Working for a better world: the librarian as a change agent, an activist and a social entrepreneur

Abstract

For many years, the social role of librarians has been a topic of heated debates, both within the library field and within library research. Such debates have traditionally been about questions of neutrality and the professional identity in librarianship. Recently, visions of librarians as radical positive change agents (Lankes 2016) have influenced and shaped this debate, raising new questions about neutrality or "post-neutrality", professional agency and personal and political ideologies. However, what does it mean to be a radical positive change agent? To expand our understanding of the librarian as a radical positive change agent, this paper introduces the concepts of activism and social entrepreneurship. By highlighting similarities and differences between the concepts of the change agent, the activist and the social entrepreneur, this paper aims to inform future discussions about the proactive role of librarians working for change. The current focus on how librarians should act as agents for change in relation to the UN sustainability agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serves as an example throughout. The paper concludes by posing questions for further discussions of how the concepts of the change agent, the activist and the social entrepreneur might expand our understanding of the proactive librarian and how they might translate to the practice of librarianship in the era of "post-neutrality".

Introduction

Since the early days, librarians have been working to make the world a better place by improving the lives of individuals and communities. The goals were enlightenment, literacy, democracy and social mobility and the means were free and equal access to information and services. In parallel to the narrative of the social role of librarians, another and sometimes conflicting ideal of neutrality has existed. This ideal builds on the narrative of librarians as neutral providers of access to information and services; however, with varying understandings of neutrality and what was neutral.

Changing understandings of neutrality

Throughout the history of public libraries, the idea(l) of neutrality as a guiding principle of librarianship has been problematized, in close relation to ideas about the librarians' role. Shortly after World War II, a Danish resistance movement of librarians (*Frit Danmark's Bibliotekargruppe*) wrote a manifesto

entitled "Democracy's Demand for Libraries". In this manifesto, the notion of "positive neutrality" was used to inform and guide the work of the (public) librarian:

> "The modern public librarian must be aware of his place in the service of general education, which is also the service of democracy since these two things cannot exist separately. Although he should be neutral in his selection of books, he should not be neutral in the question of democracy or no democracy. Here, he must have an unambiguous opinion, which should make up the primary foundation for his view on librarianship" (Frit Danmark's Bibliotekargruppe 1945, 20–21).[i]

With the notion of "positive neutrality", we see how ideas about what is positive or good are articulated. Here, democracy is considered the unquestionable good and a necessary foundation of a free and equal society. This opinion has continued to flourish within librarianship, although not always articulated as strongly and unambiguously as here.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the social understanding of the librarian's role became more visible and widespread within northern European countries, largely inspired by a "radicalism" amongst American librarians, where political and societal problems such as poverty and exclusion influenced the work of librarians. As a result of this tendency, radical library associations were established in countries like Austria, Denmark, Sweden and the UK (Sundeen and Blomgren 2020, 165). In combination with a Marxist critique of society and culture during this period, especially younger librarians rebelled against the "liberal" library ideals of neutrality, objectivity, facts and versatility. Although these are positive values to some librarians, in the ears of the progressive critics, they are "Orwellian" in nature. It was argued that these ideals attended to maintain the position of the privileged by covering up power structures (Sundeen and Blomgren 2020, 167).

More recently, we find librarians and library researchers critically reflecting on neutrality and its successor "post-neutrality" (see Lewis 2008; Wenzler 2019; Gerolami 2020; Lankes 2020). In an essay on the ethics of librarianship, American librarian and library scholar John Wenzler (2019) sum up three strands in the critique of neutrality, roughly referring to the three dominating points of critique. Firstly, "that maintaining a professional stance of impartiality undermines the ability of librarians to advocate for social justice through their work"; secondly, "that neutrality is a myth"; and thirdly, "that neutrality diminishes the importance of librarianship by reducing librarians to mere technicians" (Wenzler 2019, 56). The first point of critique concerns the link between neutrality and impartiality, which potentially "undermines the ability of librarians to advocate for social justice through their work" (Wenzler 2019, 56). Moreover, this link builds on the wrong assumption that neutrality and impartiality are part of being a "real" library professional. The second point of critique – that neutrality is a myth – also addresses the mistaken assumption that neutrality and impartiality are part of library professionalism. To elaborate on this, Wenzler cites library scholar Stephen Bales, who asserts that "library neutrality is a myth hiding a bias . . . all positions are political positions (some practitioners are just more honest in their admission of this)" (Wenzler 2019, 56). This argument is similar to the one posed by the group of Marxist and Feminist inspired librarians in the 1960s and 1970s in that "those who assert that libraries ought to be neutral ignore deeper structural forces that shape our social world (…)" (Wenzler 2019, 56). Concerning the third point of critique, Wenzler is referring to librarian Joseph Good, who states that "neutral responses to vital issues (…) continually jeopardize the library's relevance in contemporary society" (Wenzler 2019, 56). "If the librarian cannot be motivated to take a stand on

pressing social issues out of a sense of moral duty, certainly the librarian should break his or her neutrality in the name of self-interest. If librarians merely process, manage, and distribute information without evaluating it, Good believes that they have minimal social importance" (Wenzler 2019, 56). There is, thus, a moral duty or a moral imperative, which, according to Good and others, conflicts with neutrality. Despite these points of critique, Wenzler argues in favour of neutrality and concludes that what is vital is that "librarians should be neutral between different conceptions of *the good*" (Wenzler 2019, 64 emphasis added). Thus, according to Wenzler (2019, 64), "librarians should do their best to maintain neutrality between differing moral ideals to provide an intellectual environment in which every citizen has an equal opportunity to discover, develop, and defend her own conceptions of the good".

Before moving on, we need to problematize the notion of "post-neutrality" – the successor of neutrality. In the words of political scientist Christine Agius (2011), although the transition from neutrality to "post-neutrality" might seem smooth, there is "a politics of post-neutrality at work which relies on privileging certain narratives and discourses about neutrality, identity and security over others" (Agius 2011, 371). Agius (2011) argues that these discourses and narratives are circular, and they overlap in complex ways. Thus, instead of seeing neutrality as a long-gone ideal, we argue that "post-neutrality" should be considered a paradigm shift, allowing for new readings of old debates. Looking back at the discussions of neutrality presented by Wenzler (2019) and others, it becomes apparent that in the era of "post-neutrality", we still find certain narratives and discourses about neutrality and professional identity favoured over others. Such understandings are based on changing ideas about what is good and how librarians should work towards or in line with it. However, as a paradigm shift, "post-neutrality" has allowed for more complex and nuanced understandings of neutrality and library professional identity. Moreover, in light of the previous debates, it becomes apparent that librarians have always been change agents.

The librarian as a change agent

The argument that librarians have always been change agents builds on an understanding of librarians as wishing and working for change. Returning to our opening statement, that librarians have, since the early days, been working to make the world a better place by providing access to information and services, we argue that this provision of access has never been an uncomplicated or "neutral" act. It has been based on a wish to improve the lives of individuals and communities. Moreover, it has always depended on a selection and (e)valuation of the information and services offered. Thus, it has been based on ideas about what the good.

Today, there seems to be widespread recognition that librarians should be proactive change agents and drivers of change. The American LIS researcher David Lankes has been one of the more forthright promoters of this understanding (Lankes 2016; Lankes 2020). In his influential book on librarianship, Lankes poses the compelling argument that "librarians are agents for radical positive change who choose to make a difference" (Lankes 2016, 1). Thus, according to Lankes, "to be a librarian is not to be neutral, or passive, or waiting for a question. It is to be a radical positive change agent within your community" (Lankes 2013). Recently, the role of librarians as so-called change agents has become more outspoken. Worldwide, libraries and librarians are encouraged to take action and to take part in achieving change. An example of how libraries and librarians worldwide have been highlighted as agents for change can be found in the current interest in sustainability and sustainable development,

including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is a universal imperative for action; in these goals, to achieve sustainable development, we need to work proactively and innovatively towards change. Through their strategy "Global Vision", IFLA calls on libraries and librarians to take action and "initiate the change that is urgently needed facing global challenges like climate change, poverty, hunger, gender equality etc." (Hauke 2018, 1). This call for action is further articulated in the 2021 IFLA World Library and Information Congress theme: "Let's work together for the future" (IFLA, 2021). Although access to information is central in this work, it is not enough. Librarians must find ways to activate this information and facilitate action (Beutelspacher and Meschede 2020; Mansour 2020), stressing the proactive role of librarians which imposes new questions about and possibly conflicting understandings of the identity of librarians as "post-neutral" radical change agents. In light of these questions, we need to ask how we can understand the librarian as a radical positive change agent?

This paper aims to expand the understanding of the librarian as a radical positive change agent by introducing the concepts of activism and social entrepreneurship as a framework for future discussions. To guide the paper, we ask the following questions:

- How can we expand our understanding of the librarian as a radical positive change agent using the concepts of activism and social entrepreneurship?

- What are the similarities and differences between the change agent, the activist and the social entrepreneur, and how might these concepts add to our understanding of the librarians' role as radical positive change agents?

Using the description of the librarian as a radical positive change agent as a starting point, in the following, we will provide an introduction and clarification of the concepts of activism and social entrepreneurship, highlighting similarities and differences between the change agent, the activist and the social entrepreneur. The current focus on the UN sustainability agenda, specifically librarians working proactively with the SDGs, will serve as an example throughout the paper. Instead of concluding, we will sum up the conceptualizations presented in this paper and pose open-ended questions for further reflection and discussions following this paper.

The change agent, the activist and the social entrepreneur
In the following, we will clarify the concepts of activism and social entrepreneurship related to the literature on the librarian as an activist and a social entrepreneur. We will introduce these concepts in light of the description of librarians as radical positive change agents.

The change agent
A *change agent* is someone stimulating, facilitating and coordinating change efforts (Lunenburg 2010). Returning to one of Lankes' core arguments, that "librarians are agents for radical positive change who choose to make a difference" (Lankes 2016, 1), a personal choice and motivation is central to this role. Lankes' argument is based on the assumption that good librarians see their profession as "a chance not just to promote reading or inform their communities, but also to make a positive difference

there. That they see their mission as the improvement of society" (Lankes 2016, 4). In Lankes' vision of librarianship, to make a positive change is equivalent to improving society. The word "radical" is, Lankes stresses, often deemed "problematic" since, for some, it "implies civil disobedience and an adherence to a far-left ideology" (Lankes 2016, 4). To others, "a "radical" is a violent extremist (…) who seeks the outright destruction of governments" (Lankes 2016, 5). While acknowledging that such understandings exist, Lankes stresses that both of these interpretations ("radical" as either far-left ideology or violent extremist) are one-dimensional uses of the term and wrong interpretations in the context of his writings. The word "radical" has many facets. For some, "radical" is positive, for others, it is "a label of shame" (Lankes 2016, 5). Acknowledging the many facets of the word, Lankes stresses that as a multifaceted word, "radical" means both "(…) "extreme," "fundamental," "thorough," and "cool"–all at the same time. To me, it's the perfect description of the type of librarianship I seek to install in my readers – professionals advocating and enabling far-reaching change based on deeply held principles in an exciting way" (Lankes 2016, 5).

Important in this context is also the concept of *change*. According to Lankes' description, being a radical positive change agent is the opposite of being "neutral, or passive, or waiting for a question" (cf. Lankes 2013). As a change agent, the librarian is able to make something change or take action towards change. Importantly, being a change agent involves the active choice to do something, make a difference, as opposed to being neutral or passive (cf. Lankes 2013). When it comes to change, the key is, according to Lankes, "to identify what's unchanging and what's changeable in librarianship" (Lankes 2016, 15). Lankes argues that while the tools of the librarians (e.g. books, buildings and cataloguing) are changeable, the librarians' mission, values and means of facilitation are unchanging, providing the "grounding of librarianship" (Lankes 2016, 15). Therefore, the definition of librarianship should be based on *why* librarians do things, not *how* (Lankes 2016, 15). The distinction between what is changeable and what is unchanging is of central importance to the discussions initiated by this paper since we wish to expand our understanding of the librarian's role as a change agent, including what it means to change, what is changeable and who decides what should be changed.

To sum up on Lankes' (2016) conception of the librarian as a radical positive change agent, we highlight some points for comparison and further discussion:

- Personal choice and motivation are central to the role of the radical positive change agent.

- The word "radical" should be understood in a broad sense while acknowledging the multifaceted interpretations of the word, meaning both "extreme," "fundamental," "thorough" and "cool" all at the same time (cf. Lankes 2016).

- The word "positive" in this context is equivalent to improvement. Thus, making a positive change is equivalent to improving society.

- Mission, value, and means of facilitation are unchangeable and make up the foundation of librarianship.

The activist

Activism is a broad and ambiguous concept. Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (2021) defines activism as "the activity of working to achieve political or social change, especially as a member of an organization with particular aims". The definitional emphasis on "activity" and "change" is essential here; activism always depends on and points to the act of doing something in order to achieve (social, environmental or political) change. Thus, activism is always normative and ideologically driven since it is fundamentally about wishing and working for change. With reference to Janes and Sandell, (museum) activism is a "practice, shaped out of ethically-informed values, that is intended to bring about political, social and environmental change" (Janes and Sandell 2019, 1). At the same time, (museum) activism challenges "the immorality of *inaction*" (Janes and Sandell 2019, 18 emphasis added), imposing on the (museum) professional a moral responsibility or imperative to act (as opposed to be passive or waiting for a question, cf. Lankes 2016). More broadly, activism can be described as any activities guided by the wish to achieve social or political change (Marsh and Kaase 1979). Often, such activities are enacted in opposition to or support of a controversial case or debate. According to this broad understanding, activism can be any volunteer activity that citizens engage in contemplation of effect – either directly or indirectly – political decisions on different levels of the political system (Marsh and Kaase 1979, 42).

In recent years, we have seen understandings of activism taking their point of departure in debates concerned with structural power and economic forces on class, gender, and race. We recognize such debates from identity politics. Examples include the *Mouvement des gilets jaunes* in France, the Tea Party Movement and Black Life Matters in the US, and Men in Black in Denmark, a semi-violent group of activists against Covid-19 related lockdowns and restrictions.[ii] The identity political understanding of activism imposes on cultural institutions a focus on underprivileged groups in society to counteract repression, which might conflict with traditional understandings of librarianship, neutrality and library professionalism (Sundeen and Blomgren 2020). However, as the examples mentioned above show, activist movements with identity political interests can have contradictory values and ideologies, making understanding activism as either left-wing ideology or violent extremist insufficient and one-dimensional (cf. Lankes 2016). Therefore, this paper proposes a broad understanding of activism as action towards change, stressing that activism is always ideological and never neutral, since it is driven out of personal motivation, values, and interests. To understand how librarians might be understood as activists, we need to discuss the role of the professional as an activist. For this, we find the concept of inside activism as described by political scientists Erik Hysing and Jan Olsson (2012; 2018) helpful.

Inside activism

Inside activism is a theoretical concept that "captures institutional political agency of public officials being personally committed to civil society networks and organizations and ready to support their agendas by acting within public organizations to induce policy and institutional change" (Hysing and Olsson 2018, 6). In their book on "green inside activism", Hysing and Olsson theorize on "the institutional phenomenon of green inside activism" and how it can contribute to more sustainable development "by altering institutional rules, norms, and practices" and securing institutions perceived as favorable to green values (Hysing and Olsson 2018). Concerning the current focus on how librarians can proactively work towards the SDGs, Hysing and Olsson's (2018) concepts of "green inside activism" and the "green inside activist" are particularly helpful. However, in the following, we will focus on introducing the idea of inside activism.

Inside activism is an institutional phenomenon and the professionals "carrying" the institution are the inside activists. Thus, an *inside activist* is "an individual who is engaged in civil society networks and organizations, who holds a formal position within public administration, and who acts strategically from inside public administration to change government policy and action in line with a personal value commitment" (Olsson and Hysing 2012, 258). Inside activists can have various positions within public organizations just as they can be committed to different values (e.g. gender equality, green values, civil rights). Moreover, inside activists can employ different efforts and strategies to "change or secure institutional rules, norms, and practices of public organizations" (Hysing and Olsson 2018, 6).

A central argument for inside activism is that public officials are also political agents. As Hysing and Olsson (2018) argue, "public officials do not only interpret, implement, and supervise public policy; they are also involved in framing issues, producing knowledge, setting agendas, and formulating policy" (Hysing and Olsson 2018, 4). Such a reading of the public official's role fits perfectly into our understanding of the librarian as a change agent stimulating, facilitating, and coordinating change efforts (Lunenburg 2010). Similar to Lankes' conception of the radical positive change agent as opposed to being neutral or passive, Hysing and Olsson stress that to "understand the agency of public officials, we need to perceive them not as 'neutral instruments' in the hands of politicians, but rather as creative 'political agents' in their own right" (Hysing and Olsson 2018, 4). Understanding the agency and power of public officials is essential to understand how they can act as inside activists. Moreover, it is critical to understand the relationship between elected politicians and non-elected public officials as reciprocal influence and interdependence, rather than as hierarchical in the classic sense. However, such an understanding might raise questions about "the power of non-elected officials and how it affects democratic legitimacy" (Hysing and Olsson 2018, 4). The concepts of insight activism and the inside activist help address the aspects of activism inside cultural intuitions and organizations such as public libraries.

The public library as an arena for activism
During the last decade, an activist approach within cultural institutions can be found, perhaps most outspoken in the museum field (cf. Janes and Sandell 2019). Within the library field, activism has been less outspoken; however, not less identifiable (Sundeen and Blomgren 2020). Lately, the sustainability agenda within librarianship serve as an example of this.

In a recent research article entitled "The public library as an arena for activism", Swedish library researchers Johan Sundeen and Rogar Blomgren (2020) ask if librarians ought to be neutral, for example, in the purchase of books for the library collection or if they, on the other hand, ought to take a stand for good ideologies and against evil? This debate is based on the current library legislation, the Swedish library strategy and the IFLA guidelines, which stress the importance of librarians' neutrality and the library as a free democratic arena for exchanging opinions.[iii] Based on a reading of historical documents, Sundeen and Blomgren (2020) analyse the librarian's role and provide different perspectives on the librarians' role. Although these perspectives sometimes seem conflicting, they add to the complexity of librarians as public officials.

As public officials, librarians must implement and carry out the legislation that has been politically decided. However, as local authorities, librarians also possess a certain level of autonomy regarding

book purchases, exhibitions, and public programs. This autonomy seemingly conflicts with the public official's role as one who carries out and implements what has been decided. Thus, there seems to be a dichotomy between the understanding of the librarian as a public official and the librarian as a local authority. Adding to the complex understanding of the role of librarians, Sundeen and Blomgren (2020) find that librarians can be conceptualized as agenda setters and gatekeepers who commit to some media-political censorship when it comes to viewpoints they do not consider favourable or ethical, adding to the complex image of the librarian as someone who is also personally involved and committed.

Based on the different perspectives on librarians as public officials, in their analysis, Sundeen and Blomgren (2020) operate with four types of professional identities: the bureaucratic, the profession ethical, the civil servant activist, and the entrepreneur. Of these four types, the librarian as a civil servant activist is Sundeen and Blomgren's contribution to what they identify as a gap in the research literature. The bureaucratic understanding of the librarian is closely related to classical sociology and the ideas of Weber. The profession ethical librarian is related to a more recent professional theoretical framework, based on the ideas of Parsons. This ideal type explains how change processes within the professional reality derive from within the profession itself and is separating the profession ethical librarian from the civic servant activist. Here, change processes are, to a higher degree, motivated by political conditions and ideologies. Importantly, for the discussion carried out in this paper, the entrepreneurial librarian is considered the opposite of the activist since this type of professional identity is closely related to the business world and the private sector, focusing on efficiency, economy, and New Public Management (Sundeen and Blomgren 2020).

Although Sundeen and Blomgren (2020) stress that no firm borders exist between these four types of professional identities, they are described as opposites to each other (e.g. the entrepreneurial librarian is considered the opposite of the activist). From their study, we learn that all of these different types of professional identities are in play within the (Swedish) library field today. However, it still seems as if these types of roles cannot be combined. The concept of inside activism helps understand the relationship between the different types of professional identities and perhaps combine them conceptually. The concepts of inside activism and the inside activist help us to be sensitive towards "the public-private dichotomy and how and why it is blurred in practice" (Hysing and Olsson 2018, 7) by addressing policy and institutional change as something that derives from both inside and outside of public administration. Moreover, we can use the concept of inside activism to overcome the dichotomy between a public official and a local authority with an autonomous agency, which we find articulated in the study of Sundeen and Blomgren (2020). In relation to this dichotomy, the concept of inside activism also helps to highlight "normative questions of legitimacy and democracy" (Hysing and Olsson 2018, 7), which might arise in the discussions of public officials as inside activists. Finally, inside activism stresses the "individual capacity to act" and, thus, it explicitly targets classical sociological problems of "agency versus structure" (Hysing and Olsson 2018, 8). Thus, rather than perceiving public officials such as librarians as "intermediaries" for outside "forces", inside activism focuses on public officials as individuals and their creative political agency.

To sum up, the concepts of activism and inside activism in particular, provide some valuable points for further discussions and comparison:

- Broadly, activism can be described as any activities guided by the wish to achieve social or political change (Marsh and Kaase 1979).

- Activism is always ideological and never neutral when it comes to ideas about the good.

- Inside activism stresses the importance of acknowledging the agency and power of public officials to understand not only how they can affect change but also why they do what they do, what drives them.

- The concept of inside activism helps us operationalize ideas about activism within public organizations, such as libraries and acknowledge librarians' creative political agency.

- Understanding librarians as inside activists helps us identify and discuss problematic dichotomies between public-private, inside and outside, public official and local authority, institutions and agency.

The social entrepreneur

Much have been written about libraries and social innovation (see for example Bilfeldt and Andersen 2017; Gorham and Bertot 2018; Anheier, Krlev, and Mildenberger 2019; Zbiejczuk Sucha et al. 2021). In addition, there has been a focus on social entrepreneurship and the role of librarians as social entrepreneurs.

According to librarian and library scholar Melody Allison (2007), a growing number of researchers do not confine the concept of entrepreneurship to a business model with the primary value being monetary. Instead, there has been a development towards a broader interpretation of entrepreneurship to include also values of social significance (Allison 2007, 262). "Expanding the definition of social entrepreneurship outside the business concept fits with the original meaning of the word *entreprendre*, which is Old French for undertaking a venture, either business or enterprise" (Allison 2007, 432). This expansion of the concept of social entrepreneurship includes a focus on both "a financial and a social return on investment" (Allison 2007, 432). Elaborating on such "returns of investment", Filipe Santos, a researcher of social entrepreneurship, suggests a definition of social entrepreneurship as "the pursuit of sustainable solutions to neglected problems with positive externalities" (Santos 2012, 335). Moreover, Santos (2012) argues for a distinction between "value creation" as in the business understanding of entrepreneurship and "value caption" in the social understanding of entrepreneurship.

In a study on social entrepreneurship and societal transformation, researchers Sarah Alvord, David Brown, and Christine Letts (2004) describe three variations in the concept of social entrepreneurship:

1) Commercial endeavours used to support social activities
2) Activities centred on social problems rather than commercial considerations
3) Social innovations, which used to catalyze short term changes into long-term sustainable ones

In this paper, we will lean towards the third variation of social entrepreneurship as social innovations. Alvord, Brown and Letts describe this variation as "a catalyst for social transformation (…) that creates innovative solutions to immediate social problems and mobilizes the ideas, capacities, resources, and social arrangements required for sustainable social transformations" (Alvord, Brown, and Letts 2004, 262).

In social entrepreneurship, change is effected by a *change agent* (Rogers 2003). Sociologist Everett Rogers describes a change agent as "an individual who influences clients' innovation decisions in a direction deemed desirable by a change agency" (Rogers 2003, 473). Identifying and solving large-scale problems "requires a special kind of social change agent operating in the civil sphere" (Allison 2007, 432). Such social change agents have been referred to as *social entrepreneurs* (cf. Rogers 2003). The social entrepreneur can be described as one who sees "the social mission [as] fundamental" and "social impact is the gauge" with a "long-term social return on investment" being the goal (Allison 2007, 432). Referring to scholar J.D. Dees, Allison describes social entrepreneurs as "being bold, skilled, relentless, determined, innovative, persistent, visionary, exceptional change agents—a special breed of leader" (Allison 2007, 433). Moreover, social entrepreneurs are described as "transformative forces", as individuals who are "relentless in the pursuit of their visions" and simply will not take "no" for an answer (Allison 2007, 433). Similar to these descriptions, Christine Hemingway, a social entrepreneurial scholar, argues that social entrepreneurs are always driven out of personal morality and values (Hemingway 2005). With this in mind, Hemingway makes a case for considering employees at any level as moral agents (Hemingway 2005, 233). Hemingway (2005) stresses that such personal values can act as drivers and that it is crucial to be aware of the values that drive the social entrepreneur.

As entrepreneurship is increasingly considered to be "integral to development" and as social entrepreneurship is closely related to concepts such as empowerment and social change (Haugh and Talwar 2016, 643), we find it not only helpful but also integral to conceptualize the role of librarians as a change agent in relation to the UN sustainability agenda and the SDGs. Therefore, we argue that ideas about the social entrepreneur are central to understand the personal morality and values that drive the social entrepreneurial librarian.

The social entrepreneurial librarian

A description of the social entrepreneurial librarian can be found in a text by the American library scholars Anne Less, Beth Filar Williams, and Sarah Dorsey (2012), who argue that librarians should be sustainability advocates, educators and entrepreneurs. In this context, a social entrepreneur is defined as "one who undertakes innovations, finance and business acumen to transform innovations into social, environmental and economic goods" (Less, Williams, and Dorsey 2012, 186). Less, Williams and Dorsey (2012) refer to librarians as *social entrepreneurs* motivated "by their own personal passions and the needs of their patrons and institutions (…)" (Less, Williams, and Dorsey 2012, 183). Importantly, social entrepreneurs are impatient; they "cannot sit back and wait for change to happen – they are the *change drivers*" (Less, Williams, and Dorsey 2012, 186 emphases added). The social entrepreneurial librarian is both a leader and a pragmatic visionary, driven by a personal passion and a commitment to change the course of their field. Regardless of how they take action, "like true entrepreneurs", social entrepreneurial librarians are "changing the shape of librarianship and sustainability by challenging the status quo and expanding their job descriptions" (Less, Williams, and

Dorsey 2012, 186). Thus, like the inside activist, the sustainable entrepreneurial librarian demonstrates leadership by carving out new and essential niches for themselves in the emergent areas of scholarship and practice that embody sustainability (Less, Williams, and Dorsey 2012).

- We adhere to the description of social entrepreneurship as "a catalyst for social transformation (…) that creates innovative solutions to immediate social problems and mobilizes the ideas, capacities, resources, and social arrangements required for sustainable social transformations" (cf. Alvord, Brown, and Letts 2004, 262).

- Identifying and solving large-scale problems "requires a special kind of social change agent operating in the civil sphere" (Allison 2007, 432). Such social change agents have been referred to as *social entrepreneurs* (cf. Rogers 2003).

- In social entrepreneurship, change is effected by a *change agent*, understood as "an individual who influences clients' innovation decisions in a direction deemed desirable by a change agency" (cf. Rogers 2003, 473).

- The social entrepreneur is a moral agent, driven by personal morality and values (cf. Hemingway 2005).

- The social entrepreneurial librarian is motivated by personal passion and the needs of patrons (cf. Less, Williams, and Dorsey 2012).

Outro

This paper has aimed to enlighten the discussion of the librarian as a radical positive change agent. We have discussed the notion of neutrality and "post-neutrality" as a paradigm shift within librarianship, which allows for new readings of the values and identity of the library profession. Although we argue that librarians have always been change agents, the "post-neutral" era allows for new and more radical readings of the librarian as a radical positive change agent. There are many reasons for an increased focus on the role of librarians as proactive agents of change. Global agendas such as the UN sustainability agenda and the SDGs can be seen as such a reason. The establishment of task forces and forums for taking action concerning the SDGs exemplifies what Janes and Sandell (2019, 18) call "the immorality of inaction". It is considered a moral imperative to do something.

To understand what drives such action and how it might affect change, the notion of green inside activism and green inside activists (Hysing and Olsson 2018) becomes helpful. Hysing and Olsson (2018) argue that the importance of public officials has increased as environmental policy and politics have shifted toward more complex challenges of sustainable development. Green inside activists are activists committed to environmental values and sustainable development in a broad sense, and thus, the concept is not referring to a homogeneous group of actors. Green inside activists "can be more or less radical and eager to promote change" (Hysing and Olsson 2018, 6). According to Hysing and Olsson (2018), it is of central importance to acknowledge the role and potential of public officials in "praxis-based political action for greening policies and institutions". As they argue, "national public policies

on sustainable development or international agreements on climate change are no more than good intentions and ambitions unless political action takes place on the ground" (Hysing and Olsson 2018, 5). Moreover, since inside activism is initiated and practised by the professionals, it can change "institutional rules, norms, and practices" from within (Hysing and Olsson 2018), making it helpful for understanding changes within librarianship besides those of the UN sustainability agenda.

By proposing a framework comprising activism and social entrepreneurship ideas, we found similarities in the activist and the social entrepreneur definitions, similar to exiting ideas about the librarians as radical positive change agents. Although the concepts of activism and social entrepreneurship come from separate directions, we argue that they have many similarities. These similarities point towards complex understandings of agency, personal motivation and political ideologies, notions that have traditionally been unwelcomed within understandings of library professionalism. As concepts that entail working proactively towards change and social innovation, activism and social entrepreneurship can potentially influence our understanding of the librarian as a change agent. Taking together, we argue that these concepts help nuance and expand our understanding of the librarian as a radical positive change agent. Similarly, these concepts highlight and encompass the passionate professional as an individual who wishes to do something to achieve positive social change by working for a better world.

In this conceptual paper, we have aimed to inform future discussions about the role of librarians as radical positive change agents. As a starting point for such discussions, we now pose the following questions:

- How do the concepts of the activist and the social entrepreneur add to our understanding of the librarians' role as radical positive change agents, and how does this understanding translate to the practice of librarianship?

- Moreover, how might these concepts contribute to the operationalization of the idea of the librarian as a change agent?

- The concepts of the change agent, the activist and the social entrepreneur all aim to change the current situation and achieve something better. Thus, any critical examination of these concepts and their influence on librarianship needs to pose questions about what is good, positive, and better?

- With reference to Wenzler (2019), the critical part is whether the librarian is neutral when it comes to different conceptions of what is good. Therefore, in relation to the question above, we feel inclined to ask whether one can be neutral in the conception of what is good?

- Returning to the current example of librarians working proactively with the SDGs, we ask if the moral imperative to act makes working towards the SDGs a neutral?

- Ultimately, we ask if working for radical positive change conflicts with library professionalism or if it is, in fact, a precondition of library professionalism?

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Notes

[i] Original citation in Danish: "Den moderne folkebibliotekar maa være klar over, at han har sin plads i Folkeoplysningens Tjeneste, og dette vil samtidig sige i Demokratiets tjeneste, de to Ting kan ikke eksistere hver for sig. Han skal nok være neutral i sit Bogvalg, men i Spørgsmålet om Demokrati eller ikke Demokrati, maa han ikke være neutral, her maa han have et klart Standpunkt, som skal være Hovedgrundlaget for hans Syn på Biblioteksarbejde" (Frit Danmark's Bibliotekargruppe 1945, 20–21).

ii https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/03/who-are-the-gilets-jaunes-and-what-do-they-want;
https://blacklivesmatter.com/; https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tea-Party-movement;
https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/denmarks-men-in-black-see-red-over-covid-rules
iii During the 2010s, similar arguments have influenced the library legislation in countries such as Norway and Finland.