



**THE EFFECTS OF  
COMPULSORY COMPETITIVE  
TENDERING  
ON PUBLIC LIBRARY  
SERVICES TO WOMEN  
IN VICTORIA**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis looks at the effects of Compulsory Competitive tendering on public library services to women in Victoria. It examines the philosophical basis for the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) in Victorian local government and examines the state government's legislation on CCT. The thesis also considers the role of the public library and women and looks at how that may change as a result of CCT. The thesis also looks at the implementation of CCT on library services and concludes that potentially public library services to women could be threatened because of cost savings and because of the narrow focus of public libraries.

## **Statement**

**This thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or a diploma at any University, and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by any other person except where reference is made.**

**Sophy Athan**

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## *Introduction*

Local government in Victoria is undergoing significant change as a result of the Victorian Government's attempt to redefine the role of government to meet the challenges of the nineties. These changes have arisen in response to what has come to be seen as the *excesses of the eighties* and the resultant recession which has severely impacted on the state government's budget. The huge, ever increasing government debts have caused governments, on both sides of the political spectrum, to re-examine their positions and try to come up with strategies for coping with increased expenditures and reduced incomes. It is the contention of this thesis that at the theoretical level the changes that are to be brought about as a result of compulsory competitive tendering on library services to women could be beneficial. It is also the contention of this thesis that the implementation of compulsory competitive tendering will result in uneven service levels and in some cases reduction, thus significantly impacting on services for women. A new approach to the role of government and the delivery of services can potentially be of considerable benefit to public libraries and the services they provide to women. However, problems arise when implementation strategies are based on *values* and cost rationalisation.

A redefinition of the role of government and the provision of services based on the needs and demands of the community has been developed by Osborne and Gaebler in the United States. Osborne and Gaebler in **Reinventing Government** set out to replace the existing paradigm of government with what they have come to define as the *entrepreneurial government*. A new model of *governance* which Osborne and Gaebler claim is emerging in the United States in response to the economic and social challenges which traditional approaches by government can no longer competently address. (1) This new approach seems to have influenced the Victorian government and help it rethink the role of government:

*What we need most if this revolution is to succeed, in other words, is a new framework for understanding government, a new way of thinking about government, in short a new paradigm. (2)*

Osborne and Gaebler in the above statement introduce their new paradigm for government which they do not place in the traditional right and certainly not the left of politics. Instead, Osborne and Gaebler claim to have observed a new *revolutionary* approach to a market economy where government participates in the market on a similar basis as private enterprise. But, as John Ernst indicates in his critique on privatisation, many of their ideas are not new and had already been put into practice in the United Kingdom in the 1980's. (3) The critical and most significant difference between the *New Governance* and the *New Right* is that Osborne and Gaebler have defined a role for government which they consider as playing a significant part in overcoming the immense economic problems that governments are facing today. Osborne and Gaebler clearly define what they mean by *government* in support of their paradigm:

*...our fundamental problem today is not too much government or too little government . Our fundamental problem is that we have the wrong kind of government. We do not need more or less government, we need better government. To be precise we need better governance. (4)*

The above statement presents a redefined model of conservative government where the responsibility for policy decisions is clearly assigned to government. Osborne and Gaebler further clarify their understanding of *governance* by suggesting a separation between *governance* and direct service delivery. The analogy they use to describe this is the one of government steering and not rowing. This approach has appealed to Victoria's conservative government which has set out to introduce such separation of roles in the legislation on competitive tendering for local government. The introduction of this approach has the potential to radically alter the relationship of local government with its community and potentially distance it from direct service delivery. Libraries as providers of service will be affected and the services that they deliver to women would be impacted. Women as the majority library users could receive less service because of the government's focus on cost reduction. This trend in

government is not unique to Victoria but is part of an international government movement for increasing competitiveness in the market and reducing costs.

### **Political and economic philosophies of the economic rationalists**

During the eighties countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand and Australia introduced economic reforms and in particular micro economic reforms. These countries introduced a process of review and change to work practices and structures to achieve the goals of business and industry in as efficient a manner as possible. An integral part of that was the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering, except in the United States where the prevailing political philosophy would not tolerate the compulsory element. These reforms have been implemented as Western governments have tried to grapple with the fiscal crises and the lack of confidence by the public in government. Micro-economic reform seems to be the approach taken by these governments, of both the right and the left, to address issues of unemployment, increased poverty and homelessness. The concept of government and the role of the state is increasingly being questioned and tested by the economic pressures facing Western economies. However, the introduction of these reforms is based on traditional, conservative, political and economic philosophies with some changes and modifications which go somewhat beyond the *New Right* or economic rationalists. An approach which, paradoxically, appears to have been adopted by not just conservative governments but also by Labour governments both in New Zealand and in Australia. Privatisation is thus being pursued by both side of politics with different aspects or elements emphasised by each side. A clear and straightforward definition on privatisation is given by John Ernst:

*At its core privatisation is about transferring functions hitherto performed by governments to other institutions in society, such as the private sector, non government organisations and the family..(5)*

This definition fits in with the philosophy outlined by Osborne and Gaebler in their new paradigm of government. What it does not raise is the question of values that underpin any economic and political system:

*...the market system, even in its theoretical model, is not the rational and 'value free' system which its proponents and many politicians suppose it to be...economics is not a value-free science upholding some principle of objective efficiency. (6)*

It is important to understand and be clear that economic rationalism is not a value free system and that it does have some difficulties which would have to be addressed if the creation of *new* problems is to be minimised. Thus by privatising public libraries women library users could be penalised and discouraged from using the library as the philosophy shifts from equal access to user pays. As with all theoretical positions market theory is based on certain assumptions made about individuals and their behaviour in the market. Eva Cox, a Senior Researcher with the Women's Economic Think Tank, indicates that:

*If we assume that people act out of greed and self-interest, we get different answers than if we assume that they may be concerned about others, or even realise that longer term effects of short term gain may be damaging. (7)*

The impact of the rethinking of the role of government and its ten principles as defined by Gaebler and Osborne has been energetically taken on by the Victorian State Government as the appropriate model to apply to the Victorian State and Local Governments. The ten principles outlined by Osborne and Gaebler serve as a background for the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering in government in Victoria. These principles have to be considered as part of the underlying framework that will impact and influence the way compulsory competitive tendering is to be introduced in Victorian Local Government. The ten principles that underpin Osborne's and Gaebler's focus on governments developing policies and directions rather than being the direct service providers. There is however, no indication given that access to

services by women is to be ensured once CCT is introduced. The focus seems to be on cost and not on equity of access to resources. Thus, women users could be excluded as the philosophy shifts from equal access to reduction in costs of services and the introduction of user pays. For governments to provide direct service they recommend that governments be competitive, mission driven, results oriented and customer focused. Osborne and Gaebler no longer look at the old dichotomy of private versus public instead they have redefined the functions along the lines of market monopoly or competition. (8) In some respects the thesis presented by them can be seen to sit within the conservative continuum of the right. The writers though do not see themselves as fitting into either tradition. (9)

Ernst in his monograph **Privatisation Papers** agrees with the contention that they differ to the *traditional right or left* (10) but he can also see some problems arising from their thesis:

*On the face of it then, new Governance offers a fresh approach to public policy. It is, as I will argue, at the one time both more promising and more problematic than the original paradigm of privatisation. (11)*

Certainly Osborne and Gaebler would agree with Cox when she states that:

*Economists ...have consistently promoted free markets in worlds far too complex to cope without substantial interventions and protection of the powerless. (12)*

There are numerous examples stated in Osborne's and Gaebler's text in areas such as education and housing for example where the local or state governments undertook some form of market intervention. And it is precisely this new approach to government by Osborne and Gaebler which has made their thesis popular with Western governments.

## **Role of government**

The debate about small government and big government has been going on for a long time between the right and the left. Osborne and Gaebler though have brought in a new slant to the argument and have come up with *appropriate* government. In the preface of **Reinventing Government** they indicate in the preface that they believe in government.

*We do not look at government as a necessary evil. All civilised societies have some form of government...it is the way we provide services that benefit all our people (13)*

The what and how the role of government is defined will play a critical part in the approach taken by a government and what it wants to achieve. In the case of Victoria the government has made it quite clear to local government that it does not believe that government has to be the direct service provider. Government has responsibility to plan and ensure that delivery of service takes place. It does not necessarily have to be the direct provider. Such an approach can provide opportunity and give flexibility to local government in the provision of services to the local community. If government is to provide the service then it has to be effective.(14) It is because governments have seemed to be ineffective that there is a push for indirect provision. Under such a definition of government there would seem to be support for the notion of the public good. However, should only governments provide services that others do not? If that was the exclusive area of government service provision governments could be seen to be inefficient because these services would not be competitive. Thus, public libraries, whose major clients are women, could be seen as inefficient because they are unable to raise significant funds from women to operate the library as a business. As governments shed direct service delivery to other players in the market they would end up with services that are too costly to run. The profitable and lucrative services would be contracted out. If this were to occur then questions of

equity and equality would arise. Would women continue to have free access to the same level of service as they currently do? Gaebler and Osborne certainly do not appear to be supporting such a concept given that they claim to believe in *equity-in equal opportunity for all Americans*. (15) Difficulties arise when such concepts are translated into implementation strategies that go beyond rhetoric.

*Even in theory, the market system extols consumer choice at the expense of other important values such as stability or equality. (16)*

How do we get around the issue of increased poverty and individuals having less access to services:

*We seem to be moving inexorably towards societies in which divisions between rich and poor become wider and set in place.(17)*

As Cox highlights in the above statement thus alluding to the dangers that would arise if issues of access and equity are not considered alongside issues of economic viability. Women, over-represented in the lower income brackets, would suffer the most with the introduction of these changes. (18) The problem seems to arise within the theoretical perspective of conservative economic theory. Peter Self indicates this in his critique of economic rationalism.

*The fault lies in viewing a part of the total economy and society as if it was and should be the dominant element. This fault becomes grossly compounded when economic theories of the market move into the realm of politics and seek to remake politics in their own image. (19)*

The impact of such outcomes is highly relevant from a library services to women perspective because of the complexity of information access issues that can affect women user groups. This issue will be explored further in chapter 3 when the impact of compulsory competitive tendering on public library services will be considered.

## **What the thesis intends to explore**

The main contention of this thesis is that the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering on local government will potentially impact adversely on public library services provided to women. This thesis will establish that the potential for a reduction in services will be increased as a result of compulsory competitive tendering because of the emphasis on cost savings. Broadly speaking, the thesis will look at three areas: the legislation on compulsory competitive tendering and its application, the role of the public library and the services provided to women and finally the application of compulsory competitive tendering on library services and the impact it will have on services to women.

This thesis will explore what the impact of compulsory competitive tendering on library services to women will have. It will examine whether these reforms will be able to deliver improved and or enhanced levels of service because of competition or whether other factors such as socio-political values will have a significant impact on how these changes will translate into services. In fact whether the proposed changes could improve the delivery and access of services to women by adequately reflecting the needs and demands of women after reviewing current service provision and analysing future needs.

First, the thesis will attempt to place competitive tendering within a theoretical and historical context so that a better understanding can be reached in relation to why and what the Victorian government hopes to achieve from the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering. This background will be examined from the perspective of the paradigm on government, or the *New Governance* as developed by Osborne and Gaebler in **Reinventing Government**. A paradigm which has been adopted as a strategy for government reform by a number of Western countries. In order to gauge the impact of the competitive tendering legislation the thesis will examine it in detail in

chapter one, consider its background and content and also compare it to the legislation introduced in the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Chapter 1 will also consider the other reform issues impacting on local government as compulsory competitive tendering cannot be looked at in isolation but has to be considered as part of the overall reform and restructure of local government. In particular the impact of amalgamations which will affect all public libraries because of the rationalisation of sites that is bound to occur. This chapter will then examine the legislation on compulsory competitive tendering and how it will affect public library services to women in Victoria given that they are operated and owned by local government with a subsidy provided by the state government. Libraries therefore, cannot remain immune to these changes and will certainly be affected by the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering. It will also look at the privatisation options as these various options could be applied to libraries producing different service results. Chapter two will examine the role of the public library and try to give an overview of services offered by libraries which are used by women and which also target women. It will also look at how technology, funding, government policies and statistics impact on library services to women. And finally chapter three will consider the impact, both advantages and disadvantages, of compulsory competitive tendering on library services to women and what the possible outcomes may be in terms of different options that might be available to libraries under the proposed reforms. Such an investigation is important at this point in time because the effects of these reforms will be dramatic and will have a long term effect.

### **Why is this relevant**

The reforms legislated and proposed by the state government in Victoria will have significant long term implications on the how and what local government services will be delivered in Victoria. It will also determine and define what the role of local government will be. Public libraries are a local government service which will be

affected by these changes. Women are the major users of public library services thus these changes will affect the level and quality of service they receive. The changes could significantly impact on library services in a major and potentially non-reversible way. Furthermore, Victoria is seen as leading the way with its 'innovative' approach to reform and therefore, the new directions could spread to other states. (19) An examination of the potential impacts of these reforms and changes on local government and their library services to women becomes crucial if decisions are to be based on assessed and evaluated processes of available choices. The changes could result in enhanced services as well as potentially reduced services. An evaluation of the implications to services could only assist in improving the decision making process and ensuring that women users did not suffer reduced services. Technological factors will also play a very significant role in reformulating and reshaping library services to women in the near future. Women may be required to pay for services thus creating an inequitable service based on capacity to pay. Therefore, factors such as the proposed reforms intended by the Kennett Government could potentially have a more dramatic impact than what may have been initially thought.

## Endnotes

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18. Ian Castles, **Women in Australia**, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 1993, p. 170.
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## CHAPTER 1

### *The Arrival of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT)*

#### 1.1 Compulsory competitive tendering

The practice of tendering services is not a new one in Victorian local government indeed, across Australian local government. This practice has been used by local government in trying to provide services to its community. Traditionally the areas tendered out by councils were in the physical services areas where either councils did not have the human and or physical resources in-house, or councils decided to contract out projects because of competing priorities in the capital works area. Competitive tendering was the normal way local government approached its day to day business except in the area of community services where it has been the exception. (1) The legislation introduced by the Victorian state government brings a significant element of difference which will radically alter the way local government services are provided.

Competitive tendering is a fundamental part of conservative political thinking. In theory this political thinking expresses itself in the economic philosophy of a free market where competition is the essential ingredient which assists the market to balance supply and demand. Competition in the market place will ensure that an economy remains free to express its true level. The concept of government being exempt from the competitive forces of the market is seen as not only interfering with the market but also not allowing the market to grow unhindered by regulations and controls. If government is necessary then it should be *small* government. That was the ideal philosophical approach espoused by the nineteenth century conservative, political and economic thinkers. (2)

The eighties brought with them significant changes in the world's economies and introduced an era of economic reform. Western countries were facing significant economic problems which had to be urgently addressed. The introduction of compulsory competitive tendering to local governments was part of the strategy to achieve micro-economic reform at the local government level. Such changes came into effect in the United Kingdom under the Thatcher government from 1980 onwards. In the British legislation the areas that local government has to formally put through a tendering process are listed in the legislation unlike the Victorian legislation.

The approach taken in the United Kingdom was not followed in Victoria because:

*Prescription like this needs surveillance and there has been a lot of central government effort devoted to the audit and the investigation of council's use of CCT in the UK. It is an approach which was not likely to win the collective heart and mind of Victorian local government. (3)*

Effectively to adopt the British model of prescription would have meant that the Victorian government would have had to go against its own policy about a reduced public service. Instead of reducing the public service the government would have been looking at creating a whole new specialist area for the purpose of monitoring local government legislation. The Victorian government resolved this dilemma by introducing legislation which achieved maximum reform without strict monitoring, prescriptive requirements. The government could also claim that it was allowing local needs to determine the agenda of reform at the local level. Quite correctly, the government was allowing local decision-making to play a role. The approach adopted by the Victorian government seems to have given the government considerable political advantage. By not specifying which services should be exposed to competitive tendering the government could be seen to be distancing itself from the potentially negative reaction that may arise at the local level. Local communities would lay the blame at local government and not the state government for the changes and reductions in service. The government, however, has also introduced municipal

amalgamations and is replacing elected councillors with government appointed commissioners, at the same time as, introducing CCT legislation. Thus, it could be said that the government effectively ensured that its agenda of reform would be implemented with minimal or no resistance. By also legislating for a minimum of 50 % of a council's expenditure required to be offered for competitive tendering the government was assured that about 60 % of councils services would be affected; and when asset depreciation is included that figure could go up to 70 % or 80 % in some councils. The impact of such legislation in the country area could be potentially devastating for country public libraries because of issues that will be explored in chapter 3. To ensure that the government's reform agenda on privatisation did occur the Victorian government had to introduce compulsion into the process.

*It was clear the no change option was not going to be favoured by a government which had committed itself to a policy of local government reform. And, without legislation, it was doubtful whether councils would venture into competitive tendering. (4)*

In New Zealand a similar approach on privatisation has been taken except the compulsory, component of the legislation for local government is limited to major road works, maintenance and passenger transport service if local government is to claim the Government Road subsidy. (5) Local government in New Zealand seems to have *voluntarily* gone down the path of competitive tendering in line with the legislation which requires local government to *consider* calling for tenders for all significant projects. The legislation does not define *significant*, it is local government's responsibility to define it and once the decision is made, to justify that decision to the central government. The accountability component is not just to the central government but also to the community.

In NSW the state government, also a conservative government, has taken a different approach to Victoria. Councils are required to seek tenders for *significant* projects. The threshold for significant is \$100,000.00 . (6) The approach taken by

the Victorian government makes its reform somehow more revolutionary because it is not merely economic it is also a political and a management related reform. (7) Thus the potential impact on library services to women could be significant and long term. These reforms could affect not only individual services to women, but also the role and function of the public library will have to be redefined to fit in with the new philosophy.

## **1.2 Compulsory competitive tendering legislation for local government in**

### **Victoria**

The Victorian government brought down legislation for the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering in local government to take effect from the 1 October 1994. The government's purpose for introducing the legislation is spelt clearly in part 1 of the Local Government Act, where it states that it requires councils to participate in competitive tendering and dictating only in respect of a specified amount but not what services should be exposed to competitive tendering.

*The Act's CCT provisions come into operation on 1 October and require all councils to participate in competitive tendering arrangements for a specified percentage of their total expenditure. (8)*

There are a number of elements within the legislation which will radically transform the way local government goes about providing its daily business. The first one is the percentage that will be required to be put through a formal competitive process, a minimum of 50% of a councils total expenditure. (9) The second one is that councils have the autonomy to choose what services will be subjected to a competitively tendered process. The introduction of 50% is to be phased over a period of three years reaching the 50% target by the end of the financial year 1996-1997. In 1994-95 the minimum percentage required from councils is 20%, in 1995-96 the minimum percentage will be 30% and by 1996-97 reaching the minimum of 50%. In order that

councils meet their 50% minimum requirements they will have to plan for an amount in excess of this figure.

The state government has also introduced financial accounting reforms for local government with the introduction of AAS-27 (accrual accounting). Under the requirements for AAS-27 councils will have to have completed the depreciation of their assets and included it as part of their annual budgets by 30 September 1997. This will have the effect of influencing the dollar amount that will make up the percentage of council's obligation for a minimum of 50% CCT. The figure for *total expense* includes recurrent operating costs, depreciation and debt servicing. (10) Increases in a council's total expenses will mean a higher dollar figure required for CCT purposes. In fact some rural councils have indicated that their depreciation amounts will be significantly greater than their annual capital works. The significance of this for library services to women cannot be understated given that libraries have huge assets as stock which are bound to affect the dollar figure which may need to be used for tendering purposes. Further, these requirements are to be fulfilled concurrently within an environment of Victorian council amalgamations.

The government has indicated that there is no compulsion, as in the United Kingdom, as to which services are to be subjected to competitive arrangements. A competitive arrangement does not mean that local government has to contract out all or some of its services. What the state government would expect is that a minimum of 50% of services be exposed to a competitive process. Local government though must adhere to the Act as described under section 208. The Act provides for contract agreements to be entered into either as an in-house agreement, an external agreement as an individual council or with another council or party. The section also specifies the length of the agreement which should not be longer than a five year period. For any other type of agreements the minister would have to grant approval for them to be considered a legitimate tendering process in the annual audited report. In reality,

some local government services will be contracted out to the private sector . There will also be some councils who will choose to contract out some or even most services except for governance, which is perceived as a core service.

To ensure that the competitive forces of the market determine the outcome on CCT, the government clearly outlines in the Act what a competitive process is. That is, public advertisement followed by a transparent process of evaluation and awarding of such contracts. The government indicates in the legislation that there is no obligation by the council to award the tender to the lowest bid. An important distinction which could potentially provide councils with considerable flexibility. However, the prevailing environment would not tolerate a council making a decision to award a contract that did not ostensibly satisfy all the required criteria for that selection, especially if the successful bid was not the lowest. Private enterprise will take action if it finds that most tenders are being awarded to the local government industry, accusing it of preventing *real* competition from taking place. The guidelines are very specific about the obligations of local government in fulfilling the requirements of the legislation.

*Public notice, a written quote and an agreement in writing are essential if accountability requirements of the legislation are to be met. (11)*

The legislation is clear and succinct about councils' responsibilities and obligations. To ensure that the intended legislated changes and their desired outcomes are implemented the government set up a working party to develop guidelines. The Local Government Industry Working Party developed extensive guidelines to facilitate and assist in the implementation of compulsory competitive tendering by local government. A document of about 80 pages, plus a number of appendices, containing examples of specifications and contracts. Thus, the government can quite unequivocally state that the industry has participated and contributed in the development and introduction of legislation for compulsory competitive tendering.

The government has incorporated a reporting process into the legislation so that it can monitor the process and pace of change occurring in local government. The guidelines indicate that, through the annual audited report submitted to the minister and the competitive tendering statement, councils will be reporting on how they have fulfilled the required percentage for competitive tendering and explain the basis upon which the decision was made. (12) At any point the minister could seek further information and if necessary legislate as the guidelines state:

*If councils fail to follow good tendering practice, or otherwise jeopardise the competitive process, the government will not hesitate to adopt a more prescriptive and regulatory approach. (13)*

Thus, a cooperative approach seems to have been adopted by local government towards the reforms proposed by the state government. Such an approach could presumably be seen to have benefited local government and provided an opportunity for input that it may not have had otherwise. It could also be interpreted as local government perceiving that it had no other option but to cooperate because the reforms would occur anyway.

### **1.3 How it will be applied in Victoria**

The development of the Guidelines, an extensive document, shows that the legislation has significant implications for local government and its implementation is a complex process. The implications of this are that local government will potentially become a market player in the business world, competing for business on the open market against, not only other government authorities, but also private enterprise. Local government will be one, amongst many, who will compete for business and win that business. Osborne and Gaebler make it quite clear in their thesis that the argument lies in better governance through the use of competition. Government, they

claim, is different to private enterprise, but that does not mean that competition should not be introduced and applied both within government and outside it on the open market. (14) It is a new way of governance and not necessarily less government. The new way of governance has the responsibility to utilise in a competitive and most effective way the available funds for the provision of service. The argument is not whether government would provide better or worse services the argument is whoever can competitively demonstrate they can deliver services most effectively. The role of government is to govern and that means planning and developing policies for the provision of service; ensuring that the community receives maximum benefits from the services provided.

The idea is for government to become *entrepreneurial* as described by Osborne and Gaebler. According to them *entrepreneurial government* does not have the connotations of risk as it has come to be perceived. *Entrepreneurial government* means government seeking opportunities as they arise. That is opportunities that have been assessed and evaluated on sound business premises where risk is minimised. (15) Osborne and Gaebler develop the concept of *entrepreneurial government* as requiring a complete change in the way government manages and operates. The concept of government operating more along the lines of business but knowing that its role is one of governance. The concept of outcomes and outputs is what should determine the performance of services not inputs as has been traditionally the case with governments. Simply put government should know what it is getting for its expenditure and not just how it is spending the community's funds. Government needs to know what business it is in, which is governance. The community has a significant role to play because they are the customers and therefore the service needs to reflect their needs and demands. It is the government's task to know and plan for the needs of the community. Government should be mission driven and should not be bogged down by bureaucratic systems. The government's focus ought to be on *steering* and not on *rowing*. Thus, the concept of arms length services from government means that the

focus is on the direction and not the running of the service. To achieve this a separation between the client/purchaser and the provider needs to occur so that the service does not get bogged down by the political interference of council. It also allows government and councils to set up business or service units which provide services on behalf of the council but are independent to it. These service units should be run along the same lines as a business. Essentially, these are the changes outlined and advocated by Osborne and Gaebler in their new approach to government and are now in the process of being adopted and implemented by local government.

A different management structure has to be put into place for such a model of governance and operation. The concept of the shamrock as a management structure has been promulgated as the new model. (16) It is predicted that the new organisation will operate like a shamrock and have three leaves. The first one, the core workers made up of professionals, technicians and managers. The second leaf comprises the outside contractors and the third leaf the flexible workforce who move in and out of the organisation as required. (17) It is assumed that such a structure frees the organisation from being hampered by bureaucracy and allows each leaf to act independently. As with all organisational structures there could be some difficulties arising from the structure when applied to public libraries. This issue will be examined in chapter 3 when the impact of CCT on public libraries will be evaluated.

The cultural change that is currently sweeping government will not exempt public libraries. Public libraries will not remain immune to any of these changes because of the significant size of their budgets. Local government will have to consider exposing public libraries to CCT if local government is to achieve the reforms and savings expected of it by the state government. Public libraries have not always been a service provided by local government in Victoria. Libraries in Victoria have a long history where they gradually developed and became a function of local government. From the mid forties onward public libraries were being established across the state.

Funding of public libraries used to be on a partnership basis between the state government and local government. Increasingly, this has been changing and local government has been funding a larger percentage. By 1992-93 local government was spending \$60,514,157. and raising another \$9,175,149. a total of \$81, 475, 223. whilst the state government was spending \$20,961,066 in grants. (18) In the past library services did not have to be tendered out unless it was a capital works project for a building or a computer system. In the past libraries did not go out to tender for the purchase of their resources or services. Cooperative schemes were occasionally developed or undertaken but overall the situation remained stable and unchanging until recently when the Shire of Melton pulled out its library service from the joint Sunshine Melton library service run by the Sunshine council. The Shire of Melton formed a contract for the library service with Technilib who is responsible for the delivery of the service. (19)

The changes that will occur as a result of the reforms that local government is undergoing could potentially change public library services to women in very significant ways. There are numerous other factors that are and will be impacting on public libraries which could dramatically effect the services offered to women. One of these is, of course, technology and the developments and access to networks and databases. These factors and their impact will be examined more closely in chapter 2 and chapter 3.

#### **1.4 What is CCT supposed to achieve**

Compulsory competitive tendering is seen to be one of the keys that will reform the public sector and force it to achieve improved efficiency, increased productivity, reduced cost and increased customer responsiveness. It will also potentially shift the direct service delivery function from government to the private sector. Competitive tendering is based on a theoretical framework which is political, economic and

management related. All three complement each other and should reshape the way government structures separation between purchaser and provider. The legislation makes it quite clear that in order to avoid a situation of conflict, an open competitive process has to occur. Local government must separate the roles of purchaser/client from the provider/service deliverer. This will have to occur if a local government authority has decided that an in-house work area should compete and potentially win the bid. To achieve this a different organisational structure designed for this model of government will be required. The reform of how an organisation is set up and managed will have far reaching implications in terms of local government. A situation which will apply equally to public libraries. If the library continues as it is currently managed but as a business unit then its management may or may not be significantly changed. Library tenders, however, will be based on outputs and these will become more refined as value for money becomes more dominant. Thus, a stronger competitive element will be introduced in the delivery of library services. This could be of benefit to public library services it could also be at a cost to services.

Competition theoretically should bring out the best performance out of the public sector as it is claimed it already does with the private sector. John Ernst in **Privatisation Papers** examines the issue of competitiveness and the shifting of direct service delivery including privatisation without considering the full implications of such decisions.

*The overriding point that should guide the decision to privatise is the **state of the market and the capacity for competition.** Where the signs are unpropitious, there is a strong prima facie case for retaining the service in the public sector. (20)*

As Ernst states in his paper the argument in favour of privatisation is based on the assumption that the private sector performs better than the public sector. (21) This assumption is based on the principle that competition drives the private sector whereas the public sector does not have to compete and can therefore afford to be complacent.

Privatisation involves a shift in either ownership, auspice or financing, or some combination of these. (22) Osborne and Gaebler make it quite clear that privatisation should not occur for the purpose of reducing services but rather for better government:

*Privatisation is one arrow in the government's quiver. But just as obviously, privatisation is not the solution. Those who advocate it on ideological grounds because they believe business is superior to government are selling the American people snake oil.(23)*

Inevitably, public libraries will be affected by the issues of privatisation and competitiveness. Currently public libraries in Victoria are government funded and operated. A change in political positioning could mean that libraries could become privatised which would significantly influence the type of services offered to women that continue to be delivered. If there is a situation of monopoly, competitive tendering cannot occur without encouraging a situation of contestability. (24) Contestability is the measures used to define how competitive a service is when tested against others. Boyd in his **Making Choices in Competitive Times** defines it as:

*A process of comparing the competitiveness of a service or project with others on a criteria of quality and cost. Contestability is often used as a force or even a threat to achieve competitiveness without the presence of real competitors through a tendering process. Contestability can be used for benchmarking, comparison with other, and is not a process just for competitive tendering.(25)*

The political and economic reality is that contestability can potentially be used as a coercive weapon to reduce costs and service levels. The danger lies in often not comparing apples with apples and therefore not taking into account local needs which could influence contestability results. The reality is that if a council decides that it will not support a service that does not compare favourably to some others it could then tender it out, privatise it or cease to provide it. Therefore, it becomes critical that appropriate performance indicators are developed for services so that potentially

services do not suffer adversely Performance indicators are the means by which services can be assessed in terms of their outcomes. In the past, performance was based on inputs, the new approach supported by the government and based on Osborne and Gaebler's performance is based on outputs. What becomes critical for government is what is the budget purchasing as outcomes for service? The new approach does not concern itself with the process involved to achieve the result but with the outcomes and outputs. (26 ) In the case of public libraries it will be critical how performance indicators are determined and who will monitor that performance. Agreed outputs with proper performance measures will need to be developed by the purchaser of services whether it was being provided from an in-house provider or an external one. According to Osborne and Gaebler, government will have to look at *steering* rather than *rowing* and the clearer the separation between the two the more effective does governance become. (27)

The danger is in assuming that all public libraries provide the exact same service. If all libraries end up being replicas of each other than the divergent needs of women will no longer be served. Libraries may then run the risk of becoming relevant to a narrower group of interests and therefore, potentially at risk. Benchmarks have been used in the past to measure public library performance. Benchmarking is used when there is usually no competition in a monopoly situation. In order to introduce some form of competition comparative competition is introduced. This is an important concept for libraries because all public libraries are government owned and operated, therefore, they are in effect a monopoly. This of course could change but at present there are no other privately owned public libraries. The annual statistics published by Arts Victoria on Victorian public libraries are used as a benchmark to compare libraries and have been used in the past as a management tool for introducing improvements. The statistics published cover broad areas of public library service and would require additional work if they are to be used as an effective benchmarking tool. Some local government authorities are also introducing a Total Quality Management

(TQM) approach which is seen as assisting in the introduction of CCT. TQM works on the principle of continuous improvement if an organisation is to remain competitive.(28) Public libraries would also be required to introduce such management changes which could potentially assist in the development of improved services to women.

### **1.5 Privatisation options**

Public libraries will not be able to avoid reform in the shape of some type of privatisation. The legislation may not dictate what should or should not be competitively tendered, however, the significant budgetary costs that local government incurs will certainly encourage councils to seek ways by which costs could be reduced and quality service improved. There are different paths that councils could travel in the pursuit of increased productivity and effectiveness at reduced cost. Libraries could be made exempt and continue to operate as a direct service or they could be set up as a council owned business or service unit. Libraries could also be corporatised and therefore set up as an independent council owned company. Library services could also contract out service components such as technical services, computer services, acquisitions, and even management of the library. All of these options will have different implications for services delivered to women. The main objective is for council to have a clear separation between the purchaser and provider if it is to fulfil the requirements of CCT.

The guide to local government **Making Choices in Competitive Times**, developed for the Municipal Association of Victoria by Laurie Boyd lists six broad options for privatisation. Councils could contract out council services, establish a business unit so that council can contract in, outsource, corporatise council services, sell off or a combination of the above.

Public libraries in Victoria have examined and undertaken some outsourcing fairly successfully. The system of public libraries in Victoria is a decentralised one where the state government provides a grant to council for the provision of library services and council both operates the service and funds the balance of the expenditure. Overall, local government subsidises library services up to 80% in some cases. In trying to reduce costs for public library services local government set up cooperatives the best example being Technilib a cooperative set up in the mid seventies. Technilib was established by a number of local government authorities to provide, on a co-operative basis, services to public libraries mainly in the technical services area. Technical services have always been considered an area of high cost for libraries where considerable duplication occurred and therefore a cooperative arrangement would be cost effective. Any local government authority has the right to join if it so chose. Services are provided in the areas of cataloguing, processing, acquisitions, computer services and recently the contractual responsibility for operating a library on behalf of a local government authority. These do not constitute examples of privatised libraries.

Another model of a cooperative scheme that has been adopted by local government is the regional library one. Regional libraries have been popular and reasonably successful in Victoria. There are 67 library services and more than a third are regional libraries formed under the Act, section 196 on regional corporations. (29) In the past regional libraries have provided savings to councils and produced extra benefits.

A council may also decide to corporatize its library service. Melbourne City Council has indicated that it will corporatise a number of its services and libraries is one of them. (30) A library could be set up similarly to a private company with a board of directors and ownership will be held by a council or councils. This then creates a private service which is owned by a public political body an interesting concept when it comes to issues of access and equity to basic information and recreation services. Most councils will also consider the option of contracting library

services and the contract could be granted to an external body or to an in-house business unit. The in-house business unit could be the library or the library as part of a larger business unit. All of these options will have advantages and disadvantages for libraries which will be examined in the next two chapters.

All these reforms that are taking place within local government will have far reaching ramifications for the operation of libraries. These reforms are only following world trends as markets become internationalised, technology impacting on all aspects of work, and the role of governments questioned. Communities are demanding resolutions to complex issues and accountability from government for expenditure. It appears to be accepted that governments have to perform more effectively with less money. Thus new approaches for services and new relationships with the community are required. Such an approach is bound to impact on libraries equally as it does on other government delivered services.

It is critical to define what the role of the public library is at present and whether women receive services under this current role definition so that an evaluation can be made of the potential impacts of CCT. The next chapter will examine the role of the public library and the services provided to women

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## Chapter 2

### *Women and the Public Library*

Chapter 1 considered the Victorian state government's introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering into local government. It examined the legislation and its implications on local government and service delivery. The legislation indicates that local government will be facing significant long term changes determining and impacting on the delivery of services. Public library services will not remain immune to these reforms and therefore, women as users of library services will inevitably be affected by these changes. In line with the new economic philosophy library services to women will shift from a community service focus to a business focus. These changes are not necessarily negative per se because they can potentially offer public libraries the opportunity to review their services to women and repackage them according to the identified diverse needs of women. The key criterion regarding service levels to women will be how public libraries will prioritise their services based on limited and finite budgets. Thus, it will be critical for women that public libraries currently offer a level of service which responds adequately to their needs because the starting point for any changes to services will be the existing level of service. It is unlikely that in this economic climate public libraries will receive additional funding for the improvements or enhancements of service levels to women. Chapter 3 which addresses the impacts of CCT will attempt to examine this point more closely.

Prior to undertaking an analysis of the impact of CCT on the delivery of public library services to women an examination of current services needs to occur. Chapter 2 will examine public library services currently offered to women and will attempt to identify the range and level of services targeting women. It will also consider whether there are groups of women who currently do not use public library services because they do not perceive them as relevant to their needs. Traditionally, public libraries

have determined service provision based on their understanding of what the public library's role is and how that role can be interpreted in relation to the public library's perceptions of the needs of the community.

## 2.1 The role of the public library

The role of the public library is often defined in terms that can be described as *parenthood* statements. An ideal role which is perceived as inclusive and non-discriminatory. The Libraries Board of Victoria in its **Policy Directions for Library Services in Victoria** in 1991, stated that:

*Library services exist in Victoria to provide for the information, education, cultural, research and recreation needs of individuals, and of organisations in the community, government, business and industry. They provide access to information sources and services for all Victorians, whether as children or adults, as students, business people, policy makers or researchers. Effective library services are essential to the growth and development of Victorians of all ages, and to fostering the state's social, economic, political and cultural advancement. (1)*

The Commonwealth Government has also attempted to define the role of the public library which seems to broadly agree with the definition given by the Libraries Board of Victoria. This was contained in the Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies 1991, where the government expressed its thoughts on the role of the public library in terms of functions. Once again the emphasis was on the public library's role in the areas of recreation, information, education, referral and advice to the library's community by providing resources or accessing resources for the community. (2) A broadly defined role encompassing the whole community. A similar role definition was adopted by the Library Council of New South Wales in 1991.

*The public library provides a wide range of library services and materials for all members of the community to meet their information, education and recreation needs. It also provides an access point for individuals or groups*

*within the community to the wider network of library and information services provided by State, Federal, government, and university and college libraries.*  
(3)

A clearer and possibly more narrowly defined description is the one provided by Michael Gorman in his article on academic libraries, which serves equally well for public libraries.

*The purpose of libraries is and always has been twofold; (1) to acquire, store, disseminate, and allow access to carriers of knowledge and information in all forms, and (2) to provide services based on those carriers of knowledge and information.* (4)

All of the above definitions, and in general any others adopted by individual public libraries, assume that women as members of the community can use the library service in its defined role. Such a broad definition of role has some intrinsic problems given that public libraries do not have access to unlimited budgets. It also assumes that the translation of such a role into policies and services are equitably accessible and adequately available to all groups of women within the community. There seems to be a general consensus that public libraries are a *good thing* and should be available to the whole community. This point in support of the concept of the intrinsic value of the public library is often raised when a library is under threat of closure or is to incur a significant reduction in budget. The Washington Post expressed this *value* of public library services eloquently when columnist Richard Cohen wrote in response to the financial cuts threatening the New York Public Library with closure:

*A library is not a hospital, and it is not police, and it is not welfare payments. No one ever died for lack of a book-but that in a way is the point. A library...is the apotheosis of a city, of urban culture-a free institution open to all, where ...ideas are exchanged. A library is not a basic service. It is merely an essential one.* (5)

Goldberg in the above article states that if public libraries are to continue to provide relevant services to the community then they should be planning for change rather than

reacting to change. To do this public libraries have to change to reflect the changing needs of women within the community. For women it is critical that libraries remain accessible and affordable if women are not to be disadvantaged.

Women are not specifically referred to in policy statements that attempt to define the role of public libraries. Even though women are predominantly the main users of public libraries they are subsumed under the generic term community, or included under specific headings such as migrant or literacy program. Public libraries do not express their policy statements along gender lines. Women as consumers of library services fall under two broad categories as members of the general community or the dominant cultural group that libraries serve and as individuals. That is women may belong to specific women's target groups such as English speaking women from an Anglo-Celtic background but who might also be a single parent or a lesbian. Women's needs also change as they progress through the various life cycles of their lives. Policies that define the role of the public library do not tend to focus, recognise or identify these diverse needs of women as library consumers. The introduction of CCT could significantly impact on library services to women both as users and as future users. The role of the public library being defined in such broad and general terms creates the potential for confusion and encourages a lack of specificity regarding service delivery to women. It can also be interpreted by funding authorities as lacking in accountability, thus possibly increasing the risk of service reduction to women when CCT is introduced.

Public libraries are funded by the three spheres of government in Australia. In Victoria, as indicated in Chapter 1, local government makes the largest contribution for library services and also has the responsibility for their operation. The role and function of the library is generally determined by policies initiated and developed by government. Even though Australia has a developed national public library system it did not have a national written policy on information public libraries until 1991. (6)

This does not mean that prior to that public libraries did not have a policy that defined their information role. There seems to be broad agreement by all public libraries on this general definition of the role of the public library. It is only at the local community level where differences and variations emerge when individual libraries interpret and implemented this role into service delivery. The result of this is that individual councils have a significant impact on the direction of the library services and how that should translate into service delivery. This approach results in uneven service delivery with commensurate levels of funding from the very small library to the large and comprehensive. The Commonwealth Government has undertaken a number of reviews and studies about the role of public libraries and has tried to define its responsibilities for them but with no direct funding contribution. The Commonwealth government has direct responsibility for only the National Library just as each state and territory governments have responsibility for state libraries.

With the Commonwealth government libraries are located in the Commonwealth Department of Communications and the Arts. This would suggest that libraries are perceived as playing an information role in the communications industry and as belonging to the cultural institutions sector. The Commonwealth government has just released its cultural policy and public libraries are included under the heading 'Information for all Australians'.

*The Government will work with the states to enable the resources in libraries throughout the nation to become available to all... Commonwealth strategy is based on the concept of a Distributed National Collection of library and other cultural materials, built through collaboration between Commonwealth, State and local government libraries, museums and galleries. (7)*

This policy presumably intends to influence the future direction of public libraries. Women are included under the heading *all* who should have access to information held in libraries across the nation. The women's movement may have influenced policy in a number of areas and directions but libraries have not changed significantly in terms of

their acquisitions or services over the last twenty or thirty years. This is mainly because of the chronic underfunding that public libraries experience, the huge increase in publishing output and the fact that libraries are undervalued. As Michael Gorman reminds librarians:

*Libraries of all kinds have been underfunded, are underfunded, and, I imagine, will continue to be underfunded in good times and in bad...the deeper underlying reason that we are underfunded is because we (and the range of educational/cultural institutions to which we belong) are undervalued. This undervaluation doesn't occur at the level of rational choice; it is part of a larger societal vision. (8)*

The undervaluing of libraries could be as a result of the feminisation of the profession. Clare Beck in an article on reference services has drawn librarians attention to the fact that

*...gender shaped the values and practice of a profession that, in a short time at the end of the 19th century, became predominantly female. (9)*

She also points out that:

*Gender is at the centre of human society and of the way our institutions are defined. Clearly, history has put gender at the centre of our profession in a unique way that deserves more analysis. (10)*

The issue of libraries being undervalued in conjunction with the introduction of the user pays principle and the emphasis on information access through technology could have an adverse effect on public library services received by women. Chapter 3 will examine this more closely. The public library's main emphasis is still on the purchase of materials of general interest for adults and children in predominantly, a book format. Over all, public libraries still provide what is considered to be a service to women who are literate from an English speaking background. American user studies indicate that most people use public libraries for light recreational reading and that women, as the

greatest users of libraries, use them for reading romance fiction. This situation would apply equally to Victorian public libraries. (11) Romance fiction is one of the obvious categories where libraries expend a significant proportion of their funds for the purchase of adult fiction. Public libraries also purchase western fiction targeting men as a consumer group. Official public library policies do not tend to distinguish between the sexes in the provision of service but in practice they tend to respond to the demands of their male and female clients differently. However, that doesn't prevent libraries from assuming that the needs of women and men of similar age groups or backgrounds are somewhat the same. Such assumptions can create inconsistencies and contradictions in the development and delivery of services to women; resulting in some categories of women's interests, such as leisure reading, taking precedence over others. Based on the usage statistics public libraries do provide services to women and it can be argued that some major aspects of library service have been developed to target women as a consumer group. The issue of how and why women use or do not use public libraries becomes a critical one when considering the impact of CCT.

## **2.2 Women's use of public libraries**

According to an ABS survey which looked at **Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues Australia, June 1991** more women than men attended cultural institutions Australia wide with the highest attendance level recorded for libraries. There were 2,629,300 women between the ages of 18-65+ who visited libraries in 1991 compared to 1,813,300 men in the same age group category. That is, women's participation rates were 42.9% compared to men's which was 30.4%; 12.6% more women attended libraries than men. A study undertaken by the Australian Council of Library and Information Services (ACLIS) Steering Committee on Funding Strategies for Public Libraries supported this finding. The ACLIS study suggested that women were more likely to be library users because they have more of the characteristics of users. This user characteristics list was compiled from the literature survey undertaken by the

study. In summary, these user characteristics indicated that users are likely to be female, aged between 0-39 and 65+ with a minimum education level of year 11, having a moderate to high literacy proficiency level and either retired, with home duties or a part time worker; with children still living at home and with frequent information needs on recreational, study and or hobby related interests. The user is also likely to be a reader of books, interested in community involvement and having been exposed to books in childhood. (12) Thus women of a cultural background that encourages recreational reading and have a minimum level of secondary school would be more likely to use the public library. Women who are either in part time employment or have home duties are also more likely to use public libraries. The emphasis seems to be on the recreational role offered by the library to women.

The ABS survey also indicated that there were differences in the participation rate of the states. Victoria had a participation rate of 36.2% of the state's 3,157,100 out of which 1,142,500 are library users and 2,014,600 are non-users. Interestingly, the three largest states New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland have a lower participation rate to the other states and territories by up to 8%. The statistics collected and published annually on public libraries in Victoria do not have participation rates by sex thus comparisons cannot be made over time. No studies have been undertaken to explain why the two largest states, NSW and Victoria, have a lower participation rate. An influencing factor could be that these states have a higher percentage of overseas born from non-English speaking backgrounds. Thus, possibly fewer women of non-English speaking backgrounds use libraries compared to English speaking women. This would tend to support the user characteristics that emerged out of the ACLIS study.

Attendance statistics are as meaningful as frequency statistics for library purposes. The ABS survey indicated that frequency of visits to public libraries tended to increase with age. Up to 48.1% of library users aged 65 and over visited libraries more than

15 times during the 12 months compared to 23.7% of library users aged 25 to 34 years. This is compared with only 21.4 per cent, of those aged 65 years and over who visited 5 or less times and 45.2% for those aged 25 to 34 years. (13) Therefore, women aged 65 years and over are more likely to visit libraries at least fifteen times a year. This is because women live longer than men and more women use libraries than men. Also the participation rate of individuals with degrees is high for libraries but not as high as for other cultural venues. (14) People with a Bachelor Degree or higher qualification had a higher participation rate at all venues/activities than those with lower qualifications. (15)

The ABS survey did not discover a significant difference in the participation rate between the family group category 36.7% and that of the non-family group 36.2%. (16) This is because reading can be both an individual activity and a family activity. When a comparison is made between the different marital categories (35%-37%), there was little difference between them except for a slightly higher rate for those never married, mainly students at 41.4% and a significantly lower rate for those widowed at 27.7%. (17) The survey also looked at attendance by country of birth and found that:

*...after the Americas (58.3 per cent), people born in the United Kingdom and Ireland had the highest participation rate (47.7 per cent). There was no difference between the participation rate for people born in Australia and those born outside Australia (18)*

Although the figures indicate that there is no difference between Australian born and those born outside Australia there are other factors such as age or the purpose of a visit for example, that need to be considered if the figures are to be meaningful.

The attendance figures provided by ABS are useful as general indicators of library participation. More specific studies will need to be undertaken by libraries for the purposes of CCT to establish more closely the patterns and category of usage by

women. Issues involving questions of access and equity to resources are considered important in the way libraries attempt to provide services to their community. These are incorporated in the definition of the role of the library as mentioned on page 32. Difficulties arise when public libraries have to determine how expenditure is to be allocated in terms of purchase of resources, establishment and running of specific services and programs, and ensuring access to information resources from other information providers to all users and often potential users. This complex issue will have to be considered next when looking at specific services and programs that libraries offer to women.

### **2.3 Public library services and programs for women**

Public libraries are part of the ideological discourse of Western culture. As institutions representative of the mainstream, public libraries have played a significant role in affirming and endorsing the prevailing cultural values. Public libraries are perceived to be the custodians of knowledge through time and as playing a role in inculcating these cultural values to outside or marginal groups. (19) Public libraries have traditionally attempted to provide services to both the individual and groups. Such a philosophically contradictory approach has served the public library in its efforts to provide services to both its traditional users and non-traditional users. William Birdsall articulated this contradictory philosophical role of the library in his article "Public Libraries and Political Culture", as a potential threat, but also benefit for the public library's future.

*Does public library ideology, consisting of a variety of elements drawn from conservatism, socialism, and liberalism, result in both ideological confusion and in library goals and programs what are ambiguous and contradictory? For example, the liberal commitment to individual self fulfilment that underlies the library profession's commitment to intellectual freedom often comes up against the library's more conservative role as the preserver of community memory and values. By making available to the individual a wide range of cosmopolitan ideas the library assumes the role of change agent and threat to the community norms. (20)*

As individuals, women have received library services that catered for their recreation needs within an English speaking middle-class environment. Women who were literate, of an English, speaking cultural background have been the main users of public libraries. Public libraries, however, also perceived themselves as cultural institutions which should provide services to groups of women who did not belong to the mainstream. Public libraries provide a range of services and programs to individual women and various groups. There are however, significant variations with the level and degree of service provision across the state. Each library provides quantitatively and qualitatively a different service, even though there is a basic level of library service that would be offered by all. These variations are a reflection of local political emphasis, local budgets, population served, size of library service and whether the public library is a single municipal service or a regional library service. But most importantly, the professional input of the librarians who significantly influence the direction of the library service. Services offered and used by women differ from library to library and vary depending on where a woman happens to live. There are differences in use between the Eastern suburbs and the Western suburbs of Melbourne, between Inner Metropolitan Melbourne and Outer Melbourne. Even though, circulation figures do not show loans by sex, it can be deduced from the pattern of usage that English speaking women from a more affluent background, as indicated by the ABS survey, are more likely to be higher users of libraries. Circulation figures, for example, for the Box Hill-Doncaster Library Service (Eastern suburbs) had a turnover rate of 8.48 compared to the Moonee Valley Regional Library Service (Western suburbs) of 4.20. (21)

When it comes to particular groups of women using the library the limited information available indicates a different pattern of use. Resources targeting women of non-English speaking background, for example, have been offered since the 1970's in Victoria. The "Annual Survey of Victorian Public Libraries 1992-1993", indicates

that the total number of books in languages other than English (LOTE) was 280, 931 in Victoria out of a total 8,075,876 number of books. (22) An increase from 243,502 in 1988-1989 for LOTE out of a total 7,896,936 of books. (23) This figure under-represents the number of individuals from a non-English speaking background that live in Victoria. What it does indicate however, is that libraries consider it important to provide books and other library materials in languages other than English to respond to the needs of other culture groups. Migrant women are targeted by libraries and a variety of resources are purchased to respond to their needs. The availability of resources is the prime focus of public libraries, how relevant these resources are to the needs of women served is unclear. Once again, when a comparison is made between Moonee Valley Regional Library and Box Hill-Doncaster even though Moonee Valley Regional Library has a collection of 33,471 of LOTE books it has a circulation figure of 135,143, where as Box Hill-Doncaster has a collection of 5,726 LOTE books and a circulation figure of 54,970. (24) The available statistical information on the use of public libraries is inadequate. Public libraries will have to undertake research to determine patterns of current use and potential use of their libraries by women if they are to continue providing relevant services to women.

The ideological basis upon which a library has developed its service provision will determine the funding allocation of resources and will determine the level of service women will receive. Thus, collection development and management becomes a key policy area for library services to women given that libraries spend \$16,620,411 or 17% out of the state's total library budget of \$87,634,383. The second highest, following salaries, consuming \$53,418,041 or 61% out of \$87,634,383. (25) An amount which is comparatively low and increasingly threatened when considered against a background of huge annual publishing outputs, the ever increasing cost of technology and reducing or static library budgets. With the introduction of micro-economic reform public library collection budgets will be significantly impacted. If services to women are not to be adversely affected, public libraries will have to plan

strategically to ensure that women continue to receive services relevant to their needs. Access to resources will become the most critical factor as public libraries will increasingly depend more on resources not held in their library.

### **2.3.1 Access to information services**

Information services can be as broad or as narrow across the spectrum of information provision. Overall, public libraries provide what would be considered to be the traditional area of information provision; access to specific materials rather than research provision. Research or in depth searches of resources tend to be provided by other library sectors such as the tertiary or special. This does not prevent public libraries from participating more actively in the provision of on-line access to information resources beyond the confines of their library walls. Access to information resources from a plethora of an ever expanding information supply can be challenging but also confusing. Women as library users need to be able to have access to *useful* information. With the introduction of the concept of user pays for access to information through on-line searches of databases it becomes critical that the information accessed is in a useful and relevant form.

*Information is random and miscellaneous, while knowledge is orderly and cumulative. Information is the raw stuff from which knowledge is derived; but information must be organised to foster connections and relevant interpretations before it will lead to knowledge. (26)*

If public libraries are to continue fulfilling their role, it is important that libraries actively participate in the dissemination of information to women based on their needs. As funding levels become increasingly threatened it becomes more important for public libraries to ensure that women have access to information according to their needs. The 1991 Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies on **Australia As an Information Society**, identified a number of issues that

had to be addressed by Australia's information institutions, if Australia is not to fall behind as an *information society*.

*The essential element is to enhance the community's use of information but to achieve this end attention needs to be paid to the capacity of domestic information technology to aid in the collection, collation, translation and dissemination of information. The ability of individuals and institutions to access that information and to transfer it into knowledge is also important and is based on the capacity of the education system to impart information skills. The capacity of our institutions to store and preserve information is also a part of this process and is a matter of long term concern. None of these processes can be considered in isolation if Australia is going to develop effective policies and strategies for its further development. (27)*

Basic reference services are provided by public libraries and the occasional monograph title on and for women may be purchased but the emphasis is certainly not on consciously selecting for and about women. Nor is there an emphasis on what needs women may have that have not been expressed as demands beyond their needs in the recreation area. With the availability of Internet in Australia, access to resources will be enhanced dramatically. There is a problem though for public libraries, because unlike academic libraries, they are not members of the Internet. The danger in allowing this situation to continue is that public libraries could become irrelevant to the information needs of the community. Therefore, public libraries could be inadvertently assisting in further widening the gap between the information *rich* and the information *poor*. (28) In fact, if as in the United States, Internet access is made accessible to general members of the public then the same warning that applies to the United States will apply to Australia.

*I believe we desperately need to extend participation to the general public, even with all the accompanying problems of overcrowding, silliness and unproductive activity. Otherwise in 20 years we'll have a society with just two classes: the 'Knows' and the 'know-not'. (29)*

The Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies on **Australia As An Information Society: Grasping New Paradigms**, also highlighted the risk once commercialisation of information occurred and

information is then treated as a commodity. The report acknowledged that in Australia the situation already existed where there were two categories of people the *information poor* and the *information rich* and that some appropriate measures would have to be introduced if Australia is to avoid the creation of a new class structure with the *information poor* at the bottom. (30)

Women would be the most at risk of joining the *information poor* at the bottom of the class structure. Women are already over represented in the group category with the lowest incomes, therefore, if these women cannot have free access to information via the public library they will be further disadvantaged. The issue of user pays can only adversely impact on women if libraries decide to introduce charging by format.

*I believe charging the sort of direct fees that impose a barrier to access to services will ultimately lead to less support for libraries, and that format-oriented charging in particular will eventually start to undermine the very basis for public libraries. (31)*

Libraries are funded by all tax payers based on their role but in practice they do not provide services to all. In Victoria 36.4% of Victorians were users of public libraries. That means that another 66.6% did not use public libraries. With the commercialisation of information and the introduction of business principles in the running of public libraries the issue of those who use the service and benefit from it should also pay for it could become a reality. As Jennifer Cramm reminds public librarians public libraries do not have a secure government financial base.

*While the public library is not, in Australia revered as fundamental to the nation's values to the same extent as it is in the United States, the Australian public library is as much an anomaly in our society as it is in theirs. While there is a mandate for public libraries in Australia, they have no secure fiscal niche at any level of government. (32)*

The question of user pays for access to information is not the only issue that would disadvantage women on low incomes. The issue of information literacy is another important factor which could further disadvantage women. Women who have not developed the necessary information literacy skills to access information will be effectively excluded from sources of information. As databases grow manipulating them to extract relevant information becomes a skill which requires considerable training and affluence.

*Information literacy defines the ability of an individual to select and apply a variety of appropriate information skills and strategies in order to effectively handle information tasks. (33)*

There is a further difficulty when dealing with access to information for women which needs to be addressed by public libraries first. The issue of knowing what it is that a woman requires or should know about which is relevant to her needs. That is public libraries developing a proactive approach to the provision of information and information access. Women should be able to access these services but as John Levett said:

*In my view there is only information injustice and everything we do as a profession should be directed towards correcting intrinsic imbalances in access and even awareness. Many people don't know that they don't know, don't know that they could know, and never become aware of their right to know, let alone learning how to know. (34)*

Public libraries, if they are to continue providing relevant services to women, will have to ensure that not only information is made accessible but that the library develops and maintains in-house collections that reflect the needs of these women. With the increasing emphasis on access to resources through databases rather than the purchase of items, public libraries may be jeopardising one of the roles of the public library.

### 2.3.2 Collections for women

Collection management policies of public libraries determine what libraries will purchase or not purchase for inclusion in their collections. Increasingly public libraries are responding more to demand than to planned purchases because of reduced purchasing budgets. This practice would detrimentally impact on the principle of access to resources for the community as a whole, if libraries respond to demand without planning for collection development. The danger could be that public libraries could provide high demand services to a decreasing population base.

*Collection management, as we head for the year 2000, is where we will of necessity first come to terms with what we have understood to be the differences between the demands of the public library as information centre and the public library as repository of public knowledge. (35)*

Public libraries provide an important role in the provision of recreation services. A service that tends to be used more by women than men. Public libraries have to continue providing recreation services which means they will have to continue to purchase resources in that area. It is important that public libraries in their pursuit of a business focus do not forget the recreation role they provide to women.

*First, our attempts to 'defeminize' our image have caused us to put down the importance of recreation. But recreation is essential to human beings, and in every human culture one of the most important forms of recreation is storytelling. In other words fiction. (36)*

One way of ensuring that public libraries can continue to provide the required resources to women users is through The Distributed National Collection. The Distributed National Collection is:

*The aggregation of all collections in Australia which are recorded in generally accessible databases and are accessible, either in person or via inter-library document supply, to users with bona fide reasons for access. The Distributed National Collection is comprehensive in relation to Australiana and selective in relation to the rest of the world as present and future needs of Australia require. (37)*

It is important that public libraries continue to expend significant funds on the purchase of resources. To effectively achieve this, public libraries have to coordinate their purchasing by maximising unique purchases and minimising unnecessary duplication. A planned approach to collection development and management will have to occur for the state's public library resources. If public libraries do not undertake such a planned approach then they may effectively be undermining the long term viability of the public library.

*...the public library's claim to support is that in providing such access to individuals it performs a task essential for the continuation of a democratic society, a task generally acknowledged to be of significance to not only individuals but the community, including individuals who may never directly use the library. (38)*

Collections available in public libraries tend to focus on current users. Public libraries will have to consciously broaden their selection if they are to target other groups of women as well as literate middle-class women.

*Libraries have a long, depressing history of hostility toward working-class people of either sex, and, whether we admit it or not, when we don't buy what they want to read, we send the message "we don't want your kind in our library". Working people are not stupid; they get the message. And they (especially men) stay away from the library in droves...We have tried to change, of course. In fact our heavy emphasis on "information services" over the past 30 years can be seen as a partly unconscious attempt to gain status for the library in a culture where male values still have more prestige than female ones. (39)*

In general public libraries provide recreation material for women in the form of fiction books, such as romances, mysteries and fantasy, magazines, music cassettes and compact discs. In the non-fiction area libraries focus on books and other formats in the arts and craft area, cooking, health and gardening. These are the resources that predominantly women tend to borrow from libraries. There is very little material for the information and recreation needs of other groups of women. For example women from a non-English background, women who work in factories, indigenous women,

unemployed women or battered women. Thus collection development and management become critical if public libraries are to respond to the needs of all women within their community. The publishing market is huge and libraries cannot afford to purchase all publications, a selection process has to take place. It is only when a library makes a conscious decision that it will purchase materials for and about women that a planned approach for the needs of women beyond the traditional recreation needs can occur. Certainly, libraries have become quite good at purchasing fiction books that target women. Romances, mainly in English, published in English speaking countries. Potentially, when CCT comes into place library services provided to current women users could be under threat and other women would not even be considered. For example public libraries that have developed specific programs in response to the needs of groups of women would be in a better position to argue for the retention of such services.

#### **2.3.4 Specific programs targeting women**

A public library is more than a collection of books. It is an active part of the community. A community centre where a number of community activities take place. Some libraries have developed a range of programs that target specific groups of women such as an English as a second language class for migrant women or a women's community arts project, a women's writing group or a women's literacy group. These programs are not provided consistently across the board and are not perceived to be a *core* service. When looking at the "Annual Survey of Victorian Public Libraries 1992-1993", there is no mention of programs or specific collections. The emphasis seems to be on the purchase and circulation of library materials. Public libraries do play a significant role in the provision of traditional services to women but they do not target the diversity of women's interests. Public libraries still maintain the traditional approach of expecting users to come to them. Further, there is little research undertaken into the library's community to ensure that the library is in fact

reflecting that community's needs. Public libraries that take a proactive approach to service delivery and work in with other local community organisations are more likely to continue receiving financial support.

*...public libraries have long considered themselves educational institutions, we have adopted a passive stance; we are there for anyone, but everyone must make the effort to come to our doors, or call us. Librarians insist on calling this stance neutral, when it is simply passive. (40)*

Public libraries have not modified their emphasis moving towards a more customised service approach. The result of this is that they expose libraries to an increased funding threat as individuals move elsewhere for service provision. Osborne and Gaebler in their **Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector**, include public libraries in their evaluation of the public sector.

*And yet traditional public institutions still offer one-size-fits-all services...Traditional public libraries still offer only books, newspapers and magazines. When consumers accustomed to choices confront public institutions that offer standardised services, they increasingly go elsewhere. (41)*

Osborne and Gaebler quote the example of the Oakland Public Library in California. The first point they argue is that the Head Librarian was appointed to survey the library's community to determine whether the library was relevant to the needs of the community. As a result of that survey a number of programs were established to target groups that were not using the library. Migrants and children were found to be neglected groups. Programs for migrants and children were introduced to attract these groups. Literacy programs were established, a bookmobile service for Indigenous Americans, lawyers in the library program, a free income tax service and a books-on-tape library for groups such as the Hmong who have no written language. (42) Public libraries in Victoria have tried to respond to similar needs in their communities but with varying degrees of success. Often the argument used to justify

inaction has tended to be that because such services are specialised services they are more expensive. All women are potentially, important customers of public library services because of their varied individual needs but also as parents, workers and partners. As in the Oakland library example, children of migrants will not use the public library if the parents, usually the mother, cannot see the relevance and usefulness of the services offered. Public libraries cannot afford to ignore non-traditional users within their community if they are to continue receiving funding from the whole community. The question of access to services becomes even more critical when it is considered within a changing environment impacted by technology.

#### **2.4 Technology and future direction**

It is becoming apparent that the future direction of public libraries lies in the way technology will be used to ensure access to resources by the community. Women as the majority users of public libraries, will be impacted by changes in quantity and quality of resources and programs as well as by the effects of information technology.

*Information technology is changing forever the way in which people create, disseminate and access information. ...The availability of affordable desktop workstations, coupled with computer networks, has the potential to deliver any information, at any time, anywhere, and any way I want to look at it (42)*

The super highway costs and the commercial specialists that are cropping up who provide better services than libraries can undermine the current provision of library services. The Distributed National Collection should provide opportunities for public libraries to maximise their purchasing potential and to evaluate the strengths of their collections. It also provides them with the opportunity to develop some specialist collections for women available across the state.

Changes in the demographics of women will have to be addressed by public libraries. The increasing number of ageing women who may require increased



housebound services, the increasing number of migrant women from Asian countries who have different cultural experiences and expectations of libraries; the increasing number of unemployed and homeless women, the issue of women's health and legal rights and the increasing number of women who are in the workforce. All these issues will need to be considered in the provision of services to women.

Technology could be used by public libraries to enhance access to information or it could be used as a barrier to further inhibit non-traditional women users from using the library. The mandate that public libraries currently have demands that they cater to the needs of the whole community. Thus, proposed changes that will occur because of CCT should be seen as an opportunity by public libraries to improve the relevance and effectiveness of their services to women. The possibility of user pays is a real threat to women who cannot afford to access information. The complexities of public library indexes and catalogues further disadvantage women who are not traditional library users. Technology is changing the notion of 'free' because of a distinction that is being made on the basis of if it is costing libraries money to access other databases then that cost should be passed on to the customer. The question of need and affordability has to be retained if public libraries are not to assist in the creation of the *information poor*.

*A debate should not look at competing claims on a shrinking system, but cover a broad brush approach to change which recognises that we cannot undermine others without undermining ourselves. Women need to translate individualism and difference into a model which recognises and values diversity but recognises communality as well. (44)*

Chapter 3 will examine the impact of CCT on the delivery of public library services to women. Women are the majority users of library services but the services provided to women by public libraries in Victoria differ across the state. Thus, the impact of

CCT will also differ from council to council reflecting differing policy priorities. To ensure that women are not the losers of this process of reform public libraries will have to strategically plan their services so that they are in tune with the needs of their customers.

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## Chapter 3

### *CCT: Women and Public Library Services Winners and Losers*

In chapter 1 this thesis examined the state government's proposed changes to local government and looked at some of the implications in terms of legislative responsibilities and library service provision to women. Chapter 1 concluded that CCT will impact on library services to women. The nature of the changes themselves will be determined by the espoused values which will underpin the policies developed by councils for the delivery of library services to women. Potentially, CCT has the ability to enhance the level and quality of library services offered to women. This argument, however, should be countered by the potential danger library services to women are facing, because of the question of funding levels and the possible focussing on savings and cost reductions rather than service needs. Chapter 2 looked at the services offered by public libraries focusing on Victoria and indicated that even though women were the majority users of public library services, the services they were offered and used tended to be the traditional recreation services. Women with specific library information needs received an inconsistent level of service which varied from library to library. Chapter 2 also considered the range of services that libraries could be offering and the impact of information technology on the future provision of public library services. It also concluded that not all women are recipients of library services even though they are entitled to a service according to the designated role of public libraries. Further, I have indicated that CCT could enhance the level of service provided because of the increased accountability and monitoring required which forces

services to be explicit in their quality and quantity of service. But for this to occur on an equitable basis there needs to be an agreement on the 'value' given to the concept of 'free' library services to all women. If, however, CCT is used as a mechanism for the reduction and control of public library budgets then the situation becomes more difficult for libraries as they struggle to provide services to both their traditional women customers and the non-traditional customers with reduced budgets. Chapter 3 will now look closely at the introduction of CCT in local government and how that will change the provision of library services to women across Victoria.

### **3.1 Applying CCT to public library services**

Most of the literature on the introduction of CCT in Victoria tends to support the concept of competitive tendering because of the notion that competitive tendering has the potential to lower the cost to government without reducing service levels. There is not a clear agreement between expert economists on the benefits and costs of CCT in Victoria at the local government level, although most economists agree that competition and competitive tendering could only be beneficial. (1) Recently, there has been an increase in the number of voices expressing caution at the rapidity with which Victoria's local governments have moved to embrace CCT without having had sufficient time to assess the long term impacts of CCT on local government services. One such expert, Michael Paddon of the Public Sector Research Centre, University of NSW, warns about the dangers of rushing CCT in Victoria, describing it as 'going in the opposite direction of a one way street'. He indicates that Victoria's local governments have been so enthusiastic in embracing CCT that they are already in the

process of putting out to tender 50% of their total budgets, well in advance of the state government's legislated requirements. (2)

Paddon perceives this as a dangerous precedent because of its possible national ramifications if this unchecked enthusiasm spreads to the other states.

*... the state government has rushed into compulsory competitive tendering before considering the full range of issues...the fervour gripping Victoria will increase the pressure to prematurely introduce CCT in other states (with the exception of Queensland the only Labor state government). (3)*

The potential serious ramifications, if indiscriminate competitive tendering of library services occurred on a national basis, is significant and public library services to women may suffer irrevocable damage. Unless adequate research is undertaken to demonstrate the real benefits and disadvantages of privatisation, issues of access and equity of library services to women could be under threat. Michael Paddon further warns about the emphasis given to cost savings and the danger in treating public sector services as if they were market driven private businesses.

*'Compulsory Competitive tendering is a one-way street,'... It's the sort of change once you've taken it, you can't reverse'...CCT has focussed too narrowly on cost issues and that promoters of CCT were treating public sector services as though they were market driven. I think we need to be wary of that because in a lot of areas where public provision takes place there isn't really the opportunity for competition nor should there be...In some areas we should be intent to ensure people get a service irrespective of what they can pay for it. (4)*

Stephen Jones, chief executive of Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council in England, expressed similar views to Paddon on his recent visit to Melbourne as a fellow of RMIT's faculty of business and the institute of municipal management.

*The Victorian approach of setting percentages before analysing which services should be subject to competitive tendering, indicated that potential benefits might not be optimised. Councils were under pressure to implement major economic change before boundary restructure was completed, leaving only limited time for the analysis required to ensure the best long-term results. (5)*

There is a further issue that needs to be considered in relation to public library services which is raised by John Ernst, a Victorian academic. Ernst suggests that CCT is based on the notion that the public sector should function in a similar manner to the private sector. He warns against the transference of private business practices and requirements to government business without considering the factors that make government business different to big business.

*Local government is different to a business corporation; it is about governance, stewardship, inclusiveness, equity, local choice and local control. These fundamentally important elements of local government are at risk under CCT. (6)*

This applies in particular in the human services area where the issue of service delivery is more complex than in the physical services area which tends to be more straightforward. (7) Ernst indicates that what has happened in Victoria is more radical and ultimately threatening to local democracy compared to Britain where reform has been introduced in a more selective and planned manner. There are six major areas where he raises sceptical concerns about the introduction of CCT. All of them are areas that would impact and affect library services to women. First, he questions the extent of claimed savings and indicates that it is far more conservative than what had been initially indicated concluding that a modest average of 6.5% in savings applies to Britain after competitive tendering. This supports the position put forward by

Stephen Rimmer from the Industry Commission Canberra, in his "Competitive Tendering and Contracting: Theory and Research" article, that the evidence does not indicate in the case of Victoria's local government that reduced costs are achieved when a service is contracted out. (8)

These are all issues that have relevance and play a significant role in the provision of library services to women. The issue of inclusiveness, equity, local choice and control will all be fundamental to the continuation of existing and developing future library services to women. If these principles are at risk than services to women would also be at risk. As indicated in chapter 2, because Victorian local government is currently under the direction of state government appointed commissioners and not elected councillors, it is probable that decisions will be made on a different political basis than by councillors who would have to face the local community at the next election. In fact, the changes to local government are seen by some former councillors as undermining the independent legitimacy of local democracy.

*...the changes will do more than save, that councils and elected councillors are being stripped of their real, powers and turned into mere service providers instead of being another level of government. (9)*

The second issue of concern raised by Ernst is the danger of treating the diverse range of services provided by local government as a standardised common commodity, that is one standard library product received by all. This is very significant to public libraries because, as indicated in chapter 2, public libraries are a complex multifaceted service which aims to cater for the needs of the *whole community*. He also indicates that competition is inappropriate in areas which depend on cooperation and

collaboration. Public libraries are a good example of cooperative and collaborative models of service provision and competition could potentially change this as libraries compete for business. The difficulty in monitoring and managing contracts is also raised as a concern that could impact on the quality of service delivery. His final point is a political one about the state government's agenda in introducing CCT and the reform of local government. Ernst sees CCT as presenting the greatest threat to local choice and local services in the history of modern local government in this state. Whether this is an accurate assessment of the state government's political agenda or not is an issue which is less critical than the fact that local government is undergoing massive restructure. State government commissioners have been appointed to take charge of councils, new accounting regulations have been introduced, a change to the financial year will be implemented on 1 July 1995 and CCT has already come into effect since 1 October 1994. All these radical reforms are occurring simultaneously over a compressed period of time. (10)

As indicated in chapter 1 the state government believes that these economic issues are opportunities for local government to govern local communities more effectively than they have in the past. The state government upholds Osborne and Gaebler's precept of the government's role as *steering* and not *rowing*. That good governance is about developing policies for the needs of the community and in particular that the customer has a choice when competition enters the market. (11) The commercial market, however, does not always perform equally and equitably and therefore choice can be limited to issues of affordability or knowledge. Furthermore, in Victoria, there are some problems with the concept of customer choice as there seems to be a

deliberate move away from consultation with communities to surveys and customer feedback. Inevitably, the effect of this is that the service deals with the needs of individuals and not the needs of communities.

*Individual transactions and claims are recognised to the exclusion of collective action and group claims. This atomises collective needs and reduces the scope for joint action designed to influence the process of democratic decision-making. (12)*

In the area of service delivery to women the concept of responding to the collective as well as the individual has been important for libraries as they developed services targeting particular groups of women. Thus, a change in the way indicated could potentially set up the individual against the collective resulting in women with higher needs becoming losers as the collective voice is no longer listened to or heard. Ultimately, the danger may be that what determines the basis for CCT will be savings will dominate the decision making process in the selection of services to be subjected to a tendering process.

The literature on CCT consistently agrees on one point and that is that the main motivating factor for the introduction of tendering a service should not be based solely on cost savings. Each service needs to be considered separately based on the requirements for the delivery of that service.

*...if the contracting process is led by financial considerations then it is likely that it will be awarded principally on the basis of price. In such a situation contracting may often lead to an undesirable erosion of quality. This possibility is particularly alarming given that the current increase in CTC has been directly associated with the fiscal pressures facing governments at all levels. (13)*

King further warns that it is important to assess services prior to making a decision about tendering them out or not. The ramifications would be considerable to public library services to women if careful thought is not applied to how library services will be tendered and on what basis.

*To rush helter skelter into universal or even majority contracting out at any level of government may lead to higher costs. The decision to introduce competitive tendering for a government service is not an obvious win-win situation but must be considered on a case-by-case basis. While savings may be reaped (at least by the government) by sensible application of CTC, it does not offer a panacea to public sector fiscal constraints. (14)*

Public libraries will be impacted by CCT and thus services to women will be affected. It is therefore, important that public libraries prepare for CCT if they are to ensure that services to their current users are not detrimentally affected. These decisions are not value free and will be based on the current dominant philosophy of how the council perceives the importance of these services and whether the concept of user pays and the significance of recreation continue to be seen as a council responsibility. It is inevitable that the way libraries are managed will be changed to reflect CCT options of in-house or external providers. The first thing that has to occur if a public library is to ensure that its current users do not suffer, is to review its services before it can even consider whether the library service is suitable and ready to competitively go out on the market.

### **3.1.1 Reviewing and assessing current public library services**

As indicated in chapter 2 public library services appear to have a dual and potentially contradictory role of service provision being both generalists and

specialists. This puts public libraries in a rather difficult or different category because of their broad brief. At present libraries attempt to respond to the diverse needs of their community. This situation will be far more difficult to continue with because once definite budgetary decisions are made, public libraries may not be able to respond to the needs of a new group of women unless that need has been anticipated. Public libraries will have to predict well in advance who they will respond to and this has the potential for libraries to improve the effectiveness of services to women. Public libraries will have to define their services precisely and clearly as to who their customers are and what services do they currently receive. They will also have to determine which services should be continued and which should no longer be offered. There is inadequate information at present to indicate the use made of public libraries by women and there is less research in the area of women as non-users of library services. The combination of limited information on women as library users and the pressures for cost reductions or rationalisations could ultimately adversely affect the public library services received by women. If charges for services were introduced that would discriminate against women who cannot afford to pay. The situation is further compounded when the other challenges facing public libraries are considered. Technology and the concept of the global library is one such highly significant factor.

Political and economic values will determine whether current services are considered to be useful and should be retained or should be abolished because they are too narrowly focused and costly. Another consideration could be whether public libraries should be focussing more on moving towards access to information through high technology at the expense of their traditional role. The performance of public

libraries will be taken into account when these determinations are being made. The number of loans, which seems to be often used as a key indicator in performance appraisal, should be an insufficient measure for the determination of whether a service should be continued. The needs of other areas of service that have not been provided because of inadequate funding should also be considered. Women who have not been able to express their need for library services and have resorted to other 'sources' of information for their needs should also be considered if the public library is to provide services to the community. Inadequate research on the value of the library for women and how that benefits the community could ultimately cost library services for women.

The danger is that costs could obscure the issues facing public libraries. The current amalgamations of councils and the appointment of commissioners could also further complicate the situation for public libraries. The commissioners will have to determine how to amalgamate their public libraries and consider the redevelopment or closure of libraries to reflect the perspective of a larger local government identity and a smaller budget. The issue shall be what is the basis for the preferred option and how to balance it against the needs of the community, when what currently exists has not had the opportunity of community input to determine what is relevant and how libraries can change to accommodate it. Finally, public libraries are not formally 'perceived' as cultural institutions that serve predominantly the needs of women and therefore, all these changes will significantly impact on women who may not realise that they are major users of public libraries.

The assessment of services and their review will determine what the tender specifications should include. Potentially, libraries could be competitively tendered out from whole services to specific programmes or functions of services. How services are costed during this process will significantly impact on what is retained or not retained. The question of the role of local government in the provision of library services vis-a-vis the state and federal governments could again arise and even affect how much local government is prepared to subsidise public libraries as libraries move towards competitive tendering.

### **3.1.2 Going out to tender**

The decision to go out to tender for the library service should arise after the council has determined its policy position in relation to CCT. The existence of a somewhat negative impression of public servants that can be held by politicians can sometimes affect the decision making process. Osborne and Gaebler describe this view succinctly when they say that:

*The typical public employee, in fact resents that he or she occasionally has to worry about revenues-because budgets fall short or taxpayers revolt. The police, the librarians, the social workers-most believe they are doing God's work, and the public should be grateful. They are often justified in this opinion. But can you imagine the creativity they would turn loose if they thought as much about how to make money as they do about how to spend it?*  
(15)

In the case of librarians such a view could affect the way the council sees the role of the library as representing the view of the librarian. In general though, the

dominant driving force for going out to tender would be the fact that the potential for reducing costs is increased when competition is introduced.

*Competition between potential bidders creates incentives to minimise costs and or/develop products that provide a competitive edge in a market. Even where contracts are awarded to in-house bidders, the threat of competition can provide powerful incentives to discover least cost methods of producing various goods and services. (16)*

This is seen as offering improved benefits to the community by ensuring that costs are kept to the minimum whilst maintaining service levels. It also forces government services to change from the previous situation of being protected when compared to the open market.

*(CCT)...is an alternative to the traditional method of delivering public services, characterised by monopoly in-house provision, where public sector agencies are sheltered-by rules and regulations from competition from other public or private sector organisations. (17)*

Now that public libraries will have to provide services within a competitive environment. It is difficult to gauge though whether the focus on competitiveness will have some negative impact on service delivery to women. This can only be determined over a period of time where performance outputs are compared prior and post CCT. What has to be remembered is that all councils retain policy and planning responsibilities even though the library service may have been contracted to an external or internal bidder. Governance remains the council's responsibility. Such an arrangement though does put the service at arms length from the council and has therefore, the potential for council to reduce or abolish services and deflect community reaction.

*However, through legally binding contracts governments remain ultimately responsible for the management of service provision. Thus, CTC provides a*

*convenient 'half way house' between public production and private ownership.*  
(18)

It is difficult to determine how the concept of *half way house* between public and private ownership will work in the long term. What it does, however, is indicate clearly that government will be directly responsible for far fewer services.

One of the significant determinants in deciding whether a service is appropriate for tendering is the existence of other potential providers in the market who could deliver the service as well as the in-house provider. In the case of public libraries there are a number of potential competitors on the market and that number should increase as more councils put out to tender their library service. The prime competitors and or providers would be other councils as well as the in-house service. The in-house service would have to become the provider to separate it from the council who would be the purchaser. To achieve this a restructure of the library will have to occur first. Laurie Boyd's **Managing Competitive Services** is an excellent practical guide designed to assist all councils in selecting the appropriate model for their particular needs. The Office of Library Services also commissioned Matt Ainsaar and Brian Haratsis to prepare **A Guide to Competitive Compulsory Tendering for Public Libraries**. Both documents are invaluable for public libraries in their efforts to prepare for CCT and go into significant detail on the necessary changes. As well as local government there are other potential competitors on the market for public libraries such as Technilib, University library bodies such as CAVAL, book suppliers, the State Library of Victoria and even the TAFE and Education sectors.

Prior to determining what will be contained in the tender specification a decision has to be made on the level of privatisation that is being sought. The whole service, a programme, a branch/s or technical services and other in-house support services. A clear understanding has to exist on who is out there in the market who can compete and what can they offer and the long term implications of that. It is reasonably straightforward for a council to decide to corporatise its library service. The library would operate as a company with directors. The library's performance would be to maximise its competitiveness and increase its commercial viability. Such an approach would challenge the traditional relationship between the library and its customers. The way libraries are structured it would be fairly straightforward to tender out the whole library service or the technical services area of the library, which would include acquisitions, cataloguing and processing or any other area of library service. For a number of years technical services have been provided by Technilib for a fee to public libraries and would continue to do so once Technilib becomes an incorporated body but now it will be on a competitive basis if the service cost is to be considered under CCT requirements. Ultimately each council library service will have to be examined on its own merits and the best option for that council should be adopted.

### **3.1.3 The tendering process**

The tendering process would involve designing and developing tender specifications, the evaluation of the tenders and the ongoing monitoring of the tender contract. There are dangers to the integrity of the service at any and all stages of this process. One significant danger alluded to is that once tender specifications have been prepared costs will be based on this and a contract will be entered into based on those

quantities and qualities indicating the expected outcomes. In the United Kingdom most of local government's first round tenders were won in-house and a similar example is cited for NSW.

*A substantial proportion of contracts were awarded to in-house teams in the early rounds of NSW public services tenders. While these contracts may have been won fairly and squarely, questions of unfair competition persist. (19)*

The situation in Victoria is different because of the requirements under the legislation and also the annual accountability procedures required for the minister. It is possible that less services will be awarded to in-house bids in Victoria than what occurred in NSW. Public libraries in Victoria are also undergoing amalgamation because of council restructure. Therefore, the reduction in the number of library services as a result of this is quite probable with the eventual outcome of large library entities operating across Victoria. If these large entities become providers of service it is possible that Victoria could have a large number of councils purchasing from other council library services in the future. In the case of such an occurrence the risk to library services to women could increase as public libraries become more 'similar' in their provision of services unless libraries make a deliberate and conscious effort to avoid this from occurring .

There is also the perception of public sector managers and their attitude to private contractors which could be used as an argument for questioning the tender process.

*Public sector managers sometimes mistrust private contractors. They fear that the profitability objective which motivates contractors necessarily implies a conflict of interest between the public sector principal and the private sector agent. (20)*

Such perceptions have the potential to increase the scrutiny by the state government on the awarding of contracts to the in-house bids. Private contracts will also potentially question the awarding of in-house bids if few bids were won by them. In the long term it may also discourage private contractors from bidding if their perception is that local government predominantly awards contracts to in-house bids thus reducing competition.

The criteria for assessing the tenders will be critical. The specifications will have to be very clear on the required outcomes if services are not to suffer. A fair and proper comparison of tender bids has to be undertaken if councils are not to be accused of unfairness. The tender specifications have to include monitoring mechanisms with penalty clauses if the service delivered is unsatisfactory. The costs involved in monitoring the service should not be understated because they will determine how quickly remedial action will be taken if there is a problem with delivery.

*It is often claimed that in-house teams require less intensive monitoring and are therefore more cost competitive. The theoretical or factual basis for this assertion is unclear. Indeed, the debate over the merits of contracting policy has been dogged by inadequate performance monitoring systems and data.*  
(21)

Whether the successful bidder is an in-house or an external provider to the user of the service should not really matter so long as the service is provided. Evaluation of the service should occur irrespective of who provides it. In the past local government has not emphasised the evaluation of its library service on a regular and ongoing basis.

The lack of information on the provision of services to women will make it more difficult in ensuring that at the very least relevant services to women do not reduce.

*Contractors are often criticised for their quality of service, but on further investigation it is usually found that prior to contracting no formal evaluation mechanisms existed. In such circumstances it is impossible to draw conclusion about performance before and after contracting has been implemented. (22)*

The costs of monitoring the contract as well as the actual service costs have to be clear and accurately calculated so that the service does not suffer.

### **3.2 CCT and service costs**

It would be inappropriate to focus on savings without examining the impact of changes and how they will radically affect the services to be delivered. Costs have to be determined in terms of quality, quantity and monitoring. Proper and effective checking mechanisms have to be in place if library services are to continue delivering a relevant service to the needs of women. What is unclear at this stage is whether the anticipated savings will be maintained in the long term or will they change as fewer services continue to be directly provided by local government. It is important that a significant level of competition is encouraged to continue on the market so that there is always choice in providers. Further, it is important that no collusion is allowed to occur on the market by providers if low costs are to be maintained in the long term.

If all libraries were to become privatised in Victoria there is no research to indicate the social consequences of such an event.

*...all enterprise in competitive and monopolistic markets carry social costs and there is a difficulty in identifying what is exceptional in the social costs dealt with in any specific case. (23)*

Councils may continue to have responsibility for the purchasing of library services but the services themselves might change to the point where they are no longer recognisable as they move more and more towards a commercial model. There are risks attached when changes as radical as those potentially proposed by CCT are introduced. In the United States example cited by Osborne and Gaebler volunteers are actively used in library services. (24) Does this mean that potentially fewer employed staff will be working in public libraries and even fewer qualified staff to achieve the desired reduced budgets? Some women are already disadvantaged and if libraries reduce the level of professional information services further, then these women will face increased disadvantaged. One way to ensure that this does not occur is to determine and specify the required level of quality of service in the tender specifications. This however, assumes that local government continues to subsidise public libraries.

### **3.3 CCT and service quality**

The issue of quality is a highly complex one in the public library environment because it has tended to depend on numerous factors each different for each type of service. Evaluation of quality in public libraries is not as simple as the collection of household refuse or the building of roads.

*Quality is multi-dimensional and usually difficult or impossible to measure. Often quality (and even quantity) must be judged by second-best or third-best measures such as the inputs used. (25)*

Performance measures in the past have generally tended to focus on the number of items that circulate and the number of borrowers as well as number of staff to provide that service. For example house-bound services to older women, where a considerable amount of time is expended in the selection and delivery of recreation material, when considered through a perspective of efficiency and effectiveness could change because of the high cost involved in staff time per item borrowed.

*A decline in quality accompanied by a fall in price may be socially desirable. Preferences for quality differ and it is erroneous to argue that a higher quality is always preferred if it involves a greater expense. If CTC did lead to a fall in quality this would only be undesirable to the degree that any concomitant savings are less than the service recipients willingness to pay for quality. (26)*

Thus public libraries could change to self-serve *super-market* libraries as borrowers find and borrow items for themselves as in a shopping centre. With the use of on-line public access catalogues borrowers would obtain a listing of what is available and arrange to obtain it if not available immediately. Selection and purchase of items could be contracted to suppliers who could use a community profile and purchase library materials on behalf of numerous public libraries. Selection and acquisitions becomes stream lined and would then cost less. A handful of library staff would need to be employed to operate such a library.

*...without direct government participation, some service needs will simply not be brought into the political arena to create the necessary pressure to ensure that a service, at an adequate standard, will be provided. (27)*

But is this the only role of the public library and how would such changes impact on the services provided to women. Do women use libraries to just borrow books and other materials or do they use the library for other services that would not be readily available under the previous description? Maybe the issue will disappear as

this generation of women library users dies out. Maybe even recreation reading could be disappearing as the use of interactive video, CD-Rom, virtual reality, cybernetics and robotics become the common means for recreation and information. Libraries that limit their services to the basic provision of traditional recreation resources on an ever decreasing budget are jeopardising the library services to women in the future. CCT could be the catalyst that accelerated the demise of the public library services to women if service providers do not re-think and re-examine the public library's role in line with the technological and information changes that are already happening now.

## Endotes

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## Conclusion

### *Survival of the Powerful and Well-Informed*

Public library services to women will have to change as a result of CCT. Given that local government in Victoria has embraced CCT with such enthusiasm it is inevitable that libraries will be considered suitable services for contracting. Issues that arise are the fact that libraries are considered to be expensive services and with the CCT legislated requirements councils will want to expose them to the competitive forces of the market if that means a reduction in the cost of running the service. A number of questions will arise and confront councils about library services. One of them will be the provision of a service to 35%-40% of community and funded by the whole community. The role of the library will have to be defined and a better understanding has to occur in relation to the fact that the majority of public library users are women. The issue of technology will also influence the decision on what services public libraries should be providing and who should they target. Women who are the current majority users could be facing reductions or have to pay charges for the services that they currently receive for free.

Competition on the market for the provision of library services is not clear at this point. There are potential contenders on the market but the impact of privatisation on public libraries in the long term is more difficult to gauge as other factors will also impact on the situation. Local government boundary reform will significantly affect all public libraries including regional libraries. This could be an opportunity for local government to examine closely how services are delivered through physical sites but it may also be used as an opportunity for the reduction in the number of libraries. The

issue of library buildings will have to be reconsidered as technology becomes more significant and direct access of resources could change to access and retrieval from other sources. Such an approach would impact on the recreation material currently borrowed by women. Other types of outreach or targeted services to women would also be affected as buildings and their use changes. The question of who can afford and who cannot afford access to alternative resources becomes critical. In an environment where cost is considered a paramount factor issues of equal and equitable access potentially become threatened. Libraries will have to reconsider what they currently provide. Booksellers might enter the market and sell library services for recreation purposes. The issue of complementarity and the role of other types of libraries, as technological developments impact on how and who can deliver access to information resources, becomes another important consideration. The possibility that the broad role of public libraries might be narrowed and defined in very specific ways to reduce costs and target directly the groups that use it is highly probable. If such a path was undertaken the existence of public libraries as we know them may no longer be viable.

### **Future directions**

What will the public library of the future look like is an interesting and challenging question. Technology and telecommunications have changed the way we operate at all levels of our daily life. It will not be that far into the future when the global library will be a reality. Those who have the capability and the finances will be able to benefit from this global library. Individuals will no longer visit the library, the library will be part of the information and communication centre within the home computer network.

Recreation will change life styles and I can not imagine poverty having been abolished so that the affluent will remain the powerful ones. They will be part of a privileged community who will have access to the world's total information and knowledge network systems. The affluent will experience longevity, life long learning, space travel, hyperreality robotics and a life of leisure and enjoyment. The few libraries left will become cultural museums where you can interact and participate in the old systems of finding a book and looking for it in the catalogue possibly even in the card catalogue. CCT in terms of library services will have a long term impact. Library services to women are already inadequate in that they provide a service which is suited for the past generation rather than the present and therefore could be considered obsolete in the near future.

Women who need information services will be increasingly left out more and more as fees and charges become commonly implemented and the emphasis will be on the requirements of those who pay. It could be a great future if libraries decided now to determine what their role is and implement it. Otherwise they will continue to be reactive and gradually become obsolete replaced by private companies who specialise and provide better access to information. These companies will have the ability to purchase the required technology to remain up to date. If libraries continue to be relevant to a narrowing group of women they will become obsolete as governments refuse to subsidise them and then not allow them to compete with the emerging businesses that are taking away their function. If public libraries do not attempt to anticipate and create their future role there is the real possibility that public libraries may no longer exist in the future.

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