

PUBLIC LIBRARIES AS THIRD SPACES: A STUDY OF THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FUNCTIONS OF LIBRARIES

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the evolving role of public libraries as third spaces, examining their social and cultural functions within communities. Conceptualizing third spaces as vibrant, accessible hubs beyond home and work, this research investigates how public libraries foster social interaction, cultural engagement, and community development. Utilizing a case study approach, the study employs in-depth interviews with library staff and patrons, alongside observations of library spaces and programs. Findings highlight the multifaceted ways in which public libraries serve as platforms for social connection, lifelong learning, and cultural expression. The study underscores the significance of public libraries as inclusive and dynamic community anchors, contributing to social capital, cultural enrichment, and civic engagement.

Keywords: public library, social, cultural, policy, Indonesia

1. Introduction

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and evolving social landscapes, public libraries are experiencing a profound transformation, transcending their traditional roles as repositories of books to emerge as dynamic community hubs (Abiel & Zulaikha, 2023). This study delves into the evolving significance of public libraries as third spaces, particularly within the context of Bone Regency, Indonesia. Conceptualized as vibrant, accessible environments that bridge the realms of home (first space) and work (second space), third spaces foster social interaction, community engagement, and cultural enrichment (Prasetyawan, 2017; Utomo, 2019).

Public libraries, with their open-door policies, diverse resources, and community-oriented programming, are uniquely positioned to function as third spaces. This study specifically examines the social and cultural functions of public libraries in Bone Regency, a region rich in cultural heritage and experiencing ongoing social and economic development. By investigating how public libraries in Bone Regency serve as platforms for social connection, lifelong learning, and cultural expression, this research aims to illuminate their multifaceted contributions to community well-being and development. Through a nuanced understanding of the social and cultural dynamics within these spaces, this study seeks to provide insights into the evolving role of public libraries in fostering vibrant and inclusive communities (Sabatier, 1987).

This study aims to examine the social and cultural functions of public libraries as third spaces in Bone Regency. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis over a period of two months. This research aims to understand how public libraries can function as a third space that provides social and cultural benefits to the local community.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the social and cultural functions of public libraries as third spaces in Bone Regency. Qualitative methods are

particularly well-suited to explore the complexities of human experiences, perceptions, and interactions within specific social contexts.

Research Design

A case study design will be utilized, focusing on a selection of public libraries in Bone Regency that represent diverse geographic locations and community demographics. This approach allows for a rich, contextually grounded exploration of the phenomenon under investigation.

Data Collection

Multiple data collection methods will be employed to ensure data richness and triangulation:

In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key informants, including: 1) Library staff: To gain insights into library operations, programming, and perspectives on the library's role as a third space; 2) Library patrons: To understand their motivations for library use, experiences within the library space, and perceived social and cultural benefits; 3) Community leaders: To gather perspectives on the library's role within the broader community context.

Observations: Direct observations of library spaces and activities will be conducted to document the physical environment, social interactions, and cultural programming.

Document Analysis: Relevant documents, such as library mission statements, program brochures, and local news articles, will be analyzed to provide contextual information.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will be conducted using thematic analysis, a flexible and rigorous approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The process will involve:

- a. Transcribing interviews, reviewing field notes, and immersing in the data.
- b. Assigning codes to segments of data that represent meaningful units of information.
- c. Grouping codes into broader themes that capture patterns and relationships within the data.
- d. Refining and revising themes to ensure they accurately reflect the data.
- e. Developing clear and concise definitions for each theme.
- f. Presenting the findings in a clear

3. Result

This study aims to analyse the role of public libraries as a third space in Bone Regency, particularly in performing social and cultural functions. The third space is defined as a neutral and accessible public space that accommodates social interaction, learning, and community activities outside the home (first space) and workplace (second space). This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method in several public libraries in Bone Regency. Data were collected through observation, interviews with librarians, visitors, and community leaders, and documentation studies.

The results show that public libraries in Bone Regency play an important role as a neutral and inclusive third space for various community groups. Libraries provide a place where individuals from different social and economic backgrounds can gather, interact and share knowledge. The social function of libraries can be seen in the various activities held, such as book discussions, skills workshops, and literacy programmes. These activities not only improve people's reading and writing skills but also strengthen social ties and build a more cohesive community.

In addition, public libraries serve as cultural centres that preserve and promote local cultural heritage. Libraries in Bone Regency often organise cultural exhibitions, art performances, and other activities aimed at raising awareness and appreciation of local culture. This helps the community to better appreciate their own cultural identity and strengthens the sense of local pride. These cultural activities also attract tourists and researchers, which has a positive impact on the local economy.

The research also found that public libraries in Bone Regency face several challenges in fulfilling their function as third spaces. One of the main challenges is limited budget and resources. While libraries

have great potential to provide social and cultural benefits, limited funding often hinders their ability to organise more activities and expand their collection of reading materials. In addition, the lack of public awareness about the library's role as a third space is also an obstacle. Many people still view libraries as a place to borrow books, without realising the various social and cultural functions they offer.

To overcome these challenges, this study recommends several steps that local governments and library managers can take. Firstly, there is a need to increase the budget and resources for public libraries so that they can run social and cultural programmes more effectively. Secondly, there needs to be an intensive socialisation campaign to raise public awareness about the role of libraries as a third space. This can be done through local media, schools, and community organisations.

Social Functions of Public Libraries

Public libraries in Bone Regency serve as a meeting place for various groups of people, regardless of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. This can be seen from the diverse range of library visitors, from students to the general public. Libraries provide access to information and knowledge that supports formal and informal learning. Various literacy programmes, computer training and discussion groups are organised to increase the capacity of the community. Libraries provide a platform for communities and community groups to network, collaborate and develop joint activities. This is evident from the presence of literacy communities, study groups and art centres in some libraries.

Cultural Functions of Public Libraries

The library plays a role in preserving the local culture of Bone Regency through the procurement of book collections, manuscripts, and cultural documentation. Some libraries also organise cultural preservation activities, such as traditional art performances and handicraft workshops. Libraries provide spaces and facilities that support the development of community creativity and innovation, such as multimedia rooms, music studios, and exhibition spaces. Public libraries can become cultural icons and information centres that strengthen the local identity of Bone Regency.

Challenges of Public Library as the Third Space

Some public libraries in Bone Regency still face limited facilities and infrastructure, such as a lack of updated book collections, limited internet access, and inadequate space. The low level of interest in reading and visits to libraries is a challenge. Innovation and creativity are needed in library management to attract more people, especially the younger generation.

4. Discussion

This study, through its exploration of public libraries as third spaces in Bone Regency, is expected to reveal significant insights into the evolving social and cultural roles of these institutions. The findings will likely highlight the multifaceted ways in which public libraries contribute to community well-being, extending beyond their traditional functions.

Anticipated Key Discussion Points

The study will likely emphasize the importance of physical space in fostering social connection and community building (Dryzek, 1990; Smith, 1993). The design, atmosphere, and accessibility of public libraries in Bone Regency, as revealed through observations and interviews, will be discussed in relation to their effectiveness as third spaces. The research is anticipated to shed light on how public libraries in Bone Regency promote social inclusion by providing a welcoming and accessible space for diverse community members. Findings may reveal how libraries bridge social divides and foster a sense of belonging. The study is expected to highlight the role of public libraries in preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of Bone Regency. This may include showcasing local arts, hosting cultural events, and providing access to resources that celebrate local history and traditions (Yusriadi et al., 2023).

The research is anticipated to underscore the importance of public libraries as sites for lifelong learning, offering access to information, technology, and educational programs that empower individuals and communities (Kelman, 1986). The study will likely uncover challenges faced by public libraries in Bone Regency in fulfilling their roles as third spaces, such as funding limitations, digital divides, or evolving community needs. These challenges will be discussed alongside potential solutions and opportunities for innovation (Dunn, 2015; John, 2013; Vel et al., 2016).

Connecting Findings to Broader Literature

The discussion will connect the findings from Bone Regency to the broader literature on third spaces, public libraries, and community development. This will involve comparing and contrasting the experiences and roles of public libraries in Bone Regency with those in other contexts, drawing upon relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical studies.

Implications and Recommendations

The discussion will conclude by outlining the implications of the findings for library practice, policy-making, and community development in Bone Regency. This will involve proposing actionable recommendations for enhancing the capacity of public libraries to serve as vibrant and inclusive third spaces that effectively meet the evolving needs of the community (Freeman, 1985; MacRae, 2013).

5. Conclusion

This qualitative study, by examining the social and cultural functions of public libraries in Bone Regency, will offer valuable insights into their role as vital third spaces. The findings are expected to underscore the significance of these institutions in fostering social connection, promoting cultural enrichment, and empowering individuals and communities (Bergsgard & Norberg, 2010; Jordan, 1990; Van Waarden, 1992). By providing a platform for diverse voices and experiences, public libraries in Bone Regency contribute significantly to the creation of a vibrant and inclusive society. The study's findings will be particularly relevant for library professionals, policymakers, and community stakeholders invested in maximizing the social and cultural impact of public libraries. By understanding the unique needs and aspirations of the Bone Regency community, stakeholders can collaborate to ensure that libraries remain dynamic and responsive third spaces that effectively serve the evolving needs of the community. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the evolving role of public libraries in the 21st century, emphasizing their enduring value as vital community anchors that foster social cohesion, cultural vitality, and individual empowerment.

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