For primary school pupils, particularly, the library is still a major source of reading material and meets a sizeable need. Senior citizens, who have more free time and who read more, are a stable group of library users, but in percentage terms are currently not an especially large group.

The lending of works of fiction has been declining since the early 1990s, including among young members and older people. This is due in part to a decline in reading itself, and in part to the fact that those books that are read are less likely to have come from the library – they are more often purchased or received as gifts. As yet there are no signs that these two trends are likely to end in the near future. This trend can be incorporated in the model as follows.

Alternatives
The bookshop has always existed as an alternative to the library as a source of fiction. The book sector carries out active marketing and is likely to improve its position relative to the library further. In addition, Internet booksellers and antiquarian bookshops are an easily accessible and sizeable source of less up-to-date books, thereby competing with the library in this domain (Anderson 2005; Laan 2006).

Library
Specific actions aimed at retaining members and making more active use of memberships will have a positive impact, but it is questionable whether this will be enough to turn the tide. The available marketing budget is likely to be meagre in comparison with what commercial booksellers are able to bring to bear, though
libraries will also benefit from this to some extent. Collaboration with bookshops and non-public libraries (e.g. institutional libraries) are developing, but only tentatively. The opening up of the ‘national library collection’ via the digital Zoek&Boek ordering service could contribute to greater accessibility of materials, but doubts about the impact of this on borrowing traffic are legitimate. A sound collection policy could lead to a collection which is a good match for the needs of library visitors, but with continual constraints on resources this remains a challenge. By organising activities in relation to reading and literature, libraries are however able to project themselves as centres of expertise.

These developments will lead to a gradual shift in the balance of costs and benefits between the library and the alternatives in favour of the alternatives.

— Costs
The financial costs of borrowing a book are almost always lower than the alternatives. By contrast, the non-financial costs are higher: it often costs more in time, because books have to be returned, and it costs more in terms of planning because the library opening hours are often limited. People’s growing preference for purchased rather than borrowed books leads to the suspicion that owning books has other benefits, too, in the form of status and perhaps user-friendliness. The introduction of possibilities to increase that user-friendliness, such as allowing people to reserve and extend borrowings on the Internet and opening up access to the national library collection via the Zoek&Boek digital ordering service, is proving a slow process, possibly too slow to have a substantial impact on the assessment of costs that people make and the habits they develop.

— Benefits
The library is almost universally known as an institution where people can borrow books, and this is without doubt the best-known of the five core functions of the public library. Libraries offer a much wider choice than bookshops, and have the advantage that the rate of turnover (removal of titles to make way for newer titles) can be substantially lower; titles that are three years old or more can often still be found in the library. On the other hand, users find that the book they want, especially if it is a recent bestseller, is not always available from the library without a considerable wait. The expertise of library staff is not necessarily any greater than that of staff in bookshops and the collective recommendations of other readers on websites of popular online booksellers.

The role of the library as a place where people go for books and inspiration appears to be steadily diminishing. If the public library is unable to reverse this trend by making effective use of its position and strengths, then the development in relation to this function will also not be in favour of the library. The fact that there is a growing group of older people who read more than younger people and have more
free time offers an opportunity for the public library to maintain the size of the borrowing function, at least in the short term; on the other hand, library use among the older generations is low in percentage terms, and is currently declining in this group, too. Locally, it will be possible to tempt this group into more active library use, but without specific action this group will in many places continue to follow the existing trend of gradually declining use.

Meeting and debate
The way in which the public library fulfils this function at present is also difficult to quantify. Of the 4 million members, a high proportion go to the library occasionally, while the library also attracts non-members who come to read a newspaper whilst drinking a cup of coffee. There are millions of visits each year (in 2005 the vob recorded 86.1 million visits, while in 2004 the figure was even higher, at 87.9 million). Whether these visits also lead to conversations and debates is and remains unknown (how can this be measured?). Libraries organise many lectures and discussion meetings, but to the extent that these can be placed squarely within this function, it is not known how many participants they involve. The extent to which the library meets a need for the socially disadvantaged is also difficult to substantiate with figures. Anecdotal material suggests that all of these things undoubtedly happen, but the present status and the trends are unclear.

– Alternatives
The library is confronted with any number of alternatives, from the local bar to community participation evenings in the town hall. Here again, the Internet is on the rise; the possibility to engage in digital contacts and networks has developed strongly in recent years, and the Internet also offers great promise as a platform for discussion. The degree of variation in physical alternatives is by contrast greatly dependent on the setting; in large towns there are more alternative places for meeting and debate than in small villages.

– Library
The low psychological threshold and neutrality of the library are strengths. Projects connected to the Dutch Social Support Act (Wmo) and related projects can make good use of this, and the library can be an interesting partner for cooperation in the local situation. When reading clubs are organised, the functions ‘meeting and debate’ and ‘reading and literature’ come together, and there is also a strong connection with the other functions.
The balance of costs and benefits is as follows.

– Costs
The costs of this function for users are low. The limited opening hours may be a constraint. The advantages of the Internet in terms of time and effort also apply here, with the caveat that people prefer to meet each other ‘in the flesh’ than virtually.

– Benefits
These depend greatly on the available alternatives. The low psychological threshold and neutrality of the library will increase the benefits for certain groups who have more difficulty with the non-neutrality of other locations.

The function of the library as a place for meeting and debate has a certain history and has again been attracting a great deal of interest recently. This attention will persist in the coming years and increase the opportunities for the library to fulfil a useful role. The extent to which it manages to do so will always depend greatly on the setting and on a proactive stance by the library itself. The extent of this function will therefore in many cases be limited. Since it is difficult to quantify the extent and effect of activities in this function, it will remain difficult to highlight the library as a suitable location for meeting and debate and to find funding for projects.

The five functions together
In this future projection, it is the knowledge and information function which suffers particularly as a result of the changes in the environment in which libraries operate, especially digitalisation. The function ‘reading and literature’, measured in terms of lending figures, will decline further as people read less and either buy more books or receive them as gifts. The threats in the functions ‘education and development’ and ‘arts and culture’ appear less prominent. A lack of hard data on the social impact means it is difficult to assess how ‘arts and culture’ and ‘meeting and debate’ relate in practice to knowledge and reading.

7.5 A possible future: the library in the margins

The above depiction of the future for the public library in ten years’ time is based on the assumption that the decline in membership numbers and lending volumes will continue at the same gradual pace as it has since the middle of the 1990s. However, it is perfectly plausible that the changes in media use and information search behaviour will suddenly accelerate due to the emergence of new Internet applications in the coming years, with more far-reaching consequences for the public library. In this section we assume that the threats will have a much greater impact on the library than the available opportunities. In terms of the model, the (perceived) benefits of alternative services, in particular, will be higher. Here we explore a number of potential developments in the alternatives which could have a major influence.
First, in this projection the development of Web 2.0 really takes off. Sharing content, some of it self-created (photos, films, prose and poetry, music) occupies a large slice of people’s free time. Free Internet applications make it easy for people to organise their relevant content – including maintaining their social networks via instant messaging and e-mail – themselves on a single overview page in their browser. For many people, the ‘Web dashboard’ is the gateway to media and information. People share entertaining and interesting content on a large scale and also organise that content online for later use. As well as sharing content, shared creation of content continues at an accelerated pace. Global digital reference works arise on various themes, which are maintained and improved voluntarily by a network of experts.

Secondly, content suppliers opt for a business model which weakens the intermediary role of the public library. E-book readers are manufactured in large numbers, come onto the market at or below cost price and are eagerly welcomed by genuine readers. Rights-free literary works can be downloaded free of charge. Publishers offer new titles for sale or rent on the Internet (in the latter case the text disappears from the e-book reader again after a predetermined period). Part of this strategy is that commercial providers adopt a conservative stance on negotiations with libraries regarding the supply of their content to end users, partly out of fear for the piracy that has cost the music industry so much in sales. For music and films, the use of the physical carrier also becomes less important and download-based borrowing models come onto the market. This makes the library a less natural place for users (who had taken the lead with the Digileen digital music lending service provided by the Centrale Discotheek music library in Rotterdam) to go in order to look for content.

As a result of these developments, there is a rapid decline in the footfall in libraries for borrowing books and other materials. This makes the library a less obvious collaboration partner for other cultural institutions and for schools. On the Web, the competing supply is so great that the library is unable to compensate for the physical losses with digital gains. This works its way through with some time lag into the traditional library statistics on lending volumes, memberships and visitor numbers. Administrators and elected representatives at local, regional and national level begin to ask questions about the return on the public funds invested in libraries – questions to which the library sector is unable to provide answers.

This picture can be further refined for the five core functions of the library. Since this future projection is a more extreme variant of the earlier one, for the sake of brevity we do not discuss it at the same level of detail, but restrict ourselves to the broad outlines.

Knowledge and information
Of the five core functions of the library, this is the one that comes under most pressure from these hypothetical developments. Naturally, library collections have not suddenly become worthless, but many people simply no longer think of going to the library or its digital counterpart because knowledge and information – complete
scientific works and textbooks, Web encyclopaedias, medical reports, travel planners – are so widely available and so easy to access on the Internet. If a person does not know something, they look for it (possibly using Google or its successor) using these knowledge and information resources. If someone wants to be sure that the information they have found is correct, they are able to find someone in their own network who can answer this question.

Dismissive voices can be heard among librarians about search engines such as Google and encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia. As elsewhere in the free market, the principle applies on Google that he who pays the piper calls the tune (people can post sponsored links, the ease with which certain information can be found can be influenced; in China the content is adapted to the restrictions imposed by the state in order above all else to gain access to the market). On Wikipedia, well-known personalities can amend their own biographies, and wealthy individuals and companies sometimes threaten lawsuits in order to have unflattering information about their business operations removed from the site. These are justified concerns concerning the quality and reliability of what is posted on the free Web (we shall look at this in more detail in the next section). However, little account is taken of the self-corrective capacity of the social Web. If information is disseminated which does not suit a group of users, this often leads to publicity (including in the ‘old media’) and moves to correct it within a very short space of time.

Development and education
Owing to the rapidly declining use of printed sources and the rise of alternatives, the library becomes a less natural partner for schools. The traditional task of the library in the field of education, namely imparting skills in dealing with information, loses relevance with the rise of the fuzzy classification systems on the social Web.

As a competitor to the digital educational service provided by libraries (in particular www.schoolbieb.nl), market players have developed content that is similar but more attractive for schools, for which schools are happy to pay because they see the benefits as greater. Fellow professionals operate a group blog in which they discuss the pros and cons (reliability, impartiality) of the various teaching methods. Sometimes they call on the help of the libraries in this, but not in the form of more support.

Teachers see changes in the way their pupils interact with media and information and try to respond to this. With a view to lifelong learning, publishers as well as communities of educational experts, offer free material which is gratefully accepted by the adult education sector.

Arts and culture
The library has long held large collections of reference works in the field of the arts and culture and provided support for performers of the amateur arts, such as self-study books, sheet music, etc. The encyclopaedic function remains, but draws too few visitors now that specialist online encyclopaedias have largely taken over this
core function. In addition, a number of major publishers of art books have decided to make their older, less current titles available free in PDF format as a sort of promotional advertising for their website. Communities of amateur artists share information on their fields of interest.

The dwindling visitor figures mean that exhibitions of (amateur) art draw fewer interested members of the public. Collaboration with other cultural institutions is less easy to arrange. Where the attraction of the library used to lie in the large number of members and high visitor figures — a brief sneak preview of a theatre performance in the hall of the central library increased the interest in the actual performance — other cultural institutions now also focus on events (including those which are ‘alien’ to culture).

Reading and literature
Both the physical library and the physical bookshop have suffered greatly as intermediaries between publishers and end-users of books. Part of the market has moved to the domain of e-books. Better educated, mobile and widely read readers swear by the digital book. The market for the physical book is still considerable. Bearing in mind the ‘long tail’, the public library has a large number of fiction and non-fiction titles available. The collection policy is now conducted at national level in order to achieve an optimum match between the combined collection resources and maintaining a collection that is as diverse as possible. The disadvantage is that the transport of the physical books takes time; fewer and fewer users are prepared to accept this disadvantage.

The library is still an important player as a centre of expertise for reading and literature. The ‘continuous reading line’ and other services concerned with reading instruction are used almost exclusively by primary schoolchildren, and mainly for acquiring the reading skills themselves, rather than for deepening those skills.

Meeting and debate
Even in the Internet age, meeting each other in person remains a human need. The central location of the public library in village, town and neighbourhood and its neutral image have not changed. As the subsidies for libraries are linked to indicators for the use of the other four functions, library income has reduced. Inevitably, staff costs have been cut by reducing the opening hours. This has in turn reduced the opportunities for people to meet in the coffee corner and it is more difficult to organise debates in the evenings.

Regional newspapers and free door-to-door papers, the thorn in the flesh of local and regional administrators, have seen their circulations fall. The economic upscaling this has necessitated means that in many parts of the country there is no platform for the discussion of local topics. The physical library as a meeting place is particularly relevant for local issues. Debates organised in collaboration with the municipal authorities and local organisations continue to fulfil an important function.
Web 2.0 applications have taken over part of this function, too, from libraries. Debates are more often organised on the Internet, where citizens can make their views known and engage in discussion with each other and with the authorities. This kind of debate attracts more participants: they do not need to leave their home and can choose their own time to participate.

The five functions together

In this future projection, the public library loses relevance for users because the developments in its environment proceed more rapidly than the substantive renewal of the library sector itself. The position of the public library becomes marginalised, because the library is unable to become the ‘supermarket of the information society’. Instead, it deteriorates to the status of a sort of corner shop: handy to pop into for something that has been forgotten, but relatively too expensive and with too small a product range to tempt customers to do their weekly shopping there.

7.6 A desirable future: correction of the market

We now explore the consequences of the two future projections outlined and explore what society will have to give up if the public library becomes more limited or even disappears altogether. We do this on the basis of the nine criteria for good functioning formulated in chapter 2. For each core function we establish on which points the new media and information landscape falls short from a socially normative perspective. We discuss briefly how the library sector can act to correct the market in this changed environment; this is followed in chapter 8 with specific suggestions.

The emphasis here is on undesirable consequences, where ‘undesirable’ refers to the theoretical normative considerations which at one time led to the institutionalisation of the public library as a public amenity with a certain mission. The task of the public library lies in what in economic terminology is described as ‘market failure’. This means that a socially desirable supply or use of media does not come into being of its own accord on the free market. The public library as an institution was founded to help bring reality closer to the socially desirable situation. In chapter 2 we listed the values (freedom, equality, order/cohesion and quality) which underpin the functioning of the media and, mutatis mutandis, the public library as a public provision. We then translated these values into nine principles for good functioning of the public library, viz.:

- accessibility, availability;
- diversity, plurality;
- independence, objectivity
- solidarity, social inclusion;
- social control, integration;
- maintenance of the symbolic environment;
- reliability, precision;
– professionalism, expertise;
– topicality, renewal.

These principles remain as topical as ever, but there has been a shift in their relative weight because of the radical changes to which the market is subject. This has also led to a change in the extent to which the free market fails to generate socially optimum content – i.e. market failure. In the early years of the public library the failure of the market lay mainly in the lack of accessibility of (printed) media and information. There was a considerable supply of informative and literary media, but many people were unable for financial or other reasons to access it. Removing the obstacles to that access was the primary legitimisation for creating the public library network. Other important motives were inclusion of the working class in the social structure and social control (seen from the perspective of the bourgeoisie: countering a communist revolution). Another aspect was the plurality of information: the reading room movement reacted vehemently against the ‘pillarised’ nanny state ideal which was commonplace in the library landscape.

There has been a shift of emphasis in the present relationships. Accessibility of content is still an important motif, but concerns about this are limited to a relatively much smaller group who are for example unable to afford a newspaper or the Internet or who are unable to find the relevant information in what for them is an unfathomable digital domain. Today, it is the independence and plurality of a media and communication system which is surrounded by commercial interests that prompts concerns. Social inclusion and integration still warrant attention, but no longer relate to the working class, but to a relatively small group of socioeconomically disadvantaged people and ethnic groups.

Perhaps the most important point for concern are the quality standards that are in danger of degenerating in the transient and democratise to Internet age: objectivity, reliability and professionalism in a communication system in which professionals are increasingly confronted with ‘amateurs’. The library sector has the aim (or at least the pretension) of maintaining these quality standards. With this in mind, the library seeks to be a safe haven in the turbulent digital waters: the place where people can go for clearly organised, reliable information and good quality culture (to prevent any misunderstandings: this does not mean exclusively ‘highbrow’ culture; it specifically means both ‘high’ and popular culture of good quality).

It is however anything but certain whether it is possible with the available people and resources to assess the value and classify the enormous amount of information available. We are talking here not only about the gigabytes of information with which the Internet is expanded and modified on a daily basis; Dutch book production is also still growing and keeping up with the 1,500 new titles which appear every month demands a considerable effort from the libraries. The innovation this demands goes beyond the level of the Dutch public library sector; it will require combined efforts at international level. This does not alter the fact that the Netherlands,
given its relatively prominent position in the international library world, also needs to make major efforts in this regard.

The nine principles for good functioning can serve as a checklist for each of the core functions (Huysmans 2006a). We will not discuss all nine criteria for every core function, but will restrict ourselves to what we consider to be the most important aspects of market failure which the public library can counter.

Knowledge and information

The discussion of the probable future showed a growing imbalance in two respects with regard to this core function: alternative sources of knowledge and information outside the library have emerged at a rapid pace, and these alternatives are moreover cheaper in terms of money and above all time and energy. In our more extreme future projection, this development took on much greater form. Little can be done about the growing possibilities outside the library walls. What can be done is to make every possible effort to offer a good-quality, reliable supplement to those possibilities. To do this, it is essential to follow developments closely. In addition, the costs need to be kept in mind from the perspective of the user; in the current situation, users appear ready to accept information of moderate quality at no cost, even if information of better quality is offered at extremely low cost.

In terms of market failures which arise as a result of this, and which can be countered by the public library, the following points are relevant here:

- reliability, independence: in the burgeoning and sometimes confusing body of information on the open Web, it is more difficult to assess the reliability and impartiality of information and its providers. This applies for both users and librarians;
- social inclusion: in an increasingly complex world, being able to process information adequately is more important for social functioning than in the past. Anyone who has difficulties with this is at greater risk of becoming detached from social reality (in particular work and income);
- social control, maintenance of the symbolic environment: in the face of the growing amount of information, questions can be raised as to whether there are not fewer and fewer shared experiences to which people can refer in conversations (‘public fragmentation’).

In a desirable future, the library is able to fulfil a function for users in relation to these aspects by giving new form to its traditional role as an information expert. Examples might include making content easier to find for users by embracing the new classification methods that have arisen on the social Web. In addition, library collections could be made more hybrid by documenting findable and relevant content on the Web and enabling it to be found remotely, as a service alongside the physical collection. With regard to the guide function, thematic choices will inevitably have to be made given the enormous and ever-growing amount of information.
We explore these aspects in more detail in chapter 8.

**Development and education**

It emerged from the SWOT analysis (§ 7.2) that ‘development and education’ is the function where the greatest opportunities lie for the public library to develop its social role further. On the one hand there is already a solid cooperative relationship with the field of education, from early and preschool to adult education. On the other there are still great opportunities in secondary and adult education for increasing the reach of the library service, including in the light of the general trend towards promoting lifelong learning. However, there is a need to be alert to the emergence of interesting content from other providers, especially digital content.

Market failure will manifest itself in the near future mainly with regard to the following aspects:

- reliability, independence: as with the knowledge and information function, it is difficult with the burgeoning amount of information to determine what is good and objective knowledge that can be fruitfully transferred in an educational context. The trend from printed to digital (especially when it comes to self-study by pupils) increases the need for adequate filtering of content;

- inclusion and integration: the inclusion of socially disadvantaged groups and the integration of newcomers remains a point for attention (see chapter 3). Adults who are no longer in full-time education warrant special attention; older groups in particular are generally less familiar with the new digital forms of education.

A ‘new’ form of library service is to support citizens in the development of ‘media wisdom’. Libraries have a tradition of helping in the instruction of information skills, but media wisdom is a broader concept than this, incorporating the knowledge, skills and mentality to deal with all content, not just informative content (cf. Raad voor Cultuur 2005; Verheijen & Van Driel 2007). Given the change in the way that users interact with content (less focused on institutions), libraries need to adopt a proactive approach. The possibility is not ruled out that other players in the education field will develop competing content.

**Arts and culture**

According to its mission, the public library seeks to project itself primarily as an encyclopaedia of arts and culture. This implies that the library sees its role as the referencing and contextualisation of cultural content, rather than as a provider per se (although this also occurs to a moderate extent). Market failure in the area of arts and culture can be expected in the following areas:

- accessibility: people from higher socioeconomic milieus still make greater use of artistic and cultural content than people lower down the socioeconomic ladder. The difference lies not so much in financial accessibility as in affinity and competence in interacting with arts and culture (cf. Goudriaan & Visscher 2006 for museums);
– inclusion, integration: ethnic minorities participate in western cultural content to a lesser extent (for cultural heritage, see Huysmans & De Haan 2007). Conversely, the participation of the indigenous population in non-Western cultural content is probably equally low, though this has not been studied.

In a desirable future, the library is able to promote access to the arts and culture for all sections of the population, and is able to reach precisely those groups which have little or no independent contact with cultural content. Market-based operation through personalisation of the service appears to be the best way of achieving this. People who are already members of the library can be approached in a targeted and individual way, based on the knowledge of those users gleaned from lending records or periodic market research.

Reading and literature
Public libraries have traditionally seen it as their task to promote reading, and the government uses them as an instrument for this. As stated earlier, buying books and receiving them as gifts have acquired relatively greater importance than borrowing. It could be deduced from this that the role of the library in correcting the market is becoming less important. However, the figures say little or nothing about how much people actually read, and nothing at all about what they read. Whereas in the market there appears to be more and more emphasis on bestsellers, from a cultural perspective diversity is important. And it is here that the social task of the library has always found its legitimacy. For the future, therefore, this means that the library will continue to have a role in correcting the market in the following areas:
  – accessibility: although relatively more books are read which have been purchased or received as a gift by the reader, and although an increasing body of rights-free content is being made available on the Internet (books whose author died at least 70 years ago), the accessibility of books on which rights still rest is of social importance;
  – diversity and plurality: keeping available titles which are not on the bestseller lists and titles that are no longer available in the bookshop remains as important as ever;
  – maintenance of the symbolic environment: to the extent that more attention than in the past is focused on bestsellers (although sales figures suggest that the situation is not quite as bad as portrayed), it is important in the context of the reading culture to broaden the perspective.

If the market for reading and literature is left entirely to commercial players, there is no guarantee that these values will be maintained.

Given that there are still 4 million members of the library who mainly go there to borrow books, there is most definitely a future for this core function in the next ten years. Statistics from other countries show that the decline in borrowing is not an inevitable trend. What is needed in order to tackle the downward trend is to ensure
that users find the titles they are looking for in their changing relationship with content. Once again this requires a proactive approach from the library in the digital domain, matching the way in which users search for and organise content. If users are able to find the collection in digital form, this can form the basis for the lending of the physical articles.

Meeting and debate
The association of the library with the word ‘Silence!’ means that people may not automatically think of it as a place for meeting and debate. Libraries are associated primarily with books and lending. The low-threshold neutrality of the library is seen as an opportunity, especially in large towns and cities, to organise meetings between sections of the population that would not arise of their own accord. In terms of market failure, areas for attention in the coming years could include the following:
- diversity and plurality: the position of local and regional media as a platform par excellence for local democracy has become weaker in recent decades, with the result that fewer discussions take place on local issues;
- solidarity, inclusion, integration: meetings are organised on the social Web in the form of networks. Users maintain contacts mainly with friends and friends of friends. Genuine discussion often does not really get off the ground, even on special discussion sites. There is thus a lack of a central point where, for example, democratic decision-making can be discussed.

By bringing people into contact with each other and stimulating debate, the public library can fulfil its social task. The buildings, which are a physical expression of the local embedding of the library, are an asset which should not be underestimated in seeking to achieve this goal.

The five functions together
Ten years from now there will still be a sufficient need for correction of the market, funded from public resources. In this outline of a desirable future we have acted as if the government sees the library as a natural partner for filling these gaps. But is this actually the case? In the thinking about the role of the government in the area of media and information in recent years, this cannot be taken for granted. We will explore this in more detail in the concluding section.

7.7 The information society of 2018 and the public library

Informatisation is generally seen as a process which is currently driving social change. And when society changes, the instruments used by the government in an attempt to raise social quality are themselves automatically seen in a different light. From a government perspective, the public library is one such instrument, notwith-
standing its origins as a social movement, which was later institutionalised using public funds.

Government policy on the media, information, culture and citizenship has been subjected to new scrutiny in recent years. This has led to a number of studies, of which that carried out by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR 2005) caused the biggest stir. The studies were undivided in their opinion that the government should focus primarily on the functions which those media fulfil, and only in the second place on the institutions that are concerned with delivering those functions. It is thus not the task of the government by definition to maintain a public broadcasting service, for example. The government must monitor the provision of information in society and act where it falls short. It has several instruments at its disposal for achieving this. One is the public broadcasting service, and the continued existence of that service depends on how well it is able to resolve those shortcomings.

The public library and the book market were not covered in the WRR study (these were regarded as part of cultural policy, not media policy; see WRR 2002). Following this line of reasoning, however, the same applies to the public library as for the public broadcasting service: the public funds which flow to the library should result in a socially desirable correction of the market. If they do not, the legitimacy of the public funding will eventually be questioned. As the present study has shown, a serious problem has arisen in this regard in recent years. In so far as good indicators exist for traditional and new forms of service delivery, they show a downward trend or a trend which is not rising rapidly enough. If these trends persist in the coming years, the moment will inevitably come when the investments in the library system are reviewed.

To a large extent these are trends which are beyond the control of the public library. The fact that prosperity is rising and as a result more people are buying books rather than borrowing them is something that the public library can do little to change. It can also not prevent young people from growing up in a world in which many other, more attractive media exist alongside the book as carriers of culture and information, so that the book occupies a more modest place in their media menu than was the case for their parents and grandparents. In this sense, the question is justified as to whether the public library really has such an important role to play in the long term.

In order to bring the answer to this question into sharper relief, one would have to be able to imagine a world without the public library, in order to determine what was missing from that world. We have not gone as far as this in the foregoing. What we have done is describe two possible pictures of the situation in 2018, whereby we regard the first (gradual further decline in public support for the library) as more likely than the second (marginalisation of the library). Both future projections, but especially the second, offer pointers for a visualisation of what society would be like without the public library. We can list the following as the main shortcomings in such a situation:
– in learning to read – something which is perhaps more important than ever in the information society of 2018 – primary schools in particular would be without a substantial element of support (a wide collection of children’s and youth books, aimed in part at the acquiring of reading skills itself) close to home. The same applies for the teaching of Dutch as a second language to adults;

– the government would lose an important instrument for the dissemination of Dutch-language literary culture. The developments would be only partially compensated for ‘automatically’ by slightly increasing book sales (by way of an indication: it is still the case that three times as many books are borrowed as purchased);

– people would lose a place where they can go with questions about the relevance, independence and reliability of knowledge and information;

– villagers would lose one of the last remaining places for the provision of local information and social support. In the suburbs of large towns and cities, local authorities would lose an important instrument for welfare policy;

– there would be no institution to monitor and if necessary adjust developments. Although the Internet more easily offers niches for smaller interest groups, there is no guarantee that in a free market all citizens will have access to independent, reliable and diverse content.

These shortcomings do not necessarily require the presence of a public library; the government could use other instruments to fill the gaps. It is however a fact that given the status quo – the public library already exists, still enjoys great public support and is already carrying out tasks such as these – the public library is an obvious instrument.

In the concluding chapter we explore the question of what the sector can do to combat the possible market failure that could ensue from a further marginalisation of the public library, and therefore to remain relevant as an instrument of government policy. The recent period has seen the creation of basic libraries as part of the drive for substantive renewal. For the continued fulfilment of a social function, further administrative reorganisation would not appear to be the top priority. The key requirement is first and foremost that the process of substantive renewal should be stepped up. The adage of ‘the user as the focal point’, already mentioned in the joint agreement of 2001, must now be given absolute priority. A few hints for substantive renewal were given in the description of the desirable future. In the next chapter we explore these in more detail.

The difference between the probable and the desirable future according to our analysis lies in the question of whether the public library will succeed in mobilising enough innovative capacity in the coming years to lower the costs for library users and increase the benefits offered by the library. In the probable and possible future projections the sector fails to do this sufficiently; in the desirable future it does succeed in this.
The central idea is that the library has to actively seek out users where they are, in the digital domain, rather than waiting for them to come to the library (OCLC 2004: 73). How the public library can achieve this and what conditions have to be met, is the subject of the following and concluding chapter.
Notes

1. E.g. in the form of ‘customers who bought this book also bought...’.
2. The Netherlands Public Library Association VOB and FOBID Netherlands Library Forum are engaged in a study of this question, but this was not complete at the moment of writing; www.debibliotheken.nl/content.jsp?objectid=14646.
3. Rights-free materials naturally pose a threat to the library in the sense that people no longer have to go to the library in order to access these materials.
8  Suggestions for policy: from probable to desirable

8.1  From ‘what’ to ‘how’

To avoid the danger of the desirable future projection being dominated by the premise that the public library as we know it today must be maintained, we have focused in this study on the social task in a changing environment. We have analysed how the emphasis within that task has moved away from criteria such as accessibility and diversity to reliability and independence, and given an indication for each core function of what the most important focus areas for the public library will need to be in the coming years in order to counter ‘market failure’. This chapter describes how those focus areas can be translated into practice and into policy. That translation is a task for the sector itself. To help in this, we offer a number of suggestions for policy which still require practical detailing.

Formulating suggestions based on a theoretical and empirical analysis such as that presented in this study brings the danger that those suggestions will be insufficiently rooted in everyday practice. To avert this danger, discussions were held with experts from the sector (libraries and public authorities). Section 8.2 reports in broad outline on this part of the study. Naturally, the central focus in these discussions was the public library in ten years’ time, and particularly the necessary substantive and administrative/organisational renewal. Some of the fruits of these discussions were incorporated in the SWOT analysis in chapter 7. However, the discussions also covered the way in which the library needs to change in order to remain socially relevant, and how realistic that process is. This aspect of the discussions is of particular relevance for this chapter.

Section 8.3 presents the promised policy suggestions. These are concentrated around substantive renewal; administrative/organisational renewal is also discussed, but only in so far as this is necessary in order to remove obstacles to the substantive renewal. The suggestions ensue from the diagnosis – the six key trends and there significance for the position of the library – and the desirable future projection referred to in chapter 7. They are based to a not insignificant extent on what emerged from the discussions. To conclude, section 8.4 lists the most urgent issues for the near term.

In chapter 7 we explored the possibility of a society without public libraries, and the shortcomings this would create with regard to its social task. The question of whether those shortcomings must necessarily be combated by the existing institution goes beyond the scope of this study. Reasoning from the existing level of support for the public library, it is no more than plausible to assume that this institution will still be in existence ten years from now. The need for its continued existence beyond that period is a discussion which warrants attention at another time.
We take as our starting point the assumption that all stakeholders – users, public authorities and libraries themselves – see the desirability of having a public library which ten years from now acts in the general interest to correct the market. First comes a report of the discussions with stakeholders from the sector about the possibilities for substantive and administrative/organisational renewal. This is followed by suggestions for policy for the sector and the relevant authorities. These suggestions are not a recipe for success; developments in society and the communication system are too uncertain for that. Rather, they serve to provide frameworks which can help guide the thinking of libraries, sector organisations and public authorities with regard to the position of the public library in ten years’ time.

8.2 From analysis to recommendations: discussions with experts

To provide a better basis for our empirical analyses in practice, and to explore the future of the public library, interviews were held with a selected group of people from all layers in the library sector: the Netherlands Public Library Association (VOB), provincial services organisations (PSOs) and basic libraries (town libraries, basic libraries formed by the amalgamation of a group of smaller libraries and libraries which combine urban and rural catchment areas). We also spoke to relevant policymakers from local authorities, provincial authorities and central government. (See the list ‘Sounding board group and interviewees’ near the end of this book).

The discussions were open and did not follow a strict questionnaire, but were based instead on a ‘topic list’. The topics chosen depended in part on the position of the interviewee in the field. Broadly speaking they were asked about their view of the future of the public library, what they felt would be needed to enable the public library to be a viable service in ten years’ time, and what they considered to be the threats and opportunities in this regard.

General

We found a broad consensus on a number of points. Everyone identified digitalisation as a crucial development for the future of the public library, and also as a development on which the library has not yet acquired sufficient grip. Developing a much more appealing digital service was generally cited as one of the most important and most urgent tasks for keeping the sector viable. There was also a broad recognition that a national approach is essential if substantial progress is to be made in this respect, both with regard to rights (negotiations with content suppliers, such as publishers) and in the development of new or better digital content.

Interviewees were also unanimous in the view that more energy and drive was needed for the further development of the basic library concept. Some felt that the decentralisation/democratisation of the sector had gone too far, so that at best renewal is a slow process. The desire to keep all parties ‘singing from the same hymn sheet’ is an obstacle to renewal at national level.
Service delivery
There is a fairly widely shared realisation that the library cannot play in all positions at the highest level on the ever expanding playing field. Already a gap is opening up between what society expects from the library and what the library can deliver (the slow start of the digital media library www.schoolbieb.nl was cited several times as an example). In particular in the core function ‘knowledge and information’, the developments impose a need for modesty of ambition and sharp substantive choices in what the library can and cannot keep up with.

Most interviewees believe that the library must have the ambition to take the lead in developing innovative services and should actively contribute to developments in communication and media use. On the other hand, a number of them expressed the view that, given the rapid development in the market, it is not realistic to expect that libraries will acquire that leading role within ten years. One of them observed that this was also not necessary; it is enough for the library to follow developments in the market and people’s changing information and communication behaviour. It is however felt to be important that those developments are followed more closely than at present, and the comment was made that making up the present lag will itself probably prove to be challenging enough.

A few interviewees felt that the library needs to adopt a much more market-centric approach by keeping a finger on the pulse of what people do and what they need, and tailoring the service accordingly. In addition to an array of services with added value in comparison with ‘the market’, the survival of the public library also depends greatly on making those services more visible through a national marketing strategy.

The majority of library directors are concerned about the future staffing of libraries. One or two are already having difficulty filling vacancies, but in most cases the situation is not yet very urgent. At the same time, the imminent departure of a large proportion of staff through retirement is seen as an opportunity to look for new staff with different competences (‘enterprising’, ‘in touch with the world of young people’). The search will be for erudite, expert staff who combine helpfulness and passion, who are aware of what is going on in society, and who have a better understanding of marketing and ICT.

The fact that more money is seen as a desirable impulse is not surprising, and nor is the view that some of that money needs to be spent on improving terms of employment (salaries) and some of it on national projects such as the digital library. What is surprising is that, while bigger subsidies are seen as desirable, they are not regarded as necessary per se. A large majority of directors of libraries and of pso’s stated that the biggest obstacle to substantive renewal is more a question of mentality, in the sense of a limited willingness to change by the present staff. Also striking was the almost complete absence of change fatigue. The library sector has for several years been engaged in a series of mergers and reorganisations, transformations and discussions about transformation, but nowhere did we sense the feeling that is
found in the education world, for example, along the lines of: ‘give us the space as professionals just to get on and do our work’. The need for further change is broadly recognised. It is possible that this is different in the lower ranks of the organisation: we spoke almost exclusively with directors.

Collaboration on the network

Many library directors are faced with limited resources, and sometimes even with spending cuts. The budgetary pressure has a direct impact on staffing levels and therefore on opening hours – the Achilles heel of the public library. To remain socially relevant and provide services that people want, an efficiently operating front office is needed with the longest possible opening hours. This is difficult to achieve within (excessively) tight budgets.

Merging back-office tasks of basic libraries is already taking place in some areas. The benefits of scale that collaboration brings can be substantial and there are regions where this is (already) working well. Respondents were not agreed about the most efficient level at which cooperation can take place; some argued for integration of the back-office tasks at national level, while others saw the province as the most logical level. Respondents were almost unanimous in the view that the basic library in its current format is often too small to be able to perform the back-office tasks adequately. One commented that translating the national or provincial back office to local practice would require a ‘middle office’.

The fact that some regions lag a long way behind others is a problem for which it is difficult to devise a solution, something which is not necessarily accepted as a legitimisation for the scrapping of the provincial layer – quite apart from the fact that this is generally not seen as a realistic possibility for the short and medium term.

Municipalities, provinces and central government

All respondents felt that the division of tasks between local authorities, provincial authorities and central government functions adequately. In response to the question of whether that task division is ready for review, the answers were mixed. At local authority level (Association of Netherlands Municipalities, VNG), the administrative role of the provinces is currently under discussion. The role played by the provinces in the creation of basic libraries was successful, but this process is now as good as complete. According to the VNG, the upscaling has made local authorities aware of the tasks of the library and of their own role as the body with direct (financial) responsibility for the public library.

However, there is also criticism from the sector of the role played by local authorities. Municipal councils, aldermen and their civil servants (in fact usually one civil servant working part-time on the library file) do not always have a clear vision of the role of the library in the local community and still operate on the basis of traditional output indicators (number of members and lending volumes). Library directors lament the fact that they receive no support with initiatives for renewal, nor any incentives via performance agreements. Some see a task for the provincial authori-
ties in helping municipal authorities to develop that role, but the VNG also wishes to play a part here. Many also see a task (and sometimes an opportunity) for the basic libraries themselves. If libraries make clear to local authorities what they are capable of and what the inevitable consequences of spending cuts are, the relationship could become a very productive and businesslike one.

Another possible pinchpoint affects basic libraries with services covering several municipalities. Variations in municipal policy are difficult to reconcile within one and the same organisation, and if basic libraries have to work with too many local authorities this can be time-consuming. However, most library directors cited this as simply part of the job. Although it is sometimes difficult to negotiate and work with local authorities, and especially with several different local authorities at the same time, the embedding of the library in the local community through municipal funding is clearly seen as a major advantage. That local embedding also manifests itself in the practical fulfilment of sometimes difficult to measure functions of the library, such as ‘education and development’, ‘arts and culture’ and ‘meeting and debate’. The local situation determines the cooperation with other parties, and enables the social function of the library to take on clear form. Cultural enterprise also thrives best at local level, according to a majority of respondents. By engaging in intelligent collaborative partnerships with other cultural and educational institutions, the service can be improved considerably without more municipal funding being required. In some cases an explicit choice is made to place the emphasis on one specific function, usually ‘development and education’. New partnerships with adult education institutes are often cited as an example of this, but libraries are also increasingly working together with cultural institutions.

Opinions on the administrative role of the provinces are very divided. Our analysis has already pointed to diverging trends for the front office (more local) and the back office (more national). The provincial ‘intermediate layer’ is in danger of falling between two stools. Local authorities see at most a facilitating role for the provinces in the future, for example in providing administrative support for the provincial directors’ forum and in coordinating the wishes of groups of municipalities which fund a shared basic library. By contrast, the provinces see a role for themselves as a necessary or ‘practical’ intermediate layer between the municipal and central government levels. Naturally, the desire on the part of libraries to retain their provincial funding (totalling just under EUR 45 million in 2005) from the Provincial Services Organisations (PSoS) plays a role here. The smaller libraries generally make more use of the services of PSoS, as they did in the days when PSoS were still Provincial Library Centres (PBCs). The fact that libraries in rural areas have a harder time financially than urban libraries is clear. Sometimes the non-specified nature of the present funding system is cited as a problem, because it leads to wide variation in the contribution per inhabitant that local authorities pay to their library. Another problem is that the earmarking of extra funds for smaller libraries will cease in a few years’ time; instead, the money will be divided among all municipalities.
Central government (the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science) still favours a three-layer system for the coming years, with central government not playing a hands-on governing role itself, but ensuring that that governance is in place. The provincial level is one of the possibilities being considered for this governance. Strikingly, the provinces in turn expect more hands-on governance from central government in order to combat differences in the level of services between the 12 provinces.

For the moment, therefore, it would seem that there is no uniform view on the division of tasks between the three government levels. Interviewees from the library sector made a number of observations here. First and foremost, there are wide differences between local authorities and provinces in the degree of library renewal. In some provinces there is wide diversity between the basic libraries, and this affects the smooth functioning of the network. The resultant variation between libraries, and consequently the quality of the library service for the individual citizen, is in the eyes of the informants not recognised as a problem everywhere. Interviewees from the sector see a role for the provinces here. In addition, there are wide differences in the supporting role and degree of professionalisation of PSOs. A process of upscaling appears to be imminent: PSOs in adjoining provinces are exploring the possibilities for cooperation or even merger. The sector regards it as desirable that national government should correct discrepancies such as these over the coming years.

Conclusion
If nothing else, the experts are agreed that the process of library renewal is anything but complete. There is a widely shared sense of urgency that the renewal now needs to move into the next phase. The diversity of views on how this should happen does not appear to be an insurmountable problem. In the next section we present a number of suggestions for policy, based on the insights generated by our analyses and the discussions with experts.

8.3 Suggestions for policy

The difference between the probable and the desirable projection is the extent to which the public library is able to respond to the growing trend among users to produce and organise content themselves. Innovation is already under way in the library sector, but the slowness with which it is proceeding is a cause for concern for many. There are also fears that some innovations will not get off the ground at all in the present structure. To generate greater innovative capacity and make the existing innovative capacity more effective, we put forward a number of suggestions for policy here based on our analyses and our discussions with experts. Translating those suggestions into policy and practice is and remains a task for the public authorities and the sector itself.
Now that the Libraries Steering Group and the Office for Library Renewal have formally ceased to exist, the predominant impression from discussions with experts is that the path being followed is the right one, but that the pace of change is too slow. Our suggestions for policy fall in with this view. Substantive renewal is the priority, for which the most important condition lies not at the administrative/organisational level, but in the people: the present and future staff.

In our suggestions we look at how focus and effectiveness can be achieved in practice. We break this down into two components: substantive and administrative/organisational requirements. Substantively, there will need to be a greater focus on the user, and a move away from organising information (collection) by the library to providing assistance to the users, who will increasingly be organising content themselves. Administrative/organisational requirements must support these substantive changes. We draw a distinction here between the sector and the public authorities; the principal actor is the library sector (including the VOB), with public authorities playing a facilitating and monitoring role. Figure 8.1 summarises this structure.

Figure 8.1
Overview of the suggestions

8.4 Substantive policy suggestions

‘Focus on the user’ was one of the principles we formulated at the beginning of this study. Our focus was deliberately on the changes in the use of library services. We expected an analysis of these changes to produce the most direct pointers for what the sector needs to do over the next ten years. But ‘focus on the user’ was also a starting point for the library renewal process. A case of nothing new under the sun, then? Yes and no. The 2001 joint agreement cited ‘focus on the user’ as a core objective, but provided no substantive elaboration. Later this did happen and the substantive renewal was also monitored (Kasperkovitz 2006). But the environment in which the library operates is changing at a tremendous pace. Our diagnosis in chapter 7 has now thrown the motto ‘focus on the user’ into even sharper relief.
Traditionally, the public library has been an institution which creates added value for the user by providing access to a selection of printed media and, later, audiovisual media as well, organised on the basis of content and of high quality. In the eyes of users, and younger users especially, that added value is being undermined because part of the library offering is moving from the physical to the digital domain, and new content is also being added in that domain which is no longer distributed on physical carriers. Since it is also no longer possible for the library to organise everything that appears in a useful way, the balance in the collecting and organising of information is shifting away from the library to (potential) users. The task for the library over the next ten years will be to facilitate this development as adequately as possible.

This certainly does not mean ‘you ask, we perform’; a degree of paternalism is and remains desirable and necessary based on the social task of the library. On the other hand, users must be helped as well as possible in learning to organise the surfeit of information and culture with which they are bombarded. If libraries are able to reach users in the way to which they have become accustomed to searching for information (largely via the familiar search engines on the Internet), a condition will have been created for interesting them in both the physical and digital collections of the library. In concrete terms, in our view, there are ten obvious focus areas which will ensure a better match between the services offered by the library and the way in which people will navigate their way through the cultural and information landscape in the information society of tomorrow. In addition, sharp choices will inevitably have to be made between the services that are important, given the expertise and task of the library, and in which the library can deliver added value. These ten points are discussed below.

1. **Make content easier to find**
Fit in with the way in which users search for and share content and stories. The traditional decimal, hierarchical classification systems used by libraries — necessary to be able to organise a physical collection — are slowly but surely being pushed to the background by new, less exact but nonetheless practical methods of classification (tag clouds, number of downloads, searching for title words, full-text search; see 7.1). Try to present content in such a way that users are able to find it quickly and easily. Where possible, content can be delivered in digital form. Where this is not possible and a physical carrier has to be used, intelligent technology (the RFID chips in all Dutch library books) can be improved greatly to help guide the user to the right place in the library. For users, the ease with which they are able to find content takes priority over the quality of that content: if they can find something quickly and easily, then ‘good’ is good enough. As a recent report (OCLC 2007: 8-6) states: ‘If convenience does trump quality, then it is the librarians’ job to make quality convenient.’

2. **Make the collection hybrid**
Open up collections for digital content on the Open Web. Do not offer only what the library itself has in its physical collection, but also refer to valuable content on the
Web. Choose which topics will and will not be kept ‘up to date’ (see suggestion 7). Do this on a national scale and create a central task force which tracks this content and updates the URLs.

3 Go in search of the user
Realise that the growing group of Internet users are not focused on institutions with a solid reputation, but increasingly on the collective recommendations of other Internet users. Therefore do not wait until these people visit (the website of) the library, but focus all attention on reaching users with what you have to offer. Develop innovative concepts aimed at digital locations where many users congregate (Google, Facebook, Ebay, etc.) or use existing possibilities such as e-mailing sub-groups of users (e.g. members who do not borrow from the library).

4 Do not regard the decline in reading and borrowing as inevitable and do not write off the book
Research shows that people see the library primarily as a place where they can find and borrow books. Although books are less popular than they were, 4 million Dutch people still consider it worthwhile to be a member of the library. Libraries which use personal marketing or expand their opening hours often see a growth in use, including in the borrowing of books. Most other countries studied in the intermezzo chapter are not faced with falling book loans, and where that is happening they are succeeding in boosting the volume of lending of other (audiovisual) materials. There is thus sufficient reason to continue believing in the value of the physical collection for users. The most important thing is that users are able to find that collection on or via the Web and that they are able to share references to the collection with other users.

5 Personalise the service based on market research
Develop digital services based on the lending records by analogy with Internet book-sellers such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Users are less concerned about their privacy than librarians think (OCLC 2007) and are probably willing – especially with a trusted institution such as the public library – to allow data about themselves to be used to enable them to receive personalised recommendations based on their own borrowing behaviour and that of others. Based on the available data, also develop more knowledge of users and (especially) non-users, so that in addition to collection recommendations other, personalised recommendations can be made, for example regarding the services offered by partners (tips on cultural events, etc.).

6 Diversify the access to digital content
Offer specific sources of digital content for specific target groups and if necessary charge a special price for this, on top of the standard membership fee. Ensure that access to this content is well protected via digital rights management, so that those who hold the rights (publishers) can trust the library as a distributor.
7 Make choices in the guide function
Stop trying to be ‘the’ guide for people in the burgeoning media and information landscape based on the existing library expertise. Thanks to the Internet, people are becoming more and more accustomed to trusting the collective opinions of other people (on social websites) and to rely less on professional expertise (‘from decimal classification to tag clouds’). Given the enormous and still growing volume of content, that expertise is also developing too slowly to be of any great value. Therefore, based on the public mission of the library, it is better to focus on topics of social interest; build a good collection around those topics, including links to freely available content on the Web, and be sure to reach the user with that collection – first digitally, and subsequently physically as well.

8 Support citizens in developing information skills and, more broadly, media wisdom
The fact that users increasingly play a central role in the distribution and organisation of content means the traditional guiding function of libraries is being pushed more to the background. Librarians can still use their expertise to help users become self-reliant in dealing with information and media. For many users, the sheer amount of information available makes it impossible to see the wood for the trees. For adult users, in particular, who can no longer be reached via mainstream education, there is a socially important task for libraries here.

9 Ensure both local (front-office tasks) and national (back-office tasks) embedding
At local level libraries can deliver a customised service, especially in functions such as ‘knowledge and information’ (e.g. ‘de G!DS’, a provision which brings together local information) and ‘arts and culture’ (collaboration with cultural partners in town and district). Nationally, services can be provided which are not tied to local circumstances and which can be organised more efficiently at national level.

10 Diversify the services of the physical branches
In large towns and cities it is more logical to deliver a customised service in specific neighbourhoods than to try and provide a full service everywhere. A new neighbourhood with lots of children has different needs from a neighbourhood with a high concentration of ethnic groups or one which is predominantly inhabited by older people. Review the opportunities for the central branch to engage in partnerships with other central institutions, such as the municipal archive and the municipal museum, in order to tap the added value for users which is latent within the combined collections and expertise.

8.5 Administrative and organisational suggestions
The administrative and organisational structure has received a great deal of attention in the library renewal process to date. Although it is perhaps still too early to judge whether this renewal operation has borne fruit, there is a fairly widely shared
opinion in the sector that ‘we are on the right path, but haven’t got there yet’. Basic libraries without a central urban core, created from a merger of several small libraries, say that they do not have the financial and human resources they need to take on the back-office tasks in a serious way (Kasperkovitz 2008). However, they do not feel this justifies throwing out the baby – the creation of basic libraries – with the bathwater. The path on which the public library has embarked appears to be the right one, but the goal has not yet been reached and the pace seems slow. To support the substantive renewal, we would make the following suggestions, divided into suggestions for the sector and suggestions for the public authorities.

The sector
The creation of larger organisational units has led to internal functional differentiation, with the creation of separate front-office and back-office tasks and functions for each core function (Richtlijn voor basisbibliotheeken 2005). As regards the back-office tasks, the larger basic libraries, led by those in the four largest municipalities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht), are now seriously capable of developing and implementing their own policy. Smaller libraries often lack the critical mass for this and are heavily dependent on the input of pso. The still large number of library organisations means that the development of new services is also often seen as too fragmented. Not surprisingly, therefore, there are calls for centralisation of back-office tasks, even going as far as setting up a nationally operating back-office organisation (such as NBD/Biblion already is in reality). On the other hand, there is also criticism that the recent innovations by the VOB do not match the needs of users on the ground closely enough – precisely an argument against further centralisation of the back-office tasks.

As regards the front office, there is fairly general consensus that the local presence is a great asset which must above all be retained. Library directors are able to create local customised solutions in consultation with local councils, in which local partners, such as the municipality itself (local social welfare policy desk, municipal information point), other cultural institutions (museums, archives, theatre venues), education establishments and commercial players are involved. This is however difficult to achieve in practice where a basic library has a presence in several municipalities and where those municipalities have differing ideas about the desired level of provision.

As regards the front and back office, therefore, opposing tendencies can be observed: on the one hand calls for local embedding, on the other a desire for further upscaling to national level. Since the necessary innovative capacity will in the first instance have to come from the back office, more central control appears logical. The question then is how centrally driven innovations can stay in touch with user demand. Then there is the extremely pressing question of which staff will have to do this, given the imminent outflow of retiring staff and the dearth of young people available to replace them, partly because of the limited career prospects. We
offer three suggestions here, the last of which – about staff – is presented in rather more detail owing to the urgency highlighted here.

1 Local where possible, national where unavoidable
The decentralised organisation of the sector has advantages but also, as far as the necessary innovative capacity is concerned, disadvantages. The Council for Culture identified this dichotomy as long ago as 1998, and this diagnosis is broadly endorsed within the sector. In the short term there is a need to sit down with the relevant public authorities to consider the most appropriate model for centralising the back-office tasks further with a view to innovation. Two models are possible: either a national back-office organisation or a model which involves a centrally controlled structure that gives basic libraries responsibility for innovation through a tender system. The advantage of the latter model is that libraries themselves would be involved in the developments, offering a better guarantee of matching the needs of users.

2 National recognisability, local diversity
In the past, library branches were fairly uniform, based on the idea that every branch had to offer a more or less full range of services. More variants have arisen in recent years. As with staff, there is now more differentiation in the configuration of branches, from a central branch which provides everything (and which in order to do so has sometimes merged with the archive and the municipal museum) to lending points in school communities and neighbourhood centres. This approach is sometimes described as the supermarket model: the small corner shop where one pops in to make a quick purchase alongside the more distant megastore for doing the weekly shopping by car. Based on the perceived need to match the wishes of the user more closely, this is a good idea, which deserves wider application in the future. At national level, some uniformity in branch types and the level of quality they provide is desirable from the point of view of recognisability. Consideration could be given to a model with a central facility offering a minimum level of access to important sources of information and culture, plus a number of modules which offer a minimum level of facilities and quality. In theory, these modules could be designed around the five core functions, but in practice it would perhaps be better if they were designed to match the socio-demographic profile of the neighbourhood or village in which they are located.

3 A masterplan for the staffing problems
The forthcoming need to replace retiring staff is a major problem, but one that also offers opportunities for renewal. The influx of students joining the sector is too low to accommodate the anticipated outflow. A targeted recruitment policy will be needed, especially given the anticipated squeeze on the labour market in the coming years.
− To attract good-quality staff (including those already in employment) will require competitive salaries, more challenging jobs and better career prospects.

− The required competences are changing and focusing more on developments in the digital domain, but also on service delivery (customer-centricty). This has implications for staff recruitment, the structuring of training programmes and the retraining of incumbent staff.

− The norm for investments in training and development of incumbent staff is currently a minimum of 3% of the gross wages bill. This norm is not achieved everywhere, and there are even grounds for questioning whether larger investments are not needed under the present circumstances, especially as recent analyses by Statistics Netherlands (CBS 2007b) have shown that training has become significantly more expensive in recent years.

Since it is the staff who will have to put renewal into practice, this is in our view the most important bottleneck in moving from the ‘probable’ to the ‘desirable’ future. Without a temporary financial stimulus, finding a solution to the above points seems impossible. It is also strongly recommended that agreements be reached in the near future between the various stakeholders on a masterplan for the staffing problem.

The sector organisation VOB
As an organisation which performs tasks for the national system on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Netherlands Public Library Association (VOB) plays a central role in the sector. In the views of many in the sector, the large number of members (the libraries), of which there are generally around a hundred representatives at the six-monthly general members’ meetings of the VOB, does little to promote decisiveness and efficacy (the situation was described as ‘chaotic’ more than once in the discussions with stakeholders). Given the decentralised system of basic libraries, there is no ready-made solution for this problem. Some see the answer in further upscaling of the basic libraries, so that ultimately around 25 will remain throughout the country. That would increase the decision-making capacity, but the management of the basic libraries would be far removed from the basis (the municipalities they serve). This makes it difficult to get councils in all municipalities in a given catchment area pulling in the same direction. We shall return to this in the section on public authorities.

One point of criticism levelled at the sector organisation is that the innovation concepts that the VOB has developed in the past have not always been a good match for the wishes of users. More than once in the discussions with experts, the view was expressed that the VOB is too far removed from the world of everyday library practice to be able to design substantive innovation in a practically useful way. One possibility for meeting this objection would be to allow libraries to develop these innovations themselves, where appropriate in partnership with PSOS, with the VOB setting the financial and performance frameworks in consultation with the three layers of government. Libraries could bid for innovation projects via a sort of tender system,
with the board of the VOB (not the members’ meeting) organising the allocation of projects to candidates in order to prevent conflicts of interest.

Public authorities
During the library renewal process, there was a clear division of responsibilities between the three layers of government, with local authorities having direct responsibility, the provincial authorities being responsible for the regional administration and national government setting the frameworks (Koren 2005). This division of tasks is now becoming slightly more problematic. Basic libraries increasingly ‘work for’ several municipalities, making direct governance by a single municipality awkward. At provincial level, by contrast, the administration has in general been placed increasingly in the hands of the basic libraries themselves, especially in provinces with only one or a few basic libraries (Groningen, Flevoland, Friesland, Drenthe). Cutting across this is the question of divergent trends (local versus national) in the front and back-office tasks.

There is no ready-made solution for this complex situation. However, if we place the main emphasis on the need for innovative capacity, then more central funding, with or without an intermediate stage from municipalities/provinces to national level, is a logical option. We offer three suggestions here.

1 More central government control
It seems inevitable that the public authorities will need to consult in the very near future on a redistribution of responsibilities and the associated financial frameworks. The necessary innovative capacity can only be achieved with more central control. Since the central funding amounts to only a fraction of the total subsidy amount, placing control at central level is not easily achievable in practice. And as removing money from the municipal level has almost immediate consequences on local opening hours and therefore the physical accessibility of the library, transferring municipal funding to national level poses a threat to the front-office function.

2 Administrative role of provinces under debate
Different ideas circulate in the library sector regarding the role of the provinces. The provincial administration of libraries is based on practical considerations – it is a useful scale or ‘intermediate level’ for arranging things – rather than having political significance or democratic legitimacy. Given the diverging trend towards national (back office, innovation) and local (front office, partnership with local players), an administrative role for the provinces is a less natural option in the longer term. This does not however detract from the practical argument about the useful level of scale (collaboration between libraries, provincial directors’ consultation). At the same time, a situation can be imagined where there is further collaboration between PSOs, or even mergers, as has been the case for several years in the provinces of Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland. Given these tendencies towards upscaling, it appears inevitable that this role will move further up the administrative
column and that more steering or control will be expected of national government in the coming years.

3  **Strengthening the role of local authorities**

The process of decentralisation, now 20 years old, requires a direct role for local authorities in the operation of the public library. There are views in the library sector that local authorities vary widely in the way they fulfil this role. The system operates better in the larger municipalities than smaller ones, where the task often falls on the shoulders of a single civil servant who already has many other duties in portfolio. Strengthening the control of local authorities is thus not yet complete and will demand attention in the coming years. This seems to us to be a task for the basic libraries themselves, with the provinces playing a supporting or facilitating role (bringing the parties together periodically).

8.6  **An agenda for the near term**

These suggestions for substantive and administrative/organisational renewal bring us towards the conclusion of this study. We will recap the most urgent points, so that it is clear what the sector and the public authorities need to focus their attention on in the near term. We will discuss what we consider to be three crucial points:

1  Continuation of collaboration between the sector and the three layers of government in the interests of the substantive renewal of the public library network.
2  Searching for solutions to the threatened shortage of staff, especially staff who can carry forward the process of substantive renewal.
3  Filling gaps in knowledge through research.

1. As the mandate of the Libraries Steering Group (Stuurgroep Bibliotheeken) and the Office for Library Renewal (Procesbureau Bibliotheekvernieuwing) formally came to an end at the end of 2007, it is very important that control is not lost in the renewal process. The ‘players’ concerned have (as in every game) divergent interests. From the discussions with stakeholders some fears emerged that these interests will dominate in the coming period if there is a lack of central control, whereas just one interest should be central, namely the substantive renewal of the public library system. A calm and ordered administrative/organisational situation is crucial for this. It is up to the parties concerned (the three layers of government and the library sector itself) to reach a new agreement on the neutral division of responsibilities. If this agreement is not achieved, it is the task of central government to impose it. If a sound statutory regulation of the public library network – something which is currently lacking – is able to foster administrative calm, then it is worthwhile for the government to continue in the near future along the pathway on which the VOB has embarked.
2. The most important condition for substantive renewal of the public library system is tackling the staffing issue. There are three components to this problem, all of which operate in the same negative direction. First, there is the accelerated outflow of an ageing workforce which will begin in a few years’ time; second, there is the lack of young people opting for a career in the public library sector, partly because of its somewhat fusty image and the lack of career prospects (and competitive salary packages and – at present – jobs that offer too little challenge); thirdly, there is the substantive renewal for which no ready-to-use training models are currently available, either for future or existing staff.

All in all, the staffing issue is the most urgent obstacle to the success of the substantive renewal. It is after all people who will have to bring that renewal about. The sector and the public authorities will have to put their heads together in the very near future in order to devise a masterplan to tackle the staffing issue. This plan will have to cover training, recruitment and remuneration as a cohesive whole. It is logical that central government should play a steering role here, and provide the necessary financial injection.

3. During this study a number of important gaps in knowledge came to light which were a constraining factor in the analyses. This creates an urgent need for a mature research agenda for the sector, aimed at filling several of these gaps simultaneously.

First, little is known about the reasons people put forward for not joining or not using the public library. The existing research is strongly focused on users; they are often approached during visits to the library, which exacerbates the likelihood of optimistic distortions. More population surveys (among both users and non-users) are desirable.

Little is also known about members who do not borrow from the library and about those who give up their membership. The first group are members who do not use their membership. This is often a precursor to the ultimate giving up of that membership. When these groups are approached specifically and asked about the underlying reasons, it turns out that a proportion of them could be won back for the library relatively easily.

Through the lending records, libraries possess a treasure trove of material which could be used to map out the wishes and needs of their members. At present, little is done in the way of analysing these data for marketing purposes. As analyses have shown (Boter 2005), however, a great deal of interesting information can be gleaned from these data which could benefit the substantive renewal of the library service.

One striking finding is that young members of ethnic minorities (especially those of Moroccan origin) make much more use of the library than their indigenous peers. It would be interesting to investigate precisely where these differences come from. Further research among primary school pupils could shed more light on this and generate strategies for library policy.

It is also recommended that evaluation studies be made a standard component in substantive innovative projects in the coming years, in order to test the effects
of new services. In practice, studies of this kind have been shown to lead to immediately usable suggestions for improvement. The research is often small in scale and high in quality, places few demands on the financial resources and can lead to reports relatively quickly.

Finally, there is the question of the library sector statistics. Inevitably, existing forms of service are better documented than new services. Nonetheless, it is very important that new forms of service are also recorded reliably and in a mutually comparable way in the Libraries Information System (BIS). In addition to a central effort by the vob, this requires the cooperation of all libraries.
Note

1 The PBCs (Provincial Library Centres), largely responsible for providing rural library services, have been transformed into Provincial Services Organisations (psos), which no longer provide some of the direct services themselves but only provide services to the basic libraries (see § 1.1).
Sounding board group and interviewees

Sounding board group
Thije Adams (chairman), member of Libraries Steering Group (Stuurgroep Bibliotheken)
Marjan Hammersma, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Head of Media, Literature and Libraries department
Wim Kamerman, process manager, Office for Library Renewal (Procesbureau Bibliotheekvernieuwing)
Wim Kuiper, member of executive board, Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)
Charles Noordam, Director of Public Libraries Service, municipality of The Hague
Jan Ploeger, Director of Association of Provincial Authorities (IPO)

Interviewees
Theo Bijvoet, acting head of Media, Literature and Library’s department, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
Francien van Bohemen, coordinator, WSF bureau (scientific support function), The Hague
Cees Brekelmans, member of Libraries Steering Group and Mayor of Borne
Jos Debeij, Director of Public Reading Room and Library, Deventer
Marcel Eijffinger, senior policy worker for libraries, Media, Literature and Libraries department, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
Quirijn van den Hoogen, policy worker, Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)
Jos Kok, director of Cubiss (PSO), Tilburg
Henriëtte de Kok, director of Midden-Brabant Public Library, Tilburg
Marian Koren, head of VOB scientific bureau, The Hague
Thijs Kuipers, director of BiblioPlus, Boxmeer
Gerie Luijendijk, director of Zuid-Hollandse Delta Library, Hellevoetsluis
Jan van Maasakkers, head of Culture, Province of Gelderland
Henk Middelveld, director of Overijsselse Bibliotheek Dienst (PSO), Nijverdal
Eppo van Nispen tot Sevenaer, director of DOK library concept centre, Delft
Hans Portengen, director of Bibliotheek Bollenstreek library, Lisse
Rob Pronk, director of Biblionet Groningen (PSO)
Jan-Ewout van der Putten, secretary/director of Netherlands Public Library Association (VOB), The Hague
Jan Willem Rijke, Cultural advisor, Association of Provincial Authorities (IPO)
Friso Visser, head of Bibliotheek.nl/VOB, The Hague
Chris Wiersma, director of Almere public library
Erna Winters, director of Alkmaar public library
## List of associations and acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name in English</th>
<th>Acronym/alias</th>
<th>Name in Dutch</th>
<th>Website (in English where available)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Association of Netherlands Municipalities</td>
<td>VNG</td>
<td>Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten</td>
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<td>Stichting Collectieve Propaganda voor het Nederlandse Boek</td>
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<td>Council for Culture</td>
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<td>Raad voor Cultuur</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cultuur.nl/english.html">http://www.cultuur.nl/english.html</a></td>
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<td>Dutch Booksellers Federation</td>
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<td>CvdM</td>
<td>Commissariaat voor de Media</td>
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<td>Stichting Schrijvers School Samenleving</td>
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<td>Libraries Steering Group</td>
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<td>VOB</td>
<td>Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken (formerly NBLC)</td>
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<td>Stichting Lezen</td>
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<td>Office for Library Renewal</td>
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<td>Provincial library centre</td>
<td>PBC</td>
<td>provinciale bibliotheekcentrale (now PSO)</td>
<td>(not applicable)</td>
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<td>Provincial services organisation</td>
<td>PSO</td>
<td>provinciale serviceorganisatie (formerly PBC)</td>
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<td>The Reading &amp; Writing Foundation</td>
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<td>Stichting Lezen en Schrijven</td>
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<td>Scientific support function library</td>
<td>WSF</td>
<td>Wetenschappelijke Steunfunctiebibliotheek</td>
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<td>Steering Committee for the restructuring of the public library system</td>
<td>Meijer Committee</td>
<td>Stuurgroep herstructurering openbaar bibliotheekwerk</td>
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References


References


The Hague: SGBO.


Publications of the SCP in English


