

WHY DO VOTERS ALLOW A TAX LEVY FOR LIBRARY MANAGEMENT?

Issei Suzuki ¹, Masanori Koizumi ²

¹*Graduate School of Library, Information and Media Studies, University of Tsukuba (JAPAN)*

²*Faculty of Library, Information and Media Science, University of Tsukuba (JAPAN)*

Abstract

From the late 20th century, economic pressure on public library budgets rises as government funding has declined (Aabø, 2009; Child & Goulding, 2012). Under increasing financial pressure, creating a procedure for how public libraries can provide fulfilling services to residents is one of the essential issues in public library management. As a result, internationally, management models of public libraries have become more diverse in terms of dealing with financial problems. For example, there are management models such as the Designated Manager System (privatisation of public libraries) in Japan, the Community Libraries (managed by volunteers) in England, and the Combined Libraries (hybridisation of different types) in the Nordic Countries. All of these management models are a means to address the financial challenges of public libraries.

In the same way in the United States, library districts are receiving much attention as a management model that responds to financial deterioration. Library districts are Special-Purpose Governments that have a tax levy and bond authority for library management. Also, library districts are formed through a referendum.

Recent studies have demonstrated that library districts' revenues are more stable over the long term than those of other legal bases, such as General-Purpose Governments and Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) in the United States (Elliott, 2013; Goldman, 2018). However, forming library districts are not simple, because it means a tax increase for residents. Nevertheless, the number of library districts has increased since the late 20th century. Why do voters allow a tax levy for library management? In this paper, we examined in detail the arguments regarding the formation of library districts through an in-depth case analysis.

In this research, we analysed the "voters' pamphlet" distributed to residents at the time of referendum for forming the Josephine Community library district in the state of Oregon. The "voters' pamphlet" described detailed opinions of residents regarding formation of library districts.

In the analysis, based on the constituents of library district management presented through a comprehensive literature review by Suzuki and Koizumi (2020), we analysed the opinions of the residents through a qualitative content analysis. Specifically, through the analysis of opinions in favour, we illustrated the factors that residents allow to form library districts. Second, through the analysis of opinions in opposition, we illustrated the factors that residents opposed to form library districts.

As a result, we showed the following research results. Those in favour emphasised the significance of public libraries in the community. On top of that, they allowed the formation of the library district as a means to provide library services sustainably. In particular, they were satisfied with the current library service and hoped to enhance it further. On the other hand, many opponents opposed the formation of the library district, even though they recognised the value of public libraries. It was against the permanent taxation of the library district. Also, opponents called for donations to public libraries.

In other words, the significance of public libraries in the community was a common understanding among residents. The argument is how much the residents are willing to accept the burden of providing library services.

Keywords: Library Finance, Referendum, Library Management, Library Districts, Local Governance

INTRODUCTION

From the late 20th century, economic pressure on public sector budgets has increased as government funding has declined. In addition to the global recession triggered by the 2008 Lehman shock, the socio-economic impact of the global spread of coronavirus infection (COVID-19) in 2020 will be enormous. Currently, the financial deterioration of the public sector caused by the economic recession has a significant impact on public library policy.

Until the end of the 20th century, many public libraries have been run by general purpose-governments (local governments that provide comprehensive services) all over the world. However, as mentioned above, the financial resources of the government sector have declined since the end of the 20th century (Aabø, 2009; Child & Goulding, 2012). At the same time, the needs of users have become more complex and sophisticated (Molz & Dain, 1999; Travers, 2014), and how to provide users with a full range of services has become an issue in public library policy. Then, the ideal way of managing the public library was actively discussed.

As a result, the management model of public libraries has diversified worldwide. However, while advocating the same idea of "enhancing library services," there are differences in library policies among countries, and the management model of public libraries does not have same approaches. Hence, what kinds of management model is adopted by each country to provide a full range of library services? Here, we show typical examples of management models that respond to financial deterioration in each country.

We illustrated a management model of public libraries adopted to the financial issue of each country in Table 1. For example, there is a designated manager system in Japan. This management model is an example of a local government entrusting public library management to private companies or NPOs. According to the 2020 report by the Japan Library Association, about 17.6% of Japanese public libraries have adopted this management model (Japan Library Association, 2020a, 2020b). In addition to that, there is the combined library in Nordic Countries. This management model is an example in which the municipal public library and the school library are managed as one system. For example, in Norway, according to the 2010 survey, about 35.0% of public libraries run by municipalities were operated in combination with school libraries (Jørgensen, 2010). In England, there are community libraries. This management model is an example of a local volunteer group running a public library instead of a local government (Woodhouse & Zayed, 2020). According to the 2013 report by the Arts Council England, about 12.0% of public libraries have adopted this management model (Arts Council England, 2013)

Table 1. Management Model of Public Libraries adopted to the Financial Issue of Each Country

	Nordic Countries	Japan	United Kingdom	United States
Models	Combined Libraries	Designated Manager System	Community Libraries	Library Districts
Approaches	Hybridisation of Different Types	Privatisation of public libraries	Managed by Local Volunteers	Managed by Special-Purpose Governments
Executors	Governments	Governments and Private Companies	Governments and Communities	Governments and Communities

In the United States, public library management by library districts is attracting attention as public

library finances become tighter due to the financial deterioration of Counties and Municipalities since the latter half of the 20th century. Library districts are a form of special-purpose government with tax levy and bond authority that is formed for the single purpose of library management. In addition, independent library boards make management decisions. These library districts are formed through a referendum. Figure 1 shows the change of the legal bases of public libraries in the United States (1992-2017). As can be seen from Figure 1, the proportion of general-purpose governments as the legal basis for public libraries is declining moderately. On the other hand, the proportion of library districts and NPOs is increasing. In particular, library districts are currently the second largest legal basis after general-purpose governments.

However, forming library districts means that the tax burden on residents will increase. Given that fact, the new local government (special-purpose government) will tax the residents. For example, New York Governor Cuomo pointed out in his policy speech that there were too many local governments in New York (New York State Government), stating that the property tax burden on residents was too heavy.

The number of library districts is on the rise in the United States, despite the increasing tax for residents. What is the reason? In this paper, we will analyse in detail the arguments regarding the formation of library districts through an in-depth case analysis.

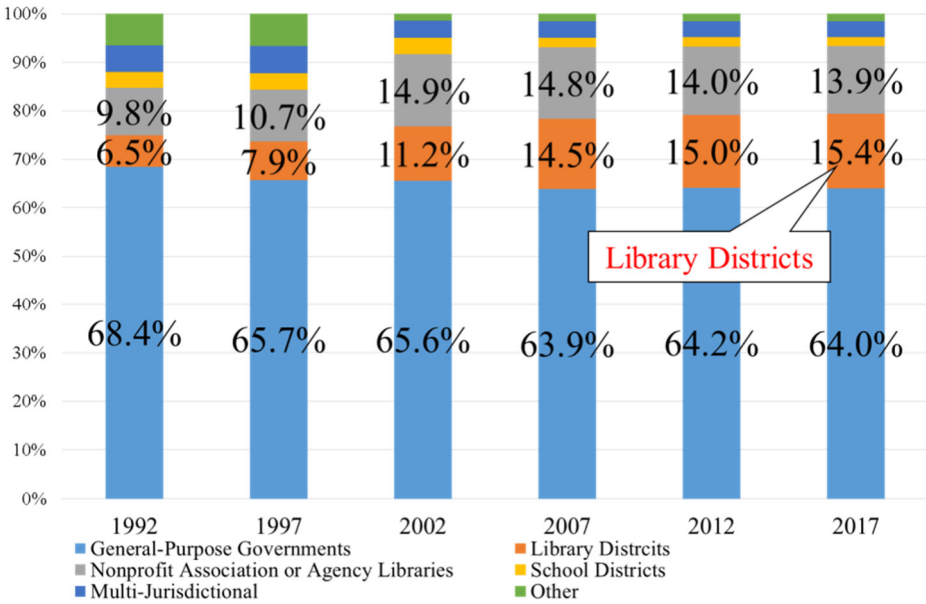


Figure 1. Legal Basis of Public Libraries in the United States (1992-2017)¹⁹

RELATED STUDIES

In his paper "The Governance of Public Libraries: Findings of the PLA Governance of Public Libraries Committee," Scheppke (1991) pointed out that public library management by library districts is increasing as a new trend in public library governance in the United States. Since then, the characteristics of library management by library districts have been reported. In particular, the

¹⁹ Source: (1) National Center for Education Statistics. Public Libraries in the United States 1992,1997,2002, Percentage Distribution of Public Libraries, by Type of Legal Basis and State. (2) Institute of Museum and Library Services. Supplementary Tables Public Libraries Survey Fiscal Year 2007,2012,2017, Percentage Distribution of Public Libraries, by Type of Legal Basis and State.

focus is on library districts having more stable financial resources than other legal bases such as general-purpose governments and NPOs. Until the early 2000s, library districts were assumed to have more stable financial resources than other legal bases due to their tax authority (Crismond, 1993; Madden, 1993; Brawner, 1993; Ruhnke, 1994). No researcher empirically showed that the financial resources of the library districts were stable. After that, the research results of Elliott (2009) and Goldman (2018) demonstrated that the financial resources of library districts are more stable in the long term than other legal bases. These two researchers are significant contributions considering library district study and public library finance.

As already mentioned, the stable financial resources of library districts are based on the tax burden of the residents. However, no studies have analysed why residents are voting in favour of forming library districts. In addition, some residents vote against in the referendum, however, no studies have analysed this factor so far. In other words, previous research has focused on the financial resources of the library district from the perspective of library administrators. Therefore, we focus on the residents' interests, during the referendum, asking about the formation of library districts from the residents' perspective. Then, we will analyse what kinds of opinions the residents have about the formation of library districts.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In this study, we will carry out an in-depth case analysis and examine the opinions of the residents regarding the formation of library districts. Specifically, first, through the analysis of opinions in favour, we will clarify the factors that residents allow to form library districts. Second, through the analysis of opinions in opposition, we will clarify the factors that make residents against forming library districts. By conducting this study, it will be possible to analyse the evaluation of the library district from the perspective of the residents, which has not been discussed in previous research.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, we will analyse the opinions of the residents described in the "voters' pamphlet" created during the referendum on the formation of the library district. This "voters' pamphlet" explains why residents agree or disagree with the formation of library districts. Therefore, we carry out a qualitative content analysis on the statements in this "voters' pamphlet".

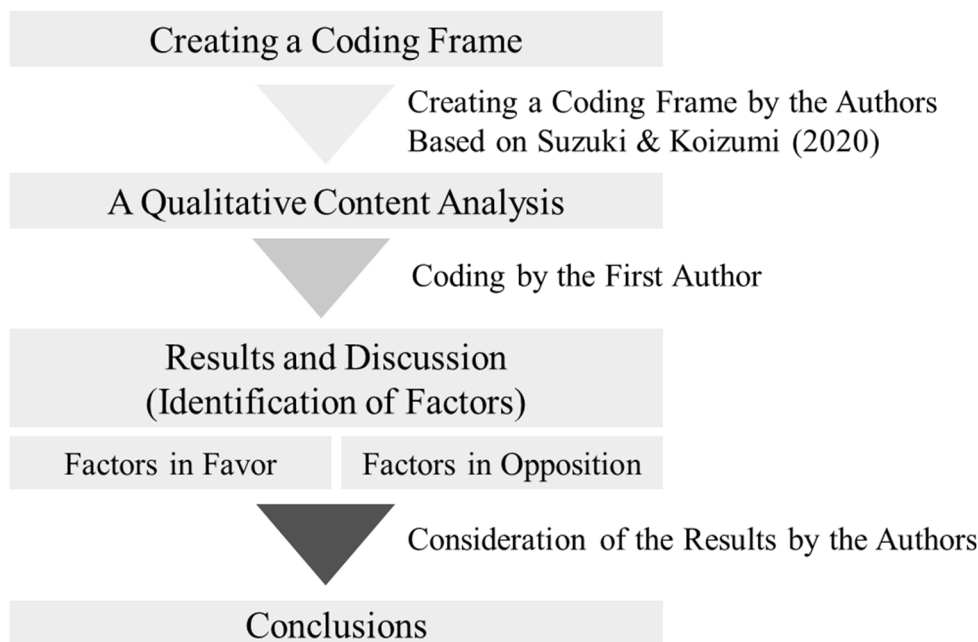


Figure 2. Research Process

The research process is shown in Figure 2. First, we created the coding frame for performing a qualitative content analysis. Previously, we presented "Theoretical Bases of Public Library Management by Special-Purpose Governments in the United States" at the Japan Library and Information Science Society, one of the largest library and information science societies in Japan. In the previous study, we showed through a comprehensive literature review that the library district's management theory is based on 16 constituents (Table 2). Based on the 16 constituents shown in this analysis, the first author gave codes to the statements in the "voters' pamphlet". After that, the results were discussed among the authors.

The case analysis targeted the Josephine Community Library District located in Josephine County, Oregon. The library closed as a public library that was run by a General-Purpose Government in 2007 due to financial deterioration. One year before that in 2006, the referendum for the formation of the library district was held to maintain the building open and secure stable financial resources. However, the referendum was rejected. Later, local residents took the lead in starting up the Josephine Community Library, Inc. as an NPO, which carried out library management mainly by volunteers and funding through charitable donations.

However, in response to the growing demand for library services, the referendum was held in 2014 to form the library district as the result of the referendum in 2006, and again, it was rejected. Subsequently, the third referendum was held in 2017, and the Josephine Community Library District was formed.

As already mentioned, referendums for the formation of the library district were held three times in 2006, 2014 and 2017. As shown in Table 3, each referendum has different tax rates and geographic boundaries.

Table 2. Coding Frame²⁰

Categories	Constituents
Financial Policy	Revenue
	Pool of Money
	Expanding Taxing Area
	Economies of Scale
	Expenditure
Administration Management	Rapid Decision-Making
	Discretion
	Separate Government Entity
	Increased Time and Effort
	Library Trustees
Political Visibility	Accountability
	Referendum
Geographic Flexibility	Expanding Service Area
	Optimum Service Area
Library Services	Significance of Library Services
	Utilizing Their Services More Frequently

Table 3. Library District Voting History in Josephine County

	2006	2014	2017
Tax Rate	\$0.55 per \$1,000	\$0.39 per \$1,000	\$0.39 per \$1,000
Boundary	County Wide	County Wide	Parts of the County
Yes / No (%)	43 / 57	47 / 53	53 / 47

Therefore, the "voters' pamphlet" was a total of 3 copies, one for each stated year (Josephine County, 2006, 2014 and 2017). The first author extracted the opinions of the content for each statement in the "voters' pamphlet", there were 345 in favour and 197 in opposition, for a total of

²⁰ Source: Suzuki, I. & Koizumi, M. (2020). Theoretical Bases of Public Library Management by Special- Purpose Governments in the United States. Proceedings of the Japan Society of Library and Information Science 68th Conference, 1-4. (Text in Japanese).

542. After that, the first author gave a code to the content of the statement. However, some remarks stated "Vote YES on Measure 17-79 to form a library district" or "Vote NO on Measure 17-79 to form a library district" and that he did not assign a code to those simple statements. Because, these remarks did not include any of the constituents we showed in Table 2.

RESULTS

Next, we present the analysis results of the opinions of the residents. As we will explain in the next chapter, only some of the constituents described in the coding frame were remarked in the "voters' pamphlet".

Analysis Results of Vote in Favour

As a result of analysing the opinions in favour of the formation of the library district, "Significance of Library Services" was the largest ratio at 75.4% in all statements in favour (Figure 3). Next, "Revenue" was 17.8%. In addition, "Optimum Service Area" was 5.1%, "Library Trustees" was 1.3%, and "Separate Governments Entity" was 0.3%.

The most frequently spoken statement, "Significance of Library Services," has emphasised the significance of providing sustainable library services in the local community. This element contained many topics. For instance, topics included expanding opening hours, accessing the Internet for residents, securing educational opportunities for children, the significance of information literacy education, supporting the unemployed, enhancing library resources, and providing meeting space. In other words, many of the supporters expected that the library district could secure stable financial resources, while at the same time the library district could provide more fulfilling services to the local residents. For example, one of the supporters said, "We believe this library district is a responsible answer to the funding needs of the library so that it may continue to offer and expand its valuable services and collections to the community."

The next most frequently spoken statement, "Revenue," claimed that the library district could secure stable financial resources based on taxation. Specifically, it was pointed out that the county government would not be able to spend for the library (Referendum in 2006) and that non-profit organisations could not keep up with the demand of the local residents (Referendum in 2014 and 2017). One of the supporters said "We simply can't keep pace with the demand for library services, and we dip into reserves each year to keep the library open."

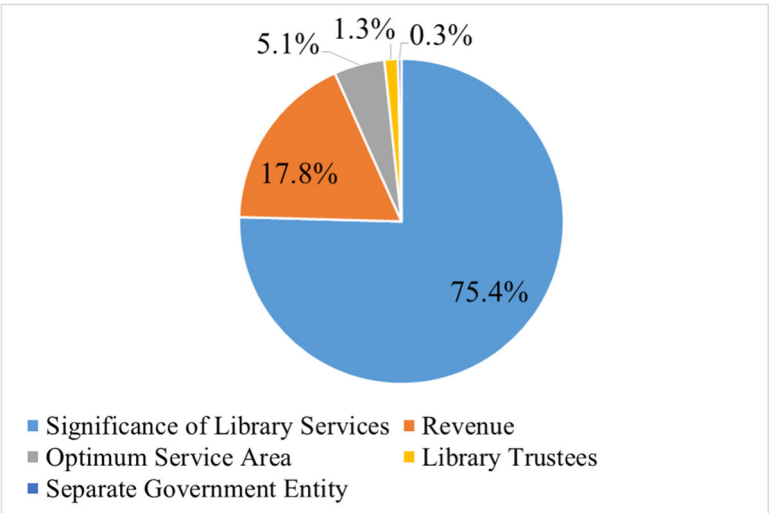


Figure 3. Analysis Results of Vote in Favour

"Optimum Service Area" is a statement related to the fact that the library district boundary was set to a smaller area during the 2017 referendum than the previous ones. In 2017, the referendum included the boundary with the most positive votes in the previous ones in the county. At the same time, they did not include the areas in the county with the most negative votes in the geographic boundaries of the library district. One of the supporters said, "The framework of this measure is very sound in that it takes into account the service area that the library supports, and asks that only the taxpayers in that area contribute to it." In other words, it was highly evaluated as an alternative to the management model in which supporters of public libraries pay taxes for.

"Library Trustee" is a statement pointed out by the supporters which stated that independent library boards are elected by local elections which are responsible for the management of the library district.

"Separate Government Entity" is a statement pointed out by the supporters which stated no other agency such as county governments will intervene in the decision-making of the library district.

Analysis Results of Vote in Opposition

As a result of analysing the opinions in opposition of formation of the library district, "Revenue" was the largest ratio at 75.7% in all statements in opposition (Figure 4). Next, "Discretion" was 12.4%. In addition, "Optimum Service Area" was 8.3% and "Significance of Library Services" was 3.6%.

The most frequently spoken statement, "Revenue" claims that the tax burden on residents will increase if the library district is formed. Specifically, despite having already paid various taxes to the government sector, there was a backlash against paying new taxes for library management. In addition, there were opinions suggesting different financial plans, such as management that introduces service charges instead of taxation. Also, there were comments that residents opposed taxation and at the same time called for donations to the library. For example, one of the residents stated "Donate to the Library at your Pleasure, But Please Protect Our Properties! Vote 'NO' on Measure 17.79".

In addition, "Discretion" is an opinion that the management policy will not change to what the residents expect even after the formation of the library district. Specifically, the speaker pointed out that it is necessary to prepare a filter when children browse the Internet in the public library. However, a resident opposed the formation of the library district because the policy regarding Internet browsing may not change even if the library district is formed.

"Optimum Service Area" is a critical opinion on how to set the geographic boundaries of the library district. As mentioned above, in 2017, the referendum included the boundary with the most positive votes in the previous referendums in the county. At the same time, they did not include the areas with the most negative votes in the geographic boundaries of the library district. Opponents commented, "They comprised this district of largely only those precincts that voted "Yes" in the last 2014 Library Taxing District."

"Significance of Library Services" is a statement that opposes the formation of the library district, however, accepts the value of public libraries in the community. One of the opponents said, "We all know it's nice to have a library, but taxing your neighbor's home just isn't right."

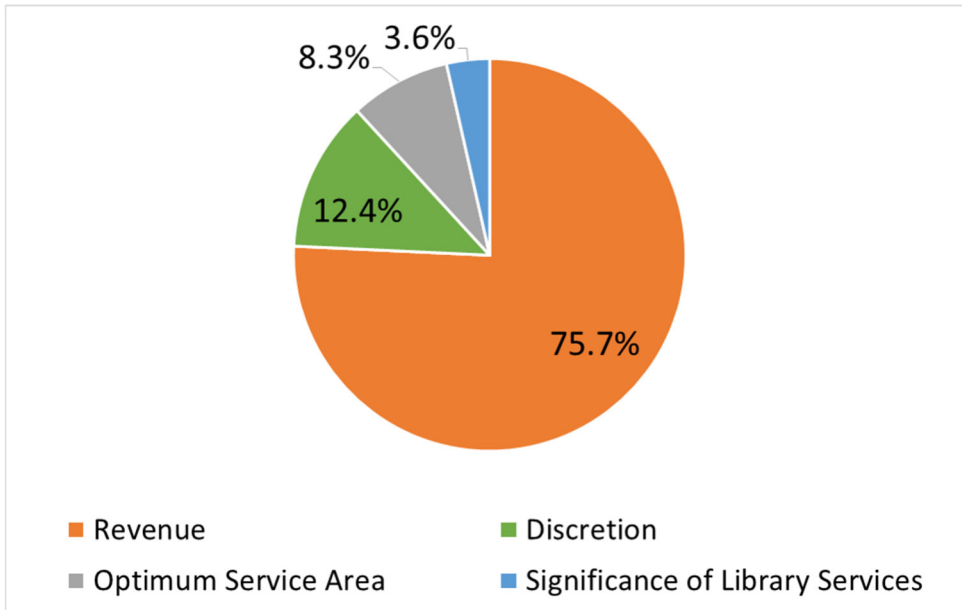


Figure 4. Analysis Results of Vote in Opposition

Summary of Analysing the Voters' Pamphlet

Characteristics of Opinions

Those in favour emphasised the significance of public libraries in the community. On top of that, they allowed the formation of the library district as a means to provide library services sustainably. In particular, they were satisfied with the current library service and hoped to enhance it further.

On the other hand, many opponents opposed the formation of the library district, even though they recognised the value of public libraries. It was against the permanent taxation of the library district. There were also opinions calling for donations to public libraries.

The Argument of the Formation of the Library District

In addition to their support, residents who opposed the formation of the library district fully acknowledged the value of the public library in the community. On top of that, the argument between the two was based on the financial model that should be used to provide library services (Figure 5). As mentioned above, many of the supporters tolerated the tax increased burden of library services. On the other hand, opponents evaluated the financing model based on donations rather than tax burdens.

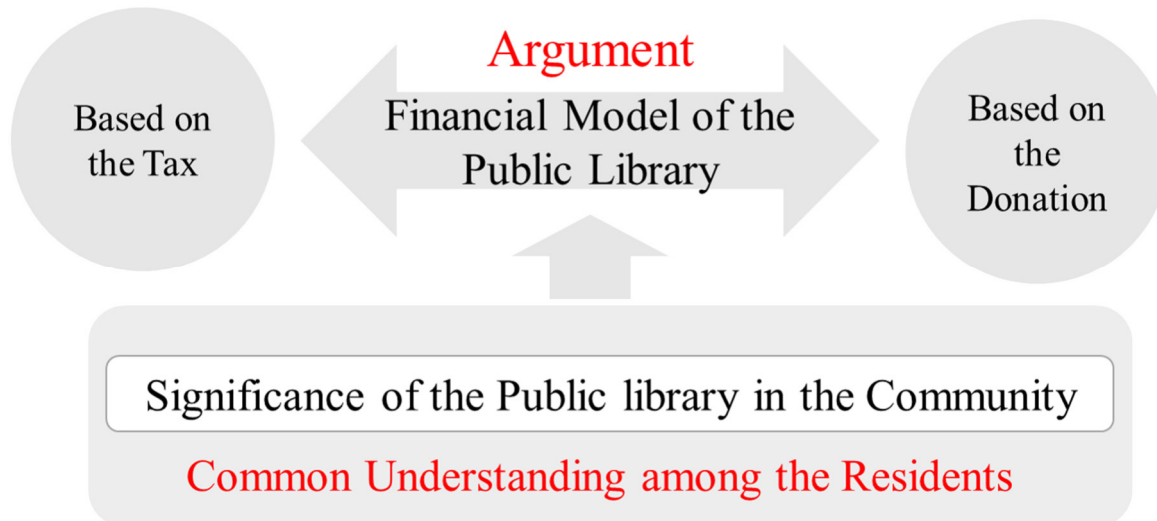


Figure 5. The Argument of the Formation of the Library District among the Residents

Constituents of Library District Management not Found in the voters' pamphlet

We prepared the coding frame as constituents of library district management, although some constituents were not claimed in the "voters' pamphlet". From this, it was found that many of the residents focused only on fee constituents of library district management. This suggests that many residents may not be familiar with the management theory of library districts (or special-purpose governments).

CONCLUSIONS

In this research, we analysed the "voters' pamphlet" distributed to residents at the time of referendum for forming the Josephine Community library district in the state of Oregon. The "voters' pamphlet" described detailed opinions of residents regarding the formation of library districts. Specifically, first, through the analysis of opinions in favour, we illustrated the factors that residents allow to form library districts. Second, through the analysis of opinions in opposition, we illustrated the factors that residents opposed to form library districts.

As a result of the analysis, those in favour pointed out the need to form the library district as a means of providing sustainable library services. On the other hand, even though many in opposition acknowledged the value of public libraries in the community, they opposed taxation by the library district.

In other words, the significance of public libraries in the community was a common understanding among residents. The argument is how much the residents will accept the burden of providing library services.

Finally, we explain future research. Through this study, we analysed the residents' opinions in the "voters' pamphlet" regarding the formation of the library district. In the "voters' pamphlet", the name and the institution of the person who has expressed opinions are described. In the future, we plan to conduct an interview survey with them to analyse their detailed opinions on the formation of the library district.

REFERENCES

Aabø, S. (2009). Libraries and Return on Investment (ROI): A Meta-Analysis. *New Library World*, 110 (7/8), 311-324.

- Arts Council England. (2013). Community Libraries. Learning from Experience: Summary Briefing for Local Authorities. Available at: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Community_libraries_research_2013_summary_report.pdf
- Brawner, L. B. (1993). The People's Choice: Public Library Districts. *Library Journal*, 118(1), 59- 62.
- Child, R. & Goulding, A. (2012). Public Libraries in the Recession: The librarian's axiom. *Library Review*, 61(8), 641-663.
- Crismond, L. F. (1993). Financial Structure and Funding Sources. Against All Odds: Case Studies on Library Financial Management. Fort Atkinson, Wis.: Highsmith, 4-5.
- Elliott, M. (2013). Impact of the Public Library District Model on Local Funding of Public Libraries in New York State. *Public Library Quarterly*, 32(2), 124-137.
- Goldman, M. (2018). Strategies for Sustainable Funding: A Metadata Review of the Independent Library District Model. *Public Library Quarterly*, 37(2), 139-149.
- Japan Library Association. (2020a). Statistics on Public Libraries. Available at: http://www.jla.or.jp/Portals/0/data/iinkai/chosa/nihon_no_toshokan2019pub1.pdf
- Japan Library Association. (2020b). Survey of Public Libraries Managed by the Designated Administrator System. Available at: <http://www.jla.or.jp/Portals/0/data/iinkai/seisakukikaku/shiteikanri2019.pdf>
- Josephine County. (2006). Josephine County Voters' Pamphlet Official General Election November 7, 2006.
- Josephine County. (2014). Josephine County Voters' Pamphlet Official General Election November 4, 2014.
- Josephine County. (2017). Josephine County Voters' Pamphlet Special Election May 16, 2017.
- Jørgensen, P. H. (2010). National Reporting System for Library Statistics in Sweden: Investigation of existing national solutions in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden plus description of proposed new national system in Sweden. Lund University Libraries. Available at: <http://www.kb.se/dokument/Bibliotek/referensgrupper/biblioteksstatistik/2011/Design%20of%20National%20Reporting%20System%20for%20Libraries%20in%20Sweden%20final.pdf>
- Madden, M. (1993). Independent Library District. In Robbins, J. B. & Zweizig, D. L. *Balancing the Books: Financing American Public Library Service* (pp. 128-131). Fort Atkinson: Highsmith.
- Molz, R. K., & Dain, P. (1999). Civic Space/Cyberspace: The American Public Library in the Information Age. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- New York State Government. Transcript: Governor Cuomo's 2014 State of the State Address. Available at: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/transcript-governor-cuomos-2014-state-state-address>, last accessed 2020/10/15.
- Ruhnke, C. (1994). What is a Public Library District?. *Illinois Libraries*, Fall, 222-227.
- Schepke, J. (1991). The Governance of Public Libraries: Findings of the PLA Governance of Public Libraries Committee. *Public Libraries*, 30(5), 288-294.
- Suzuki, I. & Koizumi, M. (2020). Theoretical Bases of Public Library Management by Special-Purpose Governments in the United States. In *Proceedings of the Japan Society of Library and Information Science 68th Conference*, 1-4. (in Japanese).
- Travers, S. (2014). NYPL: Service Successes and Financial Struggles as Branches Meet Neighborhood Needs. *Public Library Quarterly*, 33(3), 236-255.
- Woodhouse, J. & Zayed, Y. (2020). Public Libraries. House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SNo5875/SNo5875.pdf>