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# Libraries Response to the Crisis: Measures to Mitigate its Impact.

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**Purpose:** The aim of this paper is to present the initiatives that libraries and information services should take from the standpoint of management or services in times of economic crisis or recession such as the one we are currently experiencing.

In current times when budget cuts, downsizing and cuts in equipment are continuous, it is important to reflect on the path that each library should take to overcome the crisis while providing users the services they require.

**Design/methodology/approach:** There are projects internationally, including, inter alia, Pulman and Calimera, which highlight the supportive role of lifelong training, of both formal and informal education and of the libraries' contribution to social and economic development. They even claim that along with archives and museums, libraries should collaborate in developing a strong local economy by supporting local businesses and industry in different ways (offering information services, stimulating the acquisition of basic skills and providing career guidance).

Logically, the public library is not the only -and may not even be the principal agent or the one most associated with this problem- which can address job insecurity, economic hardship and people's need for training. However, in our view it can have a significant and active role, in coordination with other agents, and it is important to take advantage of its potential: its collections, the training of its staff members, its familiarity with the everyday life of towns and cities, its openness to everyone without any preconditions, etc.

**Findings:** In recent years some libraries have seen their financial resources reduced, or have remained stagnant in face of an increased demand for service. A first consideration in this context, which might be very hard but is unavoidable when faced with such a reality, is the need to rethink which services to keep and which to reduce or cancel in the event are not enough fund. At times it is necessary to choose what to do without

**Originality/value:** Public libraries are increasingly becoming more of a social space where all people can go for information, learning and culture, regardless of their age, level, training or background. The library as a resource, which in many cases is public, and which enables individuals to enjoy their right to information should be defended to the fullest in times such as these. Also, to the greatest extent possible, libraries should be used in a compensatory manner, targeting people with fewer resources who are in need of skills that enable them to return to the workplace or reduce the consequences of lack of income.

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15 The aim of this paper is to present the initiatives that libraries and  
16 information services should take from the standpoint of  
17 management or services in times of economic crisis or recession  
18 such as the one we are currently experiencing.  
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23 In current times when budget cuts, downsizing and cuts in  
24 equipment are continuous, it is important to reflect on the path that  
25 each library should take to overcome the crisis while providing users  
26 the services they require.  
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31 Especially in times such as these, the function of the library is  
32 enhanced due to: the large number of people who are unemployed;  
33 users with the need for independent learning resources which help  
34 them to improve their job options; or simply the need to create a  
35 space for free leisure activities in times when people cannot afford  
36 any unnecessary expenditure.  
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43 In such times, libraries are redesigned to be more than a place for  
44 consultation, strengthening their image as a cultural center and  
45 space for social and cultural integration. This is accomplished by  
46 promoting multicultural services, providing access to information  
47 technologies and networks, serving disadvantaged groups, and so  
48 on.  
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54 There are projects internationally, including, inter alia, *Pulman* and  
55 *Calimera*, which highlight the supportive role of lifelong training, of  
56 both formal and informal education and of the libraries  
57 'contribution to social and economic development. They even claim  
58 that along with archives and museums, libraries should collaborate  
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4 in developing a strong local economy by supporting local businesses  
5 and industry in different ways (offering information services,  
6 stimulating the acquisition of basic skills and providing career  
7 guidance).  
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11 Logically, the public library is not the only -and may not even be the  
12 principal agent or the one most associated with this problem- which  
13 can address job insecurity, economic hardship and people's need for  
14 training. However, in our view it can have a significant and active  
15 role, in coordination with other agents, and it is important to take  
16 advantage of its potential: its collections, the training of its staff  
17 members, its familiarity with the everyday life of towns and cities, its  
18 openness to everyone without any preconditions, etc.  
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### 27 **1. Crisis and libraries**

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29 Libraries are affected by the crisis in various both direct and indirect  
30 ways. The library is indirectly affected because the society is a  
31 system in which different elements interact and influence each  
32 other. Directly, there are fewer resources and more users requiring  
33 services:  
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39 - A lower budget for more users  
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42 a) People who are unemployed go to libraries because they have  
43 more time, and during what used to be their work day they may visit  
44 libraries to study and search for information.  
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48 b) The number of users will also increase because although they  
49 have not lost their jobs, many people begin saving or purchase less  
50 books and other cultural products, substituting these purchases with  
51 the use of library resources.  
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56 c) A decrease in other costly leisure practices such as travel and a  
57 general contraction of consumption also results in the use of  
58 libraries.  
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4 d) Unemployed individuals who return to the professional or  
5 university education system also become potential and actual users  
6 of library services.  
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10 - A lower budget translates into fewer employees  
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12 a) Fixed costs and particularly, staff costs, account for a significant  
13 portion of the library budget, e) In times like these, staff costs are  
14 reduced, and more specifically, extra part-time employees and  
15 special projects are cut causing services to suffer.  
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19 b) The remaining staff is overloaded with tasks previously carried  
20 out by employees who no longer work for the library. Given the  
21 increase in the workload and decrease in staff, the quality of the  
22 services offered is affected.  
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27 c) Due to the employees' personal problems or the uncertainty of  
28 their jobs, an environment of negativity arises that leads to a lack of  
29 interest in work and a lack of the creativity needed to invent new  
30 ways of providing services.  
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### 36 37 **3. How can library services be funded and provided despite** 38 **budget constraints?** 39

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41 In recent years some libraries have seen their financial resources  
42 reduced, or have remained stagnant in face of an increased demand  
43 for service. A first consideration in this context, which might be very  
44 hard but is unavoidable when faced with such a reality, is the need to  
45 rethink which services to keep and which to reduce or cancel in the  
46 event are not enough fund. At times it is necessary to choose what to  
47 do without, some examples being as follows:  
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54 - Defending the increase in opening hours seems to be essential. It  
55 would be a grave setback to have to close at noon or during certain  
56 weekend hours after a longer timetable has already been  
57 consolidated at libraries in medium or large cities. However, in the  
58 event that services have been outsourced, these hours are sometimes  
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4 the first items that have to be reduced.

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6 - Another key issue is timely acquisitions, since otherwise there  
7 would be gaps in the collection, which would grow old in relative  
8 terms in a time of increased loan demands.  
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12 - Some cultural activities might be canceled or reduced where they  
13 are offered by other entities in the area and there may be other  
14 alternatives. It seems more important, for example, to continue  
15 activities which promote reading such as storytelling or reading  
16 clubs rather than continuing to hold lecture series for a small  
17 minority when there are other bodies that already program a fair  
18 number of such activities.  
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21 - Another expense that is often questioned is related to promotion,  
22 advertising and merchandising, etc., because although it is  
23 important it tends to be considered unnecessary in comparison to  
24 the provision itself of the service advertised.  
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27 -Libraries should seek to the greatest extent possible, to continue  
28 contracting monitors, self-employed professionals, and cultural  
29 management and printing companies, who make storytelling,  
30 animation, workshops and outreach materials, etc. available,  
31 because for them libraries are a source of work and if they are  
32 terminated along with many others, it will leave them financially  
33 inviable. Also, they are an important part of the cultural fabric of our  
34 cities and business areas.  
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37 However, before tackling these difficult dilemmas, libraries must  
38 strive to continue operating and maintain their financial and human  
39 resources. For this purpose:  
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42 - It is necessary to actively negotiate the budget and demonstrate the  
43 social utility of libraries, alongside other publicly funded areas of  
44 culture and entertainment,  
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47 - seek alliances with other social organizations such as non-profit  
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4 organisations with which objectives can be agreed upon,  
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6 - Take into account the possibilities of relying on volunteers to  
7 continue offering services to groups which are excluded and at risk  
8 of exclusion,  
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10 -attempt to benefit from government aid for economic recovery  
11 (renovation and improvement of library facilities if so permitted by  
12 the *E Plan*, the provision of laptop computers through bulk  
13 purchases for schools, aid for digitilization, etc..) Such aid should be  
14 in advance and an attempt should be made to adapt it so libraries  
15 can benefit from such aid,  
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18 - Seek the help of training and employment agencies in autonomous  
19 regions and municipalities, as well as available state aid,  
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22 - Check the fundraising (**Llueca, 2005**), sponsorship or patronage  
23 opportunities taken advantage of in other library contexts,  
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26 - Seek alliances with users, associations of friends, media, and  
27 mediators such as teachers and other social professionals to find the  
28 help and support required for the demand and provision of library  
29 services.  
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32 - Take advantage of the potential of technologies, open and free  
33 programs, social networks for information sharing, content  
34 management, collaboration with users, promotion and viral  
35 marketing.  
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## 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 **5. Conclusions**

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51 Public libraries are increasingly becoming more of a social space  
52 where all people can go for information, learning and culture,  
53 regardless of their age, level, training or background. The library as a  
54 resource, which in many cases is public, and which enables  
55 individuals to enjoy their right to information should be defended to  
56 the fullest in times such as these. Also, to the greatest extent  
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4 possible, libraries should be used in a compensatory manner,  
5 targeting people with fewer resources who are in need of skills that  
6 enable them to return to the workplace or reduce the consequences  
7 of lack of income.  
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11 It is an ideal place to support those who are trying harder than ever  
12 to access learning opportunities, benefit from on request career  
13 counseling, take training courses in various subjects or take part in  
14 programs whose purpose is to strengthen basic skills such as  
15 languages, computer literacy, communication, interviewing or CV  
16 presentation techniques, and the use of information sources, job  
17 searching skills, and so on.  
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21 I consider focusing on these tasks and services to be quite consistent  
22 with the purposes of libraries and an example of how such libraries  
23 adapt to social needs and engage with them.  
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27 The result, besides being beneficial to people, could be the extension  
28 of a social view of libraries in which their mediating role in lifelong  
29 learning is perceived more clearly. The contribution to improving  
30 citizens' labour market opportunities and the acquisition of basic,  
31 generic or specific skills allies libraries to regional employment and  
32 professional training services.  
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36 This will help libraries to be seen as continuous learning institutions  
37 within the government administration as a whole. Consequently,  
38 this may be an opportunity for libraries to actively manage their  
39 capacity for creativity and innovation, strengthening their positions  
40 so as to defend the budgets required to meet the public's demands.  
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44 The crisis will be overcome, and it would be nice if it were to result  
45 in citizens who value education and lifelong learning more than  
46 material enrichment, and who are more critical, participatory and  
47 socially united. Even more splendid would be for the library to be  
48 present in this collective imaginary as a resource or a possible guide  
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4 in this change of direction that our world so needs.  
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