Library stories

A systematic review of narrative aspects within and around libraries

Frandsen, Tove Faber; Sørensen, Kristian Møhler; Lyngroes Fladmose, Anne

Published in:
Journal of Documentation

DOI:
10.1108/JD-10-2020-0182

Publication date:
2021

Document version:
Accepted manuscript

Citation for published version (APA):

Go to publication entry in University of Southern Denmark's Research Portal

Terms of use
This work is brought to you by the University of Southern Denmark. Unless otherwise specified it has been shared according to the terms for self-archiving. If no other license is stated, these terms apply:

- You may download this work for personal use only.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying this open access version

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details and we will investigate your claim. Please direct all enquiries to puresupport@bib.sdu.dk
Library stories: a systematic review of narrative aspects within and around libraries

Abstract

Background. Libraries are increasingly trying to communicate the library’s contributions and telling the library stories. Stories can be a component of impact assessment and thus add nuance to an assessment. Evaluations of libraries can include collecting and presenting stories of change which can be used as evidence in impact evaluations. The narrative field allows for many different approaches to a narrative perspective in the study of libraries, but we have little overview of these studies.

Aim. The purpose of this study is to introduce the narrative field and present a systematic review of the existing studies of libraries that use narrative approaches.

Method. The methods in this study comprise of a systematic review of publications reporting narrative approaches to studying libraries. To retrieve the relevant studies Library and Information Science Abstracts, Scopus, Web of Science and Proquest Dissertation were searched. Furthermore, we examined reference lists and performed citation searches. Study selection was performed by two reviewers independently. Data from the included studies was extracted using templates by one author and confirmed by another.

Results. The database searches retrieved 2,096 records across the four databases which were screened in two steps resulting in 35 included studies. We identify studies introducing to narrative inquiries in library studies as well as studies using narrative approaches to the study of libraries.

Originality/value. Exploring narratives and stories for understanding and evaluating the library’s worth is a promising field. More work is needed, though, to develop theoretical and methodological frameworks. Several of the included studies can serve as examples of the potential of a narrative perspective in the study of libraries.
Introduction
Libraries are increasingly trying to communicate the library’s contributions and telling the library stories using a variety of approaches. These approaches range from data visualization (Datig & Whiting, 2018; Terrill, 2018) to the use of advocates and media professionals (Holt, 2000; Lo, 2007). Farkas, Hinchliffe & Houk (2015) argue that “[g]athering and analyzing data to tell the library’s story as well as identify areas for improvement require commitment, time, effort, and resources” and analyses the factors that facilitate the development of a culture of assessment.

Recent examples of working with stories in arts and culture include a study of the value and impact of digital collections (Marsh et al., 2016), a proposed charter of cultural reporting (Meyrick et al., 2019) and a study of the re-use of digital material (Kenfield et al., 2019). Marsh et al. (2016) recommends using storytelling in libraries, archives and museums to understand and articulate impact. They present a wide range of techniques for conveying impacts including singular stories i.e. anecdotes and broad narratives about institutional change. They argue that “storytelling is […] a key component of impact assessment more broadly at heritage institutions” (Marsh et al., 2016, p. 367). Meyrick et al. (2019) introduces six commitments to guide credible narrative construction that can be used practically to ensure credible narratives. Credible narratives are necessary as the cultural sector needs to communicate the intangible value and “[i]n arts and culture, meaningful communication about value requires an approach to narrative that does not slip into the language of marketing, advocacy, or ‘box ticking’” (Meyrick et al., 2019: 382). Kenfield et al. (2019) argues that proving the value of digital collections typically involve collection and analysis of standardized use data. However, existing guidelines and recommendations lack “qualitative or storytelling measures that can add much needed nuance to assessment” (Kenfield et al., 2019, p. 83).

There are also examples of collecting and presenting stories in libraries. Brophy (2008) recommends the use of ethnographic methods, expert assessments and painting rich pictures by using narrative approaches. According to Brophy narratives are not easy to neither construct nor use, however, they can help communicate the achievements of the library. Eicher-Catt and Edmondson (2016) presents the results of narratives collected from library personnel and argue that the importance of the stories being told about libraries are increasingly recognized by library personnel.

Every person who works in a library has their own personal library story, as does every person who uses a library. Unfortunately, every nonuser also has a story of why they don’t use the library. Often community leaders and elected officials do not see the value of the library. When used effectively, library stories can be an opportunity to teach the value of libraries to these leaders (Eicher-Catt & Edmondson, 2016, p. 219).

Cooke (2016) explores the need for alternative narratives to be included in library and information science curricula and finds that more stories of resistance and more emerging stories should be included. Organizational stories offer real contributions to the development of innovation and transfer of knowledge in organizations (Colon-Aguirre (2014, 2015a, 2015b). Working with narratives can also potentially help to communicate the library’s contributions and telling the library stories (Ford, 2020).
Urquhart (2015) states that libraries “[…] are faced with a continuous effort to tell a coherent story, or set of stories, to our users (and the funders and policymakers) about how our services matter to them. We may have different messages for different groups, but it is important for staff within the library and information service to see how these value messages related to each other.” (p.99). Consequently, working with narratives is a promising field for exploring the library.

The aim of this study is to introduce narratives and present a systematic review of the existing studies of libraries that use narrative approaches. Ford (2020) presents a number of narrative studies in library and information science but does not specifically focus on library studies and therefore narrative studies of libraries are not included in the review. In the following section the field of narratives is briefly presented and in the next section the methods for the systematic review is described. After presenting the results, promising lines of narrative inquiry in library studies are discussed and conclusions are drawn.

**The narrative field**

The narrative field as well as the multi-disciplinarity in narrative research are growing (De Fina & Johnstone, 2015). Narrative approaches are used in e.g. language studies, literature, political science, sociology, discourse analysis, social work and organizational studies (De Fina & Johnstone, 2015; Kvernbekk, 2014). Over time, “turns” in direction and thinking have characterized the narrative field. Importantly, the turns did not directly replace the way of thinking but provide a wider platform for narrative research (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The changes can be characterized in terms of moving from the general to the particular, from objective positivism to post-positivistic interpretation and understanding, from numbers to words as data and from one way of knowing to multiple and blurred knowing in hand with the development in human and social sciences (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

Narratology has been placed in structuralist literary science known from, among others, Aristotle, Propp, Levi-strauss, Greimas, and Genette since the early 1900s (Liveley, 2019). The purpose referred to order and fixed structures from plots, clauses, characters and functions (De Fina & Johnstone, 2015; Liveley, 2019). This is also known in narrative research as coherent big stories with beginnings, middles and endings (Boje, 2008; Kvernbekk, 2003; Liveley, 2019). As a response to the structuralist approach the post-structuralist movement started mid-1900s and questioned the underlying structural order as to subjectivity and individual bias (De Fina & Johnstone, 2015; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Recently in narrative studies new approaches have emerged e.g. the local contexts, interaction (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), embodiment (Hydén, 2013) and identity such as small stories (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

A narrative is defined by Ricoeur (Ricoeur as cited in Kvernbekk, 2014, p. 565) as:

> “a grasping together of diverse elements such as characters, plots, actions, and events into a meaningful, coherent, and temporal whole marked by a beginning, a middle, and an ending.”

The study of the ‘narrative system’ (Bal, 2009) with emplotment and narrative causality (Aristotle, 1982; Ewick & Silbey, 1995) is representing the structuralist and literary view. In the postmodern turn, narrative research is of interest to organizational scholars including the recognition of ‘stories’ as something
incoherent, fragmented and polyphonic and thereby distinct from ‘linear’ and ‘whole’ beginnings, middles and endings narratives (Boje, 2001, 2008). This viewpoint acknowledges that narrative sensemaking happens not only retrospectively as stated by Weick (1995) but also in interplay with prospectively understanding for the future (Boje, 2008). Thereby, narratives or stories are representative ways of making sense of our existence (Bruner, 1991; Kvernbeck, 2014).

As pinpointed by Kvernbeck (2014, p. 565):

“Narrative is a primary and universal cognitive instrument, found in all cultures. While the kinds of stories people tell vary from culture to culture, the storytelling impulse itself seems to come quite naturally to us—storytelling is a ubiquitous human activity. We tell stories as easily and effortlessly as we grasp the stories of others”

Not only are stories told but also lived and expressed through experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kvernbeck, 2014).

“[…] stories are always told within particular historical, institutional, and interactional contexts that shape their telling, its meanings and effects. They are told with particular interests, motives, and purposes in mind” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 206).

Therefore, narratives are an important part of identity construction (Loseke, 2007; McAdams, 1996). Boje explains stories and narratives as coexisting in an interlinked and complex network of existing narratives, present stories and stories to be, all outplayed in specific contexts with different actors bringing different meaning and imaginations into the context (Boje, 2008).

Several narrative concepts are relevant to consider when defining narratives. Grand narratives, or master narratives, are the dominant narratives in the discourse that become elite of all the stories (Boje, 2001, 2008). Antenarratives are fragmented narratives not yet coherent but stories to be (Boje, 2001, 2008). Lundholt and Boje define antenarratives as “processes before-narrative, between narrative and counternarratives, beneath them, bets on future, and the becoming of care for what can and ought to be” (Lundholt & Boje, 2018). Counternarratives are narratives conflicting with the master narratives and they arise interactively with existing master narratives and stories (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; Frandsen, Kuhn, & Lundholt, 2017; Lundholt & Boje, 2018). Living stories are “transitory antenarratives changing in the moment, becoming reinterpreted, restoried, told differently in each situational context, just plain unstable” (Boje, 2008, p. 54). Small stories concern identity formation (Bamberg, 2005; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) and “how people actually use stories in everyday, mundane situations in order to create (and perpetuate) a sense of who they are” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, pp. 378-379).

Storytelling genres interplay and dynamics emerge (Boje, 2001; Boje 2008; Boje, 2011; Leinaweaver (2011). Consequently, the four genres are interlinked: linear, retrospective narrative, story narratives and antenarratives. The storytelling genres show great potential by addressing narratives as more than definite,
fixed and coherent stories. One should bear in mind that narrative approaches are not without limitations and Czarniawska (2004) stresses that the aim for social scientists when using narrative approaches is beyond the identification of narrative structures. The narrative approaches allow social scientists to understand the effects of narratives on behaviour which enables new perspectives according to Dudek (2016).

**Methods**
The methods in this study comprise of a systematic review of publications reporting narrative approaches to studying libraries. The review is planning and reported according to existing review recommendations (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009; Shea et al., 2007).

To retrieve the relevant studies four databases were searched covering both the field of library studies as well as general databases: Library and Information Science Abstracts, Scopus, Web of Science and ProQuest Dissertation were searched (April 21, 2020).

To retrieve all studies of libraries that use narrative approaches we define narrative broadly using terms that are derived from the narrative research field: narrative, sensemaking, narratology, antenarrative, counternarrative, storytelling, storymaking, storybuilding, stories and story. The search strategies are available in the search histories in appendix. All primary studies regardless of study design were considered eligible for inclusion if they report narrative approaches of and around libraries. Furthermore, the search strategy limits to peer reviewed publications in English. No limits with regards to year of publication were applied. The searches in bibliographic databases are supplemented with examining reference lists. Furthermore, we performed citation searches (Scopus, up to October 8, 2020) of all included studies to identify other potentially relevant studies. The search histories of these are also available in appendix.

Study selection was performed by two reviewers independently (TFF and KMS) and any conflicts resolved by consensus. Inconsistency among the data collectors is a component of overall confidence in a research study and is described as interrater reliability which is often measured by percent agreement or Cohen’s Kappa (McHugh, 2012). Studies were selected in two phases: 1) title-abstract screening removed clearly irrelevant publications and 2) full-text reading of publications identified studies fulfilling the eligibility criteria. Study selection was performed using Covidence systematic review software (www.covidence.org).

Data from the included studies was extracted by one author and confirmed by another (TFF and KMS). Data was extracted using two templates: 1) the data extraction form for theoretical and conceptual studies included the following information: report ID (if there are multiple reports of the study), reference details, publication type (e.g., abstract, letter) and contribution to the understanding of narratives in library studies. 2) the data extraction form for empirical studies included the following information: report ID, reference details, publication type, type of study, aim of study, participant description (e.g. total number,
age), institutions (e.g. library type, location, quantity) and results. The data extraction forms are available in supplementary material.

The results are summarized based on study types and themes.
Results
The searches retrieved 2,096 records across the four databases (Figure 1). 1784 were unique records and these were screened to identify 53 publications for full-text review. Agreement was 97% and Cohen’s Kappa 0.50 which is acceptable (McHugh, 2012). Full text reviewing the 53 publications led to 37 included studies and a list of the excluded studies are available in supplementary material. Agreement was 87% and Cohen’s Kappa in this case 0.68.

Figure 1. Study selection flow diagram.

The included studies consist of 15 theoretical and conceptual studies as well as 20 empirical studies. In the following we will describe these studies and attempt to group studies with related characteristics.
Introducing narrative inquiries in library studies

Starting with the theoretical and conceptual studies, five of these are literature reviews presenting narrative studies in library studies or general introductions to narrative approaches (Bartlett, 2011; Brophy, 2008; Ford, 2020; Marek, 2011; Murphy, 2005). Bartlett (2011) argues that organizational storytelling is an emerging management technique that can help librarians improve their organizations and provides the reader with a list of relevant literature on organizational storytelling. Brophy (2008) discusses the measurement of library performance and argues that context and complexity need to be reflected in the methods using e.g. ethnography, and narrative-based practice. Ford (2020) introduces narrative inquiry as an impactful, albeit time-consuming, research method and outlines potential uses for narrative inquiry in library research. Harer & White (2007) review relevant literature from the private sector and from professional library journals that promotes storytelling for management and focuses on the springboard story. In their book Marek (2011) argues that storytelling can be very effective when applied to leadership and management and outlines organizational storytelling tools as well as the process of using them. Murphy (2005) argues that patrons and librarians share and interpret information needs through narrative texts or stories in reference work and explores the so-called reference narrative theoretically.

Five included studies present and discuss the use of narrative approaches to marketing strategies (Baird, 2006; Durcan and Elford, 2009; Germano, 2009; Putnam; 2012; Shull, 2011). Baird (2006) argues that advocacy stories are characterized as a word of mouth marketing communication and recommends the use of students as storytellers. Durcan and Elford (2009) presents an advocacy programme that aims to help libraries communicate their services. Germano (2009) recommends library marketing activities based on a narrative or story-based marketing message. Putnam (2012) argues that support starts with visibility and therefore libraries need to share their stories with their communities. Shull (2011) argues that creating theme-related exhibits of materials in a library's collection enables the librarian to become the institution's storyteller. Urquhart (2015) demonstrates how “marketing a narrative” can be achieved for different types of library and information services.

Finally, three included studies discuss the use of narrative approaches to library data visualizations (Fichter and Wisniewski, 2014; Foote, 2012; Schrader, 2011). Fichter and Wisniewski (2014) argues that the libraries can share their stories by creating statistical narratives through infographics and other data visualizations. Foote (2012) suggests preparing a library data report together and carefully considering which data to share and how to make it come alive. Schrader (2011) argues the need for metrics to more fully express library value and library effectiveness.

Using narrative approaches to the study of libraries

Turning to the empirical studies, we find 20 studies using or exploring narrative approaches in Library and information science. Most of the studies are qualitative, although a few uses mixed methods. The majority is journal articles (14) but other publication types are also represented: PhD dissertations (3), conference proceedings (2) and book chapters (1). Most of the studies explore academic libraries (10),
followed by analyses of public libraries (5), school libraries (1) and studies covering several types of libraries (4). In the following, we will describe the studies in further detail.

Several of the included studies explore narratives and stories that can capture the library’s worth. Calvert and Goulding (2015) is a small-scale study of four centers in New Zealand that explore approaches to measuring library economic value and social impact. Based on interviews of library managers or staff they find skepticism about the validity and analysis of quantitative data as well as strong support for qualitative “stories” or narratives. Eicher-Catt & Edmondson (2016) interview 38 administrators, front desk staff persons, and staff persons in a children’s library and find that library stories can be an opportunity to teach the value of libraries. Grimsley (2012) aims to examine the effectiveness of AI (Appreciative Inquiry) as an alternative method to evaluate the quality of a service and 5 lecturers as well as 5 students are AI interviewed. The paper explores the use of AI as a research methodology. Kracker (2003) describes the results of a content analysis of participants description of specific library experiences that stood out to them and seeks to explore the human meaning of the library experience. Five themes are identified: atmosphere, size and Abundance, organization/rules and their effects on me, what I do in the library and memories.

Five studies use a life story approach to the analyses. Dali (2016) argue that the stories of readers allows libraries to get more in depth understanding of their users. Data is a selected set from a larger reading study of 14 Russian-speaking readers and the author argues that strength lies in the unique narratives, also if there appears to be little patterns. The study explores information behaviour research and more specifically what outcomes their users assign to library-based information activities. Matteson, Chittock, & Mease (2015) use experience sampling method to capture events, moods, behaviours, or emotions from everyday lives of librarians working in different types of libraries. The results show that librarians can develop effective emotion management skills to buffer the effects of emotional labor in their workplaces. Pionke (2019) explores veteran views of the library by semi-structured interviews of 24 veterans asking them about their reading habits, use of the library and their recommendations regarding libraries. Pionke concludes that exploring the views of veterans in a respectful way can form the basis of development of library services. Finally, the abovementioned study by Kracker (2003) also used life stories.

Three studies focus on specific types of stories. Colon-Aguirre (2014) interviews 20 librarians from four academic libraries specifically focusing on untold stories and classifies them into specific groups: untold stories, silenced stories, and selectively shared stories. On what seems to be three different studies stemming from the same data set, Colon-Aguirre (2015a) explores the transfer of tacit knowledge in libraries and finds that the value of organizational stories lies in transferring tacit cultural knowledge which is conveyed through stories that have four main roles: warning systems, finding comfort, preparing others, and explaining current work conditions. Colon-Aguirre (2015b) describes the nonparticipant narrative which is a narrative told by someone present at the events narrated. The results show that stories often convey tacit knowledge and it is essential for organizations as it can result innovation.
Next, we find several studies concerned with developing or exploring narrative methods for studies of libraries. Beth (2018) reports the results of interviews based on Israel’s Design Psychology Toolbox that explore their present and imagine their future in describing the significance of libraries over their life course. Six architects, design professionals and who holds a library degree are interviewed. The results are discussed as well as the possible applications of the methodology. Juntunen & Saarti (2000) evaluate the method of empathy-based stories and aim to identify services considered most crucial by students. MES can be regarded as an intermediate between surveys and interviews. The authors conclude that in the future the role of the library will be that of a teacher and tutor focusing on information skills. Kenney (2008) collects life stories as well as library stories through interviews and argues that narrative approaches seek to understand a situation as it was constructed by the participants. Finally, Martins & Canhoto (2015) studies how policy guidelines issued for the development of information literacy interventions were implemented by school librarians in Portugal. The authors conclude that narratives can add context to actions, from which researchers can infer explanations for participants’ goals or the underlying motivations that drive behaviour. Wijetunge (2012) interviews 6 librarians in different roles to explore the potential of storytelling to transfer tacit knowledge from the librarian to the junior executives. The results show that the comprehensiveness of the tacit knowledge captured through stories depend on the degree of confidentiality of the contents of the stories.

Two of the included studies primarily analyse already existing written material. Gardner & Galoozis (2018) reviews article and conference presentations to examine the discourse that academic librarians have used to describe different generations and age groups. The author finds that generational rhetoric is pervasive and powerful. Kyrillidou, Cook & Lippincott (2016) analyse the ARL profiles of 86 research libraries and identifies three intersecting themes: digitizing special collections, acquiring digital content and developing digital services.

The variety of studies using narrative approaches includes one study that emphasizes the use of sensemaking. Dorner, Campbell-Meier and Seto (2017) use future-oriented sensemaking to identify possible futures projects for review. To achieve sensemaking, a variety of methodologies were employed across the five cases, including developing bibliographies and using expert panels. Furthermore, one study uses storytelling methodology to describe the story of perceived by an individual. Cavanagh (2005) describes her (story) experiences with implementing an internet policy using storytelling methodology.

Finally, Kreitz (2015) analyses four liberal arts college libraries in the US using in-depth interviews, group interviews, and document analysis to explore college library change in the context of the changes affecting higher education in general and liberal arts colleges in particular. The author argues that the results contribute to an understanding of how smaller college libraries are leading and managing change. Potential obstacles to successful change are identified. The analyses also identify a set of skills, behaviours, and strategies that are successful in creating and sustaining transformational change.

Discussion
The included studies all describe the use of narrative approaches to the study of libraries. In the following we will discuss the potential of narrative approaches in library studies.

First of all, several of the included studies explore narratives and stories that can capture the library’s worth and they find the qualitative “stories” or narratives promising (e.g. Calvert & Goulding, 2015; Eicher-Catt & Edmondson, 2016; Ford, 2020; Grimsley, 2012; Kracker, 2003). In evaluations of libraries narrative approaches hold great promise. Streatfield et al. (2019, p. 102) argues that “there has been a significant shift beyond performance data collection towards evaluating the impact of public libraries.” The impact of libraries is assessed with multiple purposes (ISO 16439:2014) of which one is to promote the libraries’ role and value for learning and research, education and culture, social and economic life. Library impact is the difference or change in an individual or group resulting from the contact with library services which can be tangible as well as intangible (Poll, 2012) and thus a variety of methods can come in to play when measuring the impact of libraries. The Global Libraries Initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has provided a framework for impact evaluation and uses a collaborative approach called an Impact Planning and Assessment (IPA) methodology which stresses that the approaches and data collected for evaluating depends on the setting (Streatfield, 2012; Streatfield & Markless, 2009; Streatfield, & Markless 2011). Streatfield and Markless (2017) stress that one of the trends in future evaluations of libraries is that collecting and presenting stories of change will be used as evidence in impact evaluations. McCormack et al. (2016) argues that benefits that are not captured well by quantitative measures alone can be complemented by narrative-based approaches. Oakleaf (2010) recommends the use of several methods and the context should inform the decision. Consequently, a narrative approach in library evaluations could provide such a framework from numbers to living stories, experiences and values. More work is needed, though, to develop theoretical and methodological frameworks with which the narratives and stories can capture the library’s worth.

Next, many of the included studies are seminal work exploring the use of narrative approaches for developing a research methodology. In the 20 empirical studies we can see the multidisciplinary richness in the narrative approaches as well as a great variety in the methodologies. We also see that the narrative approaches, methodologies and theories are used to a varying degree in the studies. A study using interviews to collect life-stories or a study using interviews to explore the potential of library stories do not necessarily rely heavily on advances from the narrative field. The question is how to approach a narrative perspective in the study of libraries. Taking the multidisciplinary characteristics in narrative research into account there is no simple answer to the question. A starting point would be to consider the purpose carefully. The purpose could be “(…) the object of inquiry, the method of inquiry, or the product of inquiry (the researchers’ representation)” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). The research is multifaceted as argued by Kvernbekk (2014, p. 565): “narrative researchers study the stories people tell, how they tell them, and when, why, and to whom”. To impact library practices the narrative dynamics must be continuously clarified and subsequently embedded in librarian life. The methodology to do so is almost inexhaustible (Czarniawska, 2007). As an example, Czarniawska has recommended to apply narrative research in organizations by;
“Studying a field of practice (management and organizing):
Watching how the stories are being made
Collecting the stories
Provoking story telling

Working with the field material:
Interpreting the stories (what do they say?)
Analyzing the stories (how do they say it?)
Deconstructing the stories (unmake them)

Constructing organization theory:
Putting together one's own story
Setting it against/together with other stories”


As examples of narrative approaches to studying libraries we would like to draw the reader’s attention to Colon-Aguirre (2014, 2015a, 2015b). The author explores organizational stories in relation to tacit cultural knowledge, untold stories, silenced stories, selectively shared stories and the nonparticipant narrative.

The potential of approaching a narrative perspective in the study of libraries is probably argued best by exemplifying with some of the studies included in this review. Finally, Kreitz (2015) explores college library change using a variety of methods to explore the complex experience of organizational change. The author explores the change leadership of the library directors and offers unique insight into the obstacles to successful change and the skills, behaviours, and strategies that are successful in creating and sustaining transformational change. Kenney (2008) conducts interviews with the aim of collecting a life story in a first interview which the participants return to in a second interview to discuss how they used the public library and to reflect on those experiences. The study offers valuable insight into what outcomes the users assign to library-based information activities.

Conclusion

The rigorous search and selection process of this systematic review identified 35 eligible studies of which 15 are theoretical and conceptual studies and 20 are empirical studies. These studies all describe the use of narrative approaches to the study of libraries. These 35 studies depict a picture of a growing field and researchers are increasingly inspired by narrative approaches when studying libraries. Exploring narratives and stories that can capture the library’s worth is a promising field within library studies. The included studies depict a picture of multidisciplinary richness in the narrative approaches as well as a great variety in the methodologies. A narrative approach in library evaluations can provide living stories, experiences and values. More work is needed, though, to develop theoretical and methodological frameworks with which the narratives and stories can capture the library’s worth.
Next, many of the included studies are seminal work exploring the use of narrative approaches for developing a research methodology. The methodology to do so is almost inexhaustible, however, the field would benefit from developing approaches to a narrative perspective in the study of libraries. Finally, several of the included studies can serve as examples of the potential of a narrative perspective in the study of libraries.

Exploring different narrative aspects within and around libraries such as small stories and counternarratives can contribute to changing the library master narrative for the future. Hereby we do not only analyse the values retrospectively but also explore visions. Furthermore, by using narrative approaches we allow the voices of the different actors to be heard, e.g. citizens, users, non-users, politicians, children, adults, students and librarians.

References


Czarniawska, B. (2004). Narratives in Social Science Research. SAGE.


