



# Measuring the outcome of public libraries in the Netherlands

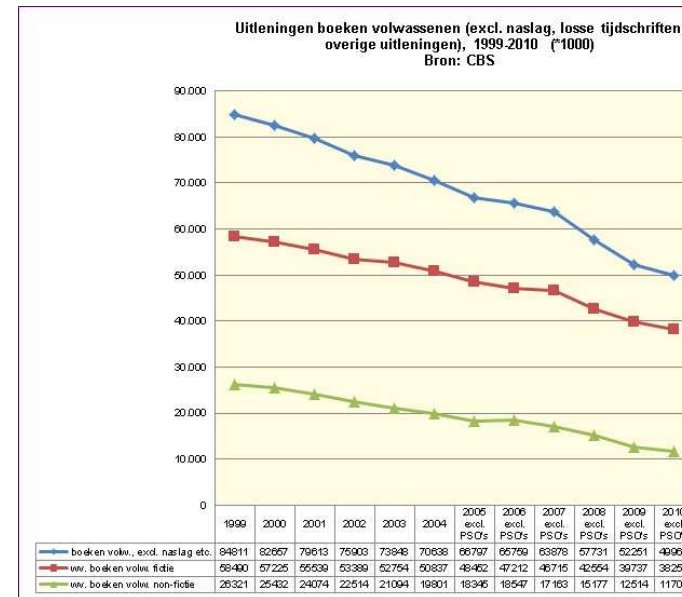
Research program and findings from a quantitative study

Frank Huysmans  
prof of library science  
University of Amsterdam  
huysmans@uva.nl

Marjolein Oomes  
PhD candidate  
Neth Inst for Public Libraries  
oomes@siob.nl

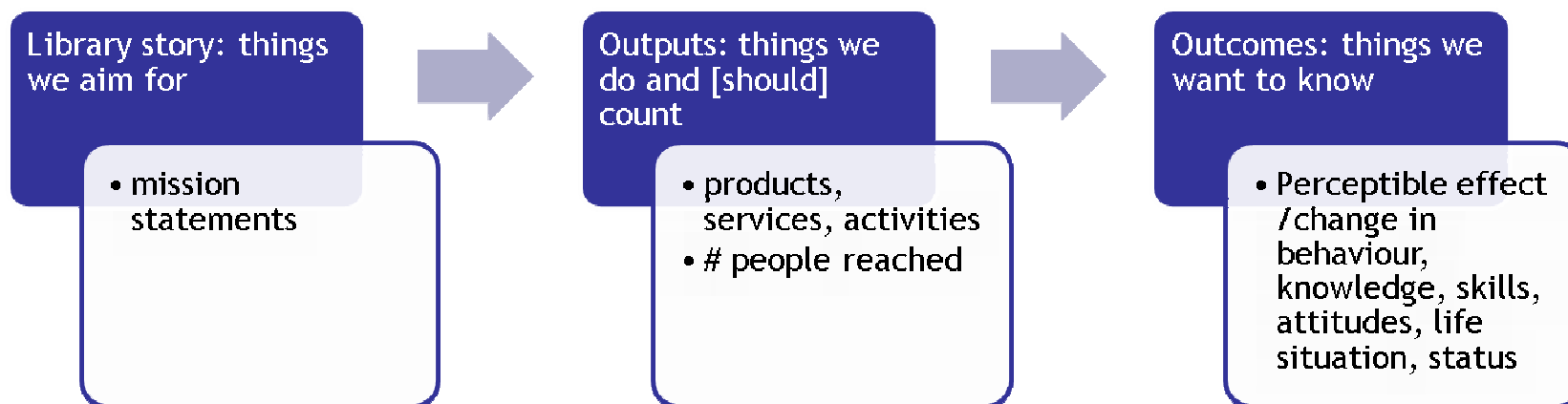
# Why measure the societal value of public libraries in the Netherlands?

- Digitization / e-books
- Declining borrowing figures
- Budget cuts
- Evidence based policy



→ Demonstrate the public library's contribution to social welfare

# Outputs - outcomes



Library story:	Output:		Outcome:
Expressed in mission statements (things we say and aim to do)	Products / services / activities	# people who are helped / reached	Perceptible effect / change (in behaviour, knowledge, skills, attitude, life situation, status)
Stimulate reading and contribute to the level of language skills	Collection (quantity / quality); host literacy courses, reading circles; supply schools with books and learning materials	Use of materials, # of participants	Did people truly read the books they borrowed? Were they inspired / surprised? Did their reading skills improve? Was their horizon broadened? Are they inclined to read more often?

# A methodological research program

- Aim:
  - Gain insight in the outcomes of the public library in order to:
    - Stimulate critical thinking
    - Improve services and increase impact
    - Show value to the outside world
- Research path
  - Phase 1
    - ✓ Stage 1 Literature review, theoretical framework
    - ✓ Stage 2 Verify/expand framework: qualitative study
    - ✓ Stage 3 Verify/expand framework: quantitative survey

Phase 2

Develop, test and retest measurement instrument

# Research path

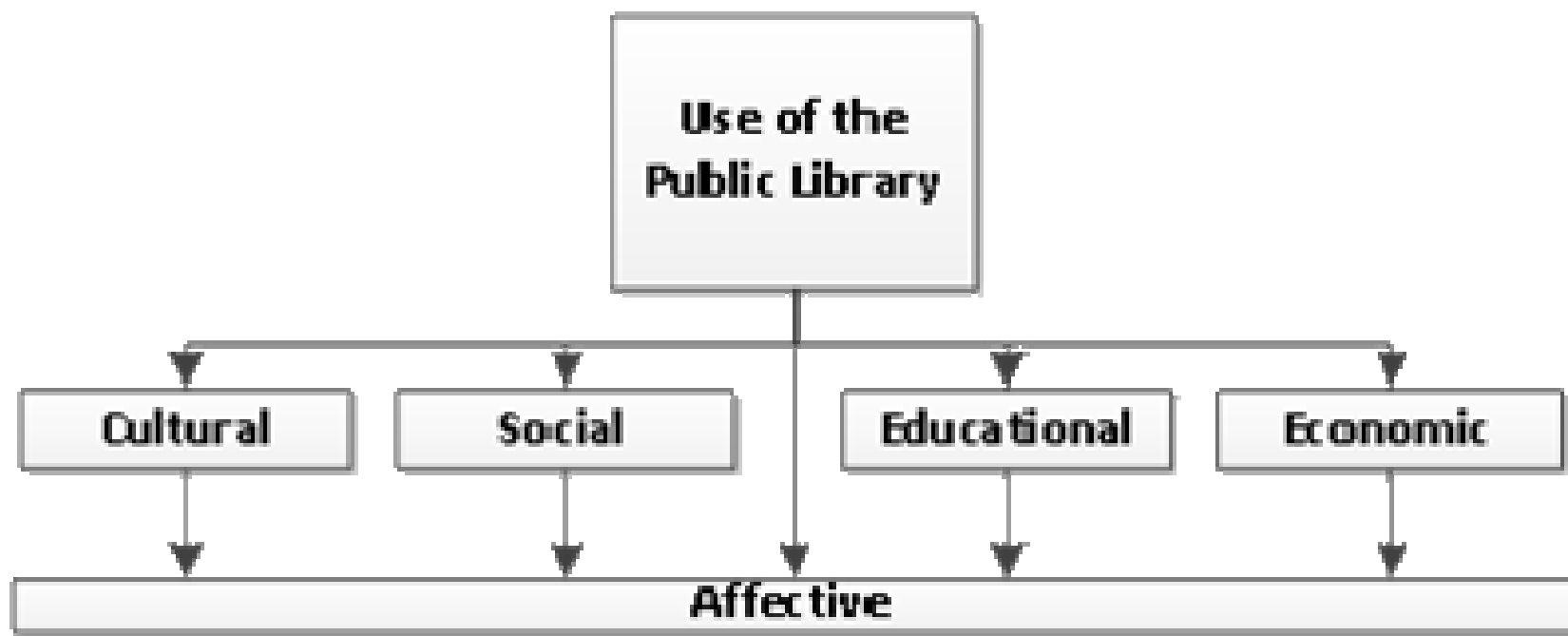


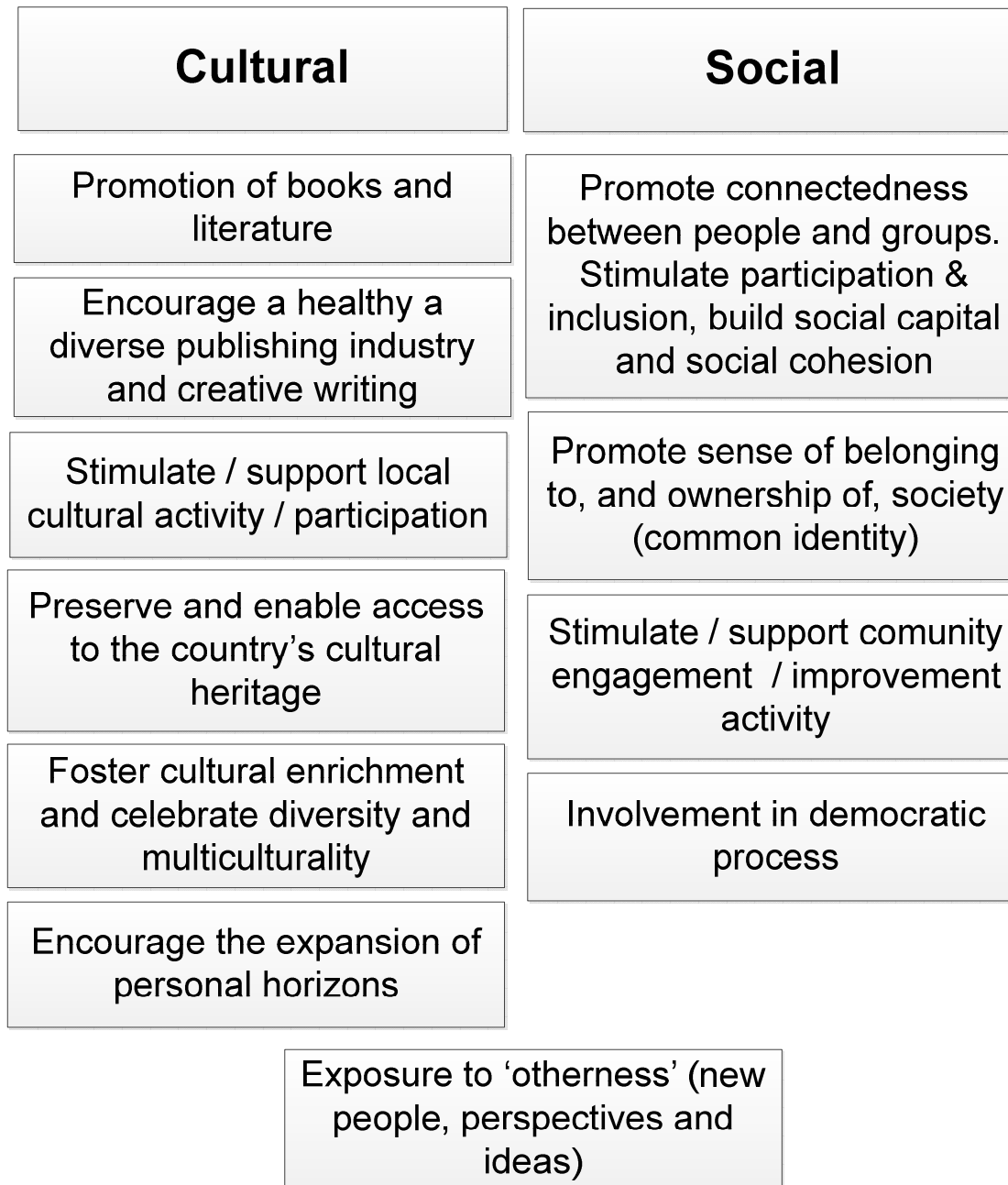
## Stage1: Literature review

Ca. 250 books, reports, articles:

- national, statewide, local
- questionnaires, interviews, focus groups
- general / overall studies, specific field of impact
- users / non-users, library staff, stakeholders, community leaders (local / national)
- abstract / intangible, concrete / tangible / observable

## Result: overall framework





Educational	Economic
(media- /information) literacy skills	Access to resources and personal help
Life Long Learning	Stimulation / support of entrepreneurship
Civic skills	Save / earn time & money
Evaluate / argue / reason	Manage personal finances
Develop a critical mind	Business support and career management
Form deliberated decisions	(percieved) value of goods and services
Familiarity with / awareness of civil rights, duties and public services	Economic vitality of neighbourhood (regeneration)
Problem solving (answers to real life questions)	Traffic to local shops
Better life decisions/ self-management: Good health, juridic, self-help, effective purchases as a consumer	Create employment
Contribute to a strong knowledge & innovation society	Enlarge attractiveness of region for tourist
	Enlarge / remain livability (for potential inhabitants)
	Foster economic activity

Esthetic enjoyment

Feelings of accomplishment  
and hope

Overall life satisfaction

Fun, leisure, recreation,  
escaping from reality

Creativity / imagination

Personal growth /  
Self-development / -  
actualization

Self confidence

## **Affective**

## Stage 2: verify/expand (qualitative study)

- November/December 2011
- In-depth interviews:
  - library directors
  - external experts (reading promotion etc.)
  - partners in cultural field
- Short interviews with public library users
- Main results:
  - Framework stood the test; small adaptations
  - Lib directors: define outcome in abstract terms close to societal discourses
  - Users mention mostly affective (intrinsic) dimension

# Stage 3

## verify/expand

### (quantitative survey)



# Sample

- Sample drawn from online access panel
- 21-28 September 2012
- N= 1.502
  - 1.025 public library users = 68% (oversampled)
  - 477 non-users = 32%
- Weighted by use / gender / age / educational level
- Bias towards library users even after weighting (with national statistics as benchmark)

# Questionnaire

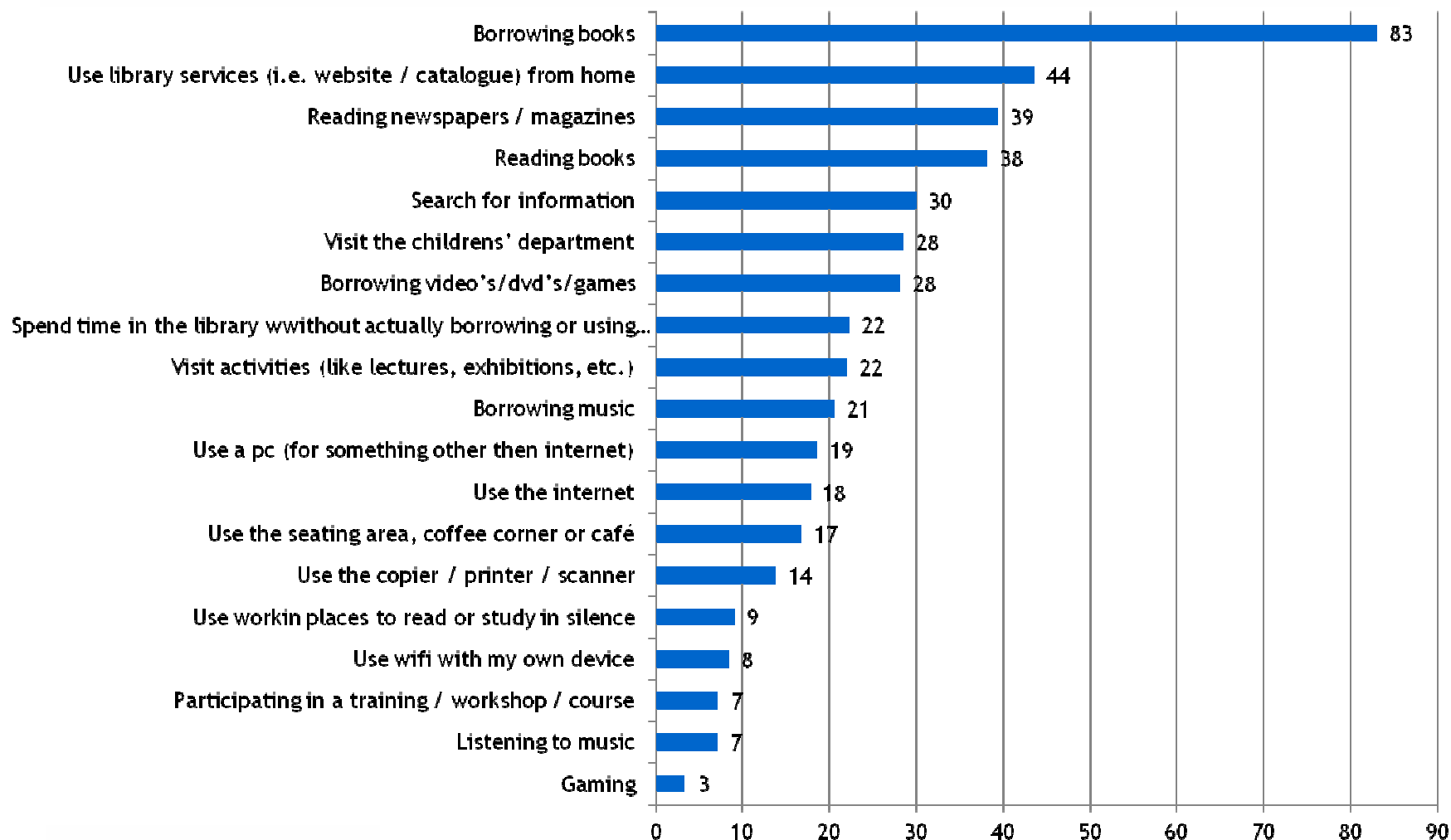
- 5 domains: economic/ educational / social / cultural / affective
  - Use of specific products / services (general / past 12 months)
  - Statements about:
    - personal benefit (users)
    - general opinion on library benefits (all)
  - Experienced benefit
- Partly replication of Finnish study, in collaboration with Finland, Sweden, Norway; also questions from other studies (Gates Foundation, eIFL)
- 3 groups: user 12mnth / user 1-3yr / nonuser

# Results





## % of users that have used the services below in the past 12 months



N=users 12mnth (661)

# Overall benefit

Most mentioned benefits	%
Fun in reading	71
travel and vacation	28
Self education in leisure time	28
Practicing a hobby	23
Health	19
Interest in history or society	17
Completing formal education	14
Child care and schooling	13
Cultural activities	11
Social relations	11
consumer, economic and legal issues	10

Least mentioned benefits	%
I haven't benefited from the library	8
Finding educational opportunities	8
Amateur art and creative activities	6
Housing	6
Development and training for work	5
Outdooractivities (sports / nature)	5
I don't know	5
Accomplish work tasks	3
Other	3
Participating in and following societal discussion and debate	3
Performing household chores	3
Finding work	2

# Age

Age seems to especially have a positive effect on the indication of both personal and general outcomes in the social domain.

The older the people, the more they agree on statements saying that the library:

- Makes them feel connected to society
- Makes them stay informed about what happens in society
- Makes it possible to contribute to society
- Is a meeting place
- Is important for cohesion / fellowship

# Conclusions

- Users seem to put high value on the affective domain
  - Overall use = borrowing & reading books
  - Overall benefit= fun in reading / travel & holiday
  - Information topics: hobbies / travel & holiday
- Educational domain also seems to be an important one
  - High agreement on the outcome statements
  - Providing information for many
  - Special role for children
- But: clear emphasis on traditional services: books & newspapers; reading & borrowing
- Use of and benefit from other services is low

# Conclusions

- Library as a place to be and meet:
  - People do meet others in the library, but seem to be hasty/superficial
  - Average time spent in the library is only 25 minutes
  - The social function seems to be more important for older people
- Cultural diversity / exposure to 'otherness'
  - 21 % sought information about other countries / people / cultures
  - 16% got in a conversation with people they do not normally speak in everyday life
  - 7% talked to people from different backgrounds (cultural / ethnic / religious) than their own
  - 38% 'I get to know other countries, cultures and lifestyles'
  - 29% 'Helps me discover different /new ideas, opinions and perspectives'

# Thoughts on future research



- Dig deeper into the data
- Compare with other countries
- To be able to explain or provide a context to the findings:
  - Find out more about the outputs of Dutch public libraries: variety of services and reach among the target group
  - Find out why the use and benefit in certain areas is so low:
    - Do our services truly meet the needs of people?
    - Which alternative services do people have (e.g., health info)?
    - Are people sufficiently aware of the services?

# What's next?



Development / test  
measurement instrument

- Summer-Fall 2013
- Issues:
  - Cover all domains or only 1 or 2?
  - Individual and/or institutional level?
  - National (system as a whole) / Local (program/project insights)
  - core + modules

# Thank you for your attention!

## Contact



[huysmans@uva.nl](mailto:huysmans@uva.nl)  
[oomes@siob.nl](mailto:oomes@siob.nl)



[@fhuysmans](https://twitter.com/fhuysmans)  
[@MarjoleinOomes](https://twitter.com/MarjoleinOomes)