Why Public Libraries Close
Outline of Presentation

- Overview
- Why Study Library Closure
- Library Closure Types
- Research Design
- Assumptions & Limitations
- Findings
- Food for Thought: Case Studies
- Questions to Ask Before Closure
- Recommendations
Overview
GeoLib Projects Related to Closure Study

Public Library Siting & Location Theory
Dissertation Research (Koontz 1990)

Research Questions:

- What methods and guidelines can library managers use to estimate the average geographic market area and population size within that area?

- Which independent market demographic variables correlate with library use levels at specific and existing library facility sites?

- Are the relationships between library use and specific market demographic variables statistically significant?
Important Conclusions Relevant to Today’s Presentation

1) Unique population characteristics of the market area within which the library facility is located, affect use

2) **Library market areas are ill-defined, critically limiting planning decisions**

3) Levels and types of use differ in non-white markets (tumbled upon this ‘gem…’)

4) **Library data are gathered inconsistently.**
Majority Minority Markets Use the Library Differently
DOE 1996 Award  based upon 1992 ALA Carroll Baber Research Award

**Project:** Identification of majority minority library markets using geographic information system software, and determine types and level of in-library use.

**Conclusions/Results:** In-library use (specifically) should be counted at the neighborhood level to better profile use at a single majority minority location.
Hand-held computers check out library usage

This study may be the first where technology traditionally used in industrial and commercial applications is used to serve the general public.

In what is believed to be the first study of its kind, public library usage has been documented by using portable data terminals to scan bar code labels corresponding to specific types of in-library services. This study maybe the first where technology traditionally used in industrial and commercial applications is used to serve the general public.

The nationwide study utilizing hand-held computer terminals and bar code scanning equipment to measure public library usage was recently concluded. The results of this survey may have a dramatic impact on future funding, staffing and operations. For library systems facing budget shortfalls, the findings may even determine whether specific library branches remain open or are closed.
Sample Results from Study: National Trends?

Highest Ranking Library Activities among Hispanics

• Reading/Writing – 23%
• Browsing – 21%
• Using Computer – 13%
• At check-out/library card – 10%

• Highest incidence of tutoring among all the study groups (1.5%)
GeoLib Projects
Public Libraries Serving Areas of Poverty

Project: Since individuals in poverty have few alternatives to information access, identify the poverty level surrounding public library outlets (1997)

Results: Findings used by the (then) Gates Library Foundation in first-year distribution of hardware and software, as well as by the American Library Association to argue for an alternative E-Rate distribution for public libraries

American Library Association
ALA Loleta Fyan Award 1997
Plotting user address data is optimal way to help define customer markets for libraries
GeoLib Projects
IMLS Project - Marketing Research CE for Librarians

Project: Development of a marketing research classes for librarians (2000) including use of GIS

Conclusion/Results: Librarians throughout the country need access to a standardized library database for decision making to utilize with their own local data.
**GeoLib Projects**
**National Digital Basemap of Public Libraries**

**Project:** Geocoding of all 1999 public library outlets with correcting of all 16,000 library locations to a known level of accuracy. Award from NCES/DOE (2001)

**Results:** Development of a public library base map for use in a nationwide public library database
GeoLib Projects: PLGDB
http://www.geolib.org/PLGDB.cfm

**Project:** Develop a nationwide digital map of public library locations; linked with demographic data relevant to library use and library use data, IMLS National Leadership Grant (2003)

**Result:** Public Library Geographic Database (PLGDB)
Recent GeoLib Projects

- **World Book Award** (2006) Study of Linguistically Isolated Public Library Markets
- ALA Branch Closure Study (2006)
- **OCLC** (2007-2008) *Branch Closure Study* (follow up to Phase One of ALA Study)
Closure Study: Some History

- City of Salinas, CA 2005
Franklin Library--Boston
Legal service area
…geographic market area dispersion
Overlay geo-coding on this type of demographic data
Small distances—big barriers
...small distances-- big barriers
Some segments are less mobile
Changes or diminished hours of access

HOURS OF OPERATION
MON 10 AM - 8 PM
TUE, WED, FRI 9 AM - 6 PM
THUR 9 AM - 8 PM
SAT 10 AM - 4 PM
SUN CLOSED

248-2665
DIAL A STORY 248-2936
Mobility can also be related to the library and reading habit
Why Study Library Closure

- If closure results in permanent service loss, actual and potential markets will be impacted, affecting public library mission.
- Gains may appear in use figures but uncounted losses may be occurring and offsetting gains.
- Each situation will factor unique pros and cons—these must be evident to all stakeholders.
# Types of Closures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Permanent Closure</th>
<th>Temporary Closure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planned</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type 1 closure (e.g., outlet closure with no plans to replace library service or outlet closure with services relocated to new site)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type 2 closure (e.g., library remodeling or renovation or technology upgrade)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unplanned</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type 3 closure (e.g., outlet closed due to huge natural disaster, political decisions without library input)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type 4 closure (e.g., minor unplanned renovations or remodeling due to roof collapses, water damage, etc.)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types of Library Closures

- Types 2 and 4 have no net long-term change to geographic market area of library outlet
- Type 3 closures are unique and hopefully very rare events
- Type 1 closures most important from library closure standpoint
  - Can plan and study impacts
  - May serve different geographic market areas
  - Can receive library users input
Research Design

1) Identify public libraries that potentially closed
2) Collect data about why those libraries closed
3) Analyze data to identify trends, patterns, and potential long-term public library issues that should be addressed
Identifying Closed Public Libraries

- Utilized Federal – State Cooperative System annual library reports from 1999 – 2004
- Libraries that were listed in a FSCS report but that were not listed in the FSCS report for the following year were tentatively identified as potential library closures
Collecting Data on the Library Closures

- Combination of Internet searches and telephone calls used to identify an individual knowledgeable about each of the potential library closures in each community
- A survey questionnaire was administered with each of those pre-identified individuals about the specific potential library closures in question
Data Analyses

- Survey questionnaire responses were entered into a database and the data tabulated relative to other libraries.
- Geographic information system software was used to analyze the socioeconomic and demographic profiles using a one-mile radius around the closed public library outlets.
Examples of GIS Radii and Block Groups
GIS Analysis Assumptions

- Individuals are evenly distributed across the entire area of a census block group.
- Users most likely to be affected by a library closure will be users with limited mobility.
- A one-mile radius is a good estimate of the geographic market area for users with limited mobility.
Study Limitations

- Telephone interviews were not extensive so there may be a perceptual bias about a library closure.
- Each closure is because of local events, so ability to extrapolate the sum of such local events to a national level may be limited.
- No data on library use prior to closure so actual impacts of closure is conjectural.
Findings
Findings....

1) the number of libraries permanently or temporarily closed in the study’s sample was 134 and 105 respectively. Of those temporary or permanent closures, 76 closures were replaced by another library in the same ‘neighborhood’ or another library in the same system and another 34 were either remodeled or merged with another library system. Therefore, only 134 permanent library closures occurred in this study’s sample where another library was not built or remodeled to replace the loss of service and resources.

2) specific actions to minimize potential impacts of the closure on existing library users are rarely taken. Librarians may benefit from guidelines and recommendations geared to this type of closure

3) during the time period of this study, the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the population immediately surrounding (1 mile radius) the closed library tended to be poorer, less educated, and with more renters than home-owners when compared to the U.S. population in calendar year 1999 year as a whole.
Extreme Closure Examples

Friends of the Library voted to close themselves in an effort to secure funding for a new library that never materialized.

Librarian stole and sold all the computers and skipped town.

Melting sea ice exposed shoreline to greater erosion and an entire Native community had to move away.
**Food for Thought**

- Did some of the users of the closed location quit using any type of library resources and services altogether due to access problems.
- Did all users have ability or desire to travel ‘across the highway or bridge’ or ‘into town.’.
- A study prior to any dramatic change should be conducted so as not to assume ‘all is well.’
- Experiential knowledge of the librarian is essential.
- Questions to consider before closure…(Koontz 1997)
Additional Questions to Ask before Closure

1. Is the community aware of the imminent closure? Do you have public advocates?
2. Is the facility adequate and attractive?
3. Is adequate parking available?
4. Are the services provided meeting the needs and wants of the community and how is this assessed?
5. Is there adequate and long-term funding available for any newly planned facility?
6. Have the impacts of the closure / relocation on library customer markets with the least mobility been considered, as well as ways to overcome any potential problems for those users?
Summary…

- The results of this study are of historical, current and future interest. Libraries are identified which closed during (historical) and the study offers a framework for a better understanding of why these closed (current).

- But the study gains little ground in terms of understanding how the actual library users of the closed libraries were impacted (future).
Distance Matters…

Measure Tool

This document shows the positions of the library and the elementary school on the map using the measure tool, and reports the great circle distance between them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>119° 47' 40&quot; W</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36° 50' 24&quot; N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>119° 47' 38&quot; W</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36° 50' 13&quot; N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>1,113.7 ft</td>
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<tr>
<td>True Course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36° 50' 14&quot; N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
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<tr>
<td>True Course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,472.9 ft</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Clear Points
**Recommendations**

- Estimated geographic market areas must be established to understand the scope of individual library’s customer markets.
- Complementary research then is needed which is longitudinal in nature, tracking what happens to library customer markets of a closed public library.
- Additional research and inquiry is also needed as to: a) within what situations is ‘no action’ a reasonable course of action; and b) for the other situations, what guidelines and recommendations should be provided.
- A major and desired study outcome is to stimulate library and information studies (LIS) researchers’ interest location. Are facilities placed equitably? If not, why? How does management decide where to re-open, merge, or build a new facility? How are services re-distributed along with resources and within the library’s mission?
- A re-design of the FSCS public library entity and outlet (branch) files
- Service and equity will be less diminished when the impact of closure on people in the community is assessed by library management.
Thank you for attending!!

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