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Intellectual Capital as a Strategic Resource of German Public Libraries: Development Conditions, Managerial Implications, and Organizational Consequences

Abstract

Objective: The aim of this article is to analyze intellectual capital as a strategic resource of German public libraries, taking into account its development conditions, managerial implications, and organizational consequences. The article seeks to identify the factors influencing the development of intellectual capital within these institutions and to assess the extent to which this capital forms the basis for their adaptability, operational efficiency, and ability to fulfil their social mission in a changing institutional environment. The discussion is conducted in the context of the specific nature of libraries as non-profit organizations, highlighting the necessity of implementing a conscious and long-term strategy for managing intellectual capital. Particular attention is given to the role of library personnel, planning and recruitment processes, as well as the importance of organizational culture and internal communication in sustaining and enhancing the intellectual value of public libraries.

Methodology: This article is based on a critical analysis of the relevant literature and an in-depth interpretation of both domestic and international sources concerning intellectual capital management in non-profit institutions, with particular emphasis on public libraries in Germany. Strategic documents, institutional reports, and scholarly studies on management practices within the library sector were taken into account. The analysis is qualitative and exploratory in nature, aiming to identify key determinants in the development of intellectual capital and translate them into insights into the functioning and organizational effectiveness of public libraries. The research approach also incorporates elements of case study methodology, drawing on observations of institutional practices and the analysis of models implemented in selected entities within the German library system.

Findings: Intellectual capital is a crucial factor determining the effectiveness of German public libraries and their capacity to adapt to dynamic social and technological environments. The development of this resource requires systematic planning, alignment with the institution's strategic goals, and a coherent human resources policy. The most effective intellectual capital development strategies identified in the studied institutions are those that are long-term, quality-oriented, and tied to continuous staff education. Conscious and engaged leadership, along with a consistent focus on the development of competencies across the entire team – not just the management – is identified as a key success factor.

Value Added: The added value of this article lies in its comprehensive analysis of intellectual capital as a strategic resource of German public libraries, taking into account both developmental conditions and the practical aspects of managing this capital. The article provides new perspectives on the importance of long-term planning and deliberate personnel policy in libraries as non-profit organizations, identifying intellectual capital as a critical factor in ensuring organizational sustainability and institutional advantage. The study also includes specific recommendations for implementing intellectual capital development strategies, offering substantial support for management in enhancing public library performance.

Recommendations: It is recommended that German public libraries develop and implement long-term strategies for intellectual capital development, addressing the needs of various staff groups and adapting to changing organizational and societal conditions. Systematic investment in staff competencies, the development of interpersonal skills, and the promotion of an organizational culture that supports collaboration, innovation, and learning are of key importance. It is further recommended to integrate intellectual capital management with the institution's overall strategy, enabling more conscious and effective utilization of human potential as a strategic resource.

Key words: intellectual capital, public libraries, non-profit organizations, management strategy, employee competencies, organizational development

JEL Codes: D83, I23, J24, M12, L31

Introduction

Public libraries in Germany are undergoing a significant transformation, driven by rising societal expectations, technological advancements, and changes in cultural and educational policy. Their role is no longer confined to providing information or education; it also encompasses fostering social capital, supporting social integration, and developing civic competencies. In light of this expanding mission, a resource that is difficult to define precisely yet indispensable to the functioning of these institutions, that is, intellectual capital – takes on critical importance (Gross-Gołacka, et al., 2021; Ujwary-Gil, 2010). It constitutes not only the foundation of libraries' operational effectiveness but also a condition for their strategic resilience and capacity for innovative development (Blankenburg, 2023). This article focuses on analyzing intellectual capital as a strategic resource within German public libraries. The analysis addresses both the internal structure of this capital (human, structural, and relational capital) and its functions in the context of fulfilling social and institutional responsibilities. Particular attention is paid to the conditions underpinning its development, the managerial mechanisms involved, and the resulting implications for organizational practices in libraries. The article aims to demonstrate how intellectual capital – understood as a set of intangible organizational resources – can be effectively shaped and leveraged by non-profit institutions operating in a complex social environment (Becker & Flicker, 2012). The research approach is based on a critical analysis of the literature, as well as an in-depth interpretation of strategic documents, institutional reports, and management practices in the library sector. The analysis is qualitative and exploratory, incorporating case study elements derived from observations of selected institutions within the German library system. Its goal is to identify the key determinants of intellectual capital development and to translate them into insights relevant to the sustainability and organizational effectiveness of public libraries (Friedl, 2002).

Table 1. Components of intellectual capital in public libraries

Component of intellectual capital	Description	Examples of application in the library
Human Capital	Knowledge, skills, experience, and engagement of library staff	Training programs, mentoring, professional development, and innovative service approaches
Structural Capital	Procedures, regulations, databases, information infrastructure, and knowledge management systems	Cataloguing systems, digital platforms, work instructions, and knowledge repositories
Relational Capital	Relationships with users, partner institutions, local communities, and external stakeholders	Collaboration with social organizations, programs for seniors and youth, participatory activities

Source: own elaboration.

The tripartite structure of intellectual capital – human, structural, and relational – constitutes the foundation of a systemic approach to managing the intangible potential of public libraries. Human capital, which underpins the quality of user services and the development of institutional offerings, requires continuous attention to staff education, motivation, and retention. Structural capital, on the other hand, ensures the stability and functionality of internal processes, thereby determining the operational efficiency of library units. Relational capital is particularly vital for libraries as open, community-oriented institutions – its development translates into increased trust, participation, and social integration. Recognizing the synergy among these three dimensions enables the deliberate formation of development strategies for intellectual capital as a strategic resource. The above framework establishes the theoretical and analytical foundation for examining intellectual capital in German public libraries, acknowledging this resource as a key component of institutional sustainability and social effectiveness. It is demonstrated that the redefinition of libraries' roles toward institutions of knowledge and social integration necessitates a paradigm shift in management – from a focus on material resources toward a concentration on intangible assets, including knowledge, relationships, and management systems (Table 1).

The introduction organizes the problem structure by distinguishing the three dimensions of intellectual capital (human, structural, and relational)

and embedding them within the organizational context specific to non-profit institutions. It also highlights the need to develop appropriate management strategies in which staff and organizational culture are not merely carriers of operational competence but essential determinants of institutional success. The need to integrate human resource policies with the institution's mission and the importance of long-term, systemic planning for the development of intellectual capital is identified. This forms the foundation for the subsequent empirical and diagnostic analysis, allowing a transition from recognizing the importance of intellectual capital to assessing its developmental conditions, managerial implications, and social outcomes. Its key value lies in presenting intellectual capital not as an abstract concept but as an operational and measurable resource of strategic significance for the future of public libraries.

Literature Review

Public libraries, as institutions deeply rooted in the local environment, are significant in the social and cultural infrastructure, actively participating in the processes of strengthening social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Their functioning extends far beyond the traditional framework of institutions providing knowledge – they currently constitute spaces of cooperation, social mediation, intergenerational transfer, and the building of institutional trust. In the German library system, characterized by a high level of decentralization and strong links with educational and social policy, public libraries carry out an expanded mission. This includes not only providing access to knowledge and information resources but also facilitating lifelong learning, counteracting informational, digital, and cultural exclusion, supporting intercultural integration, and preventing the marginalization of disadvantaged groups (Jungbluth, 2015). In this context, the library is perceived not merely as a service-oriented institution but as a complex social organization in which intangible resources – particularly the knowledge, competences, and engagement of employees; the quality of interpersonal relationships; established norms of cooperation; and organizational culture – form the primary

determinants of operational sustainability and adaptive capacity. These intangible assets constitute the core of a library's intellectual capital, conditioning its ability to respond to the complex needs of local communities and to adapt to dynamic external changes. As noted by Vigenschow (2020), learning organizations – of which next-generation public libraries may be considered a model – are characterized by their ability to mobilize resources of knowledge, reflection, and collective action, which translates into strategic resilience and institutional durability.

The development of intellectual capital in German public libraries is shaped by a complex set of dynamically evolving institutional, social, and technological conditions that define the operational framework of these institutions as entities of public trust. In the face of accelerating digitalization, the growing complexity of user needs, and the increasing multiculturalism of local communities, it becomes necessary not only to preserve intangible resources but also to actively shape, update, and reinvest them into new forms of knowledge and relationships (Blankenburg, 2023). Intellectual capital in libraries – understood as an integrated structure of human, structural, and relational capital – remains dependent on the systemic conditions in which the institution operates: from access to funding and educational-cultural policies, through the quality of institutional management, to the capacity for relationship-building and fostering social trust.

Human capital, encompassing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and engagement of personnel, is particularly susceptible to the influence of recruitment systems, training strategies, and organizational culture. Its development requires sustainable mechanisms supporting lifelong learning as well as structural motivation for knowledge sharing (Korthals et. al., 2021). Structural capital – referring to procedures, systems, knowledge repositories, and information technologies – is dependent on the level of investment in infrastructure, the coherence of management systems, and the operational flexibility of the institution. Conversely, relational capital – based on trust, communication, and collaboration with the external environment – is particularly strongly influenced by external factors such as demographics, cultural diversity, and inclusive policies. The interaction among these components, their adaptability, and their capacity for integration within the organizational structure of the library determine its ability to achieve both social objectives (integration, inclusion, education) and operational

goals (efficient service delivery, program development, institutional stability) (Wojciechowska, 2021).

Among the fundamental institutional conditions influencing the development of intellectual capital in public libraries are the organizational structure of these institutions, the degree of their decision-making autonomy, the nature of adopted funding models, and the availability and quality of human resources. In the German public library system, which is deeply embedded within local government structures, there is considerable variation in organizational level and strategic management, which directly affects the capacity to develop and sustain intangible assets. Libraries operating under conditions of high autonomy, possessing separate budgets and strategic political support, are better positioned to effectively implement staff development programs, introduce innovative solutions, and plan investments in knowledge management infrastructure (Knoche, 2024). Conversely, units subject to stringent administrative control, burdened by bureaucratic procedures and financial constraints, face barriers in flexibly shaping personnel policies, initiating programmatic activities, and investing in structural development. Lack of access to flexible financing forms and a low standing within the hierarchy of local government institutions often lead to competency stagnation and curtailment of development initiatives (Wagner, 2017). Existing inequalities in institutional structure also result in discrepancies in libraries' capacity to accumulate and reproduce relational capital. Structurally weakened institutions less frequently establish enduring and partnership-based relationships with their local environment, which adversely affects their social legitimacy (Brandtner, 2013). At the same time, institutional stability – understood as the predictability of local government policies, coherence of internal regulations, and access to stable funding sources – creates favorable conditions for the accumulation of organizational knowledge, the development of a culture of collaboration, and the professionalization of staff. Only libraries rooted in long-term local development strategies and integrated within networks of local and regional partnerships are able to consistently develop their intellectual capital as a strategic and socially valuable resource. From this perspective, the ability of libraries to engage in dialogue with the institutional environment and to proactively participate in shaping

cultural and educational policy – as equal partners rather than mere executors of assigned tasks – acquires particular significance.

Another significant factor involves technological conditions. The processes of digitization, automation of information workflows, and the proliferation of online services are transforming not only the nature of library operations but also the competency requirements for staff. Digital transformation can strengthen structural capital through the development of knowledge management tools, databases, and communication systems; however, it simultaneously demands substantial investments in developing digital skills and adapting internal procedures to new standards (Dugall, 2015). Social conditions encompass demographic changes, increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of local communities, as well as the evolving expectations of users regarding the role of libraries in society. In this context, relational capital assumes particular importance, since the effectiveness of institutions largely depends on the quality of their interaction with the environment and their ability to initiate relationships based on trust, accessibility, and responsiveness. Consequently, library staff must possess not only appropriate subject-matter expertise but also communication and intercultural skills.

Table 2. Conditions influencing the development of intellectual capital

Type of Condition	Description of Influence	Recommended Actions
Institutional	Organizational structure, decision-making autonomy, and financial stability affect the capacity for strategic planning.	Strengthening strategic management and making long--term investments in intangible assets.
Technological	Advances in digitization and technological requirements necessitate updating competencies and reorganizing processes.	Continuous staff training and integration of digital tools with management practices.
Social	Demographic changes, cultural diversity, and user expectations condition the development of relational and intercultural competencies.	Intercultural competency development programs and active collaboration with communities.

Source: own elaboration.

The conditions influencing the development of intellectual capital generate a multidimensional structure in which three interrelated spheres have a dominant role: institutional, technological, and social. Each sphere constitutes not only an independent field of influence but also an element of a broader ecosystem for managing intangible assets of knowledge, relationships, and organizational culture. Effective management of intellectual capital in public libraries cannot be limited solely to internal human resources strategies; it requires a systemic approach that also takes into account the institutional environment, digital transformation processes, and the socio-demographic structures within which libraries are embedded (Bubel, 2017). The identification of key developmental barriers – such as low decision-making autonomy in certain units, infrastructural underinvestment, staffing shortages, and limited flexibility in adapting offerings to the needs of diverse local communities – also highlighted the potential for growth of intellectual capital. This potential arises, among other factors, from the increasing recognition of the role of libraries in integration policies, the development of information technologies, and opportunities to create networks of cooperation with social, educational, and cultural organizations (Wojciechowska, 2009). The conducted analysis demonstrates that only an approach based on the synergy of internal resources and external conditions can lead to the effective strengthening of libraries' potential as institutions of public trust. Table 2 enables a synthetic presentation of the relationships between different types of conditions and practical management actions, which should be implemented in an integrated, flexible manner oriented toward institutional sustainability. In particular, the importance of adapting institutional policies to the rapidly advancing technological and demographic changes is emphasized, as these redefine both societal expectations of libraries and their potential functions in the realms of integration, education, and innovation (Gołda & Łakomy-Chłosta, 2022). The necessity to integrate libraries into a multisectoral dialogue about the future of public services – especially regarding the shaping of social capital and civic competencies – emerges as a key challenge for policymakers and management staff.

Managing intellectual capital in public libraries requires transforming traditional organizational models toward reflective and learning structures in which

intangible assets – knowledge, experience, relationships, and values – form the foundation of institutional effectiveness and sustainability. Conventional administrative and clerical functions give way to tasks related to cultivating an organizational culture based on trust, communication, and continuous improvement (Sühl-Strohmenger & Tappenbeck, 2024).

One of the key managerial challenges is the integration of the institution's strategic objectives with human capital development policies. This entails the necessity to plan recruitment, onboarding, and professional development processes in a manner aligned with the library's mission and long-term goals. Only a coherent personnel policy – combining competency development, motivation, and staff retention – enables the building of organizational advantage within the non-profit sector, where financial remuneration rarely competes with the commercial market (Stefańska et al., 2019). Moreover, managing intellectual capital requires the development of organizational learning mechanisms that facilitate the flow of both formal knowledge (e.g., procedures, documentation, knowledge management systems) and informal knowledge (tacit knowledge, know-how, practical reflections). The role of management in this context is to create an environment conducive to knowledge sharing, mutual mentoring, and building trust within the team.

Another key managerial aspect in the context of intellectual capital development is the systematic strengthening of communication and leadership competencies among managerial staff. In conditions of increasing institutional complexity and dynamic changes in the social, political, and technological environment, public libraries require leaders capable not only of efficiently administering organizational structures but, above all, of inspiring teams, initiating innovative processes, managing knowledge, and resolving interpersonal and systemic conflicts (Bubel, 2016). The growing significance of the relational dimension of intellectual capital means that the leadership of library institutions must be equipped with competencies that enable the shaping of an organizational culture based on trust, shared responsibility, and openness to dialogue (El Emary et al., 2020). In this context, transformational leadership is particularly important, characterized by a lasting focus on values, institutional mission, and the development of human potential as the primary carrier of organizational quality. This type of leadership extends

beyond standard administrative functions, concentrating on creating meaning in action, strengthening cultural coherence within the organization, and inspiring personnel to engage in efforts beyond their basic duties (Hörtemöller & Nickisch, 2025). Transformational leaders do not merely manage resources – they act as architects of change who shape developmental visions based on long-term goals, while simultaneously embedding these visions in the institution's daily practice. A key competence in this leadership model is the ability to motivate employees by appealing to higher values and shared organizational objectives. In the context of public libraries – as socially responsible institutions operating within a complex stakeholder environment – skillfully integrating teams around the educational and cultural mission, flexibly responding to changing community needs, and initiating innovative actions becomes particularly crucial (Jensen, 2022). Transformational leaders stimulate organizational development not through control but by strengthening responsibility, creativity, and the capacity for self-organization. This model finds particular application in public libraries, where a vital element of institutional identity is the ability to mediate between the demands of public policy and the evolving expectations of local communities. Libraries, as institutions of public trust, increasingly operate at the intersection of various interests: administrative, educational, civic, and cultural. In this context, transformational leadership proves not merely an optional management style, but a prerequisite for ensuring institutional continuity and the capacity for innovative transformation of the library's role within the knowledge society.

By supporting the development of human capital – through inspiring, enhancing responsibility, and creating spaces for learning – transformational leaders simultaneously activate synergistic processes with the structural and relational components. As a result, the institution gains not only greater internal coherence but also increases its capacity to operate within a complex and multidimensional environment. Knowledge management, building relational networks, and maintaining high operational standards become possible only when leaders act not as supervisors but as integrators of developmental processes. Ultimately, it is the attitude, vision, and competencies of leaders that determine whether a public library will transcend routine service delivery and transform into an institution capable of conscious, long-term development.

Transformational leadership, grounded in trust, reflection, and mission, does not merely react to environmental changes but anticipates them, formulating new directions for development and mobilizing the team to jointly shape the organization's future (Schulz et al., 2021). In this way, it not only creates conditions for the development of intellectual capital but also strengthens institutional resilience, readiness for innovation, and the ability to generate lasting public value. This is why this leadership model finds justification in organizations – such as public libraries – that perform not only service functions but also cultural and civic roles. In non-profit organizations like public libraries, which combine service, educational, and integrative functions, the ability to lead in a transformative way gains particular importance. It becomes a decisive factor for internal cohesion, readiness to implement innovations, and effectiveness in achieving social objectives. The development of this type of leadership requires not only the individual predispositions of leaders but also systemic support in the form of training, mentoring, and an organizational culture conducive to knowledge exchange and learning.

An indispensable element of effective intellectual capital management in public libraries is the ability to conduct strategic assessment and multi-level evaluation. Managing this resource cannot rely solely on intuition or general declarations; it requires the application of formalized analytical tools that enable systematic monitoring of changes in the capital structure and measurement of development outcomes. Of key importance is the development of diverse evaluation indicators covering both the individual level (e.g., employee competency growth, engagement, pro-innovation attitudes) and the organizational level (e.g., efficiency of procedures, quality of stakeholder relationships, durability and currency of knowledge management systems) (Kirchhoff-Kestel, 2012). The process of measuring intellectual capital should not only focus on assessing its current state but also serve as a tool for forecasting directions and opportunities for further organizational development. This is particularly relevant for institutions operating in conditions of heightened social and political environmental volatility, such as public libraries, which must adapt their activities to new forms of civic participation, dynamic educational needs, and rapidly advancing digital transformation. Under such conditions, regular and

systematic diagnosis of intangible resources – including employee competencies, quality of external relations, and internal system functioning – ceases to be merely an analytical tool and becomes a crucial component of strategic management. The ability to measure and interpret intellectual capital resources allows libraries not only to retrospectively evaluate the effectiveness of implemented personnel policies, educational strategies, and innovation initiatives but also to proactively identify organizational weaknesses. This analysis facilitates the recognition of untapped knowledge potential, informational asymmetries, competency gaps, and procedural bottlenecks, thereby enabling corrective actions and enhancing organizational coherence (Blankenburg, 2023). Thanks to such mechanisms, intellectual capital management becomes an iterative process embodied in everyday managerial practice rather than a one-time evaluative operation.

In the long-term perspective, the ability to systematically monitor intangible resources determines whether a public library can maintain its current level of service or transcend operational routine to become an organization capable of generating sustainable social, institutional, and cultural value. This capability entails not only the continuity of evaluation processes but also the competence to transform data into strategic knowledge, which is then utilized in managerial decision-making, resource optimization, and the design of adaptive operational models. Ultimately, it is not the scale of material resources but the quality of reflective intellectual capital management that differentiates static organizations from those that are deeply embedded in the development of local communities and public spaces. The capacity for accurate and in-depth evaluation of intellectual capital also fosters the systemic cultivation of an organizational culture grounded in learning, responsibility, and transparency. Evaluation – understood not as a one-time audit but as a continuous process of recognizing an organization's potential and limitations – becomes a tool that strengthens internal cohesion and enhances the ability to adaptively respond to changing environmental conditions. In this framework, evaluation ceases to be a mere technical control procedure and transforms into a mechanism supporting institutional self-reflection, enabling management to make decisions rooted in up-to-date data and oriented toward long-term objectives.

The library as a learning organization ceases to be a passive recipient of external impulses for change and becomes an active co-creator of these processes. In the context of a dynamically changing social and technological environment, the institution's ability to generate knowledge from its own practice and subsequently interpret it in strategic terms constitutes a key condition for both survival and development. Using the measurement of intellectual capital as an analytical and decision-making tool enables the library not only to improve operational structures and management processes but also to formulate conscious and targeted development policies aimed at building lasting public and cultural value. Conscious management of intellectual capital in public libraries generates multifaceted organizational consequences that extend beyond mere operational efficiency. It involves a profound redefinition of functions, structures, and institutional relationships. This process requires a shift from the traditional management paradigm focused on control and stability to a flexible, reflective, and developmental model. In this context, the library as a learning organization must undergo significant internal transformations: strengthening participatory mechanisms, reorganizing decision-making systems, and integrating human resources policies with strategic goals of a social and cultural nature.

One of the key organizational consequences is the transition from a functional structure to a network structure, where the flow of knowledge, competencies, and responsibilities occurs horizontally (Seefeldt, 2015). In such a model, cross-team collaboration, communication transparency, and the ability to create interdisciplinary development projects have a central role. This change requires not only modifications of formal procedures but, above all, a transformation of organizational culture – so that it supports experimentation, knowledge sharing, and acceptance of risk as an indispensable element of innovation.

The development of intellectual capital in public libraries is systemic in nature and translates not only into the efficiency of the organization's functioning but also into its social legitimacy, visibility in the public space, and ability to generate shared value. The quality and dynamics of intangible organizational resources – such as knowledge, relationships, and cultural norms – directly influence the perception of the library as an open, responsible, and integrative institution (Becker & Flicker, 2012). From a social perspective, the library's

intellectual capital functions not only as an internal resource but also as an active mechanism supporting the building of institutional trust, the consolidation of local community identity, and counteracting various forms of exclusion – informational, educational, cultural, and digital. As an open and public institution, the library becomes a space of accessibility, dialogue, and participation, and its social impact increasingly depends not on the size of its collections but on the quality of relationships created with users and the ability to respond to the diverse needs of groups at risk of marginalization. In this context, a special role is attributed to library staff, who no longer perform solely traditional service functions but increasingly become educators, advisors, and mediators in social and intercultural relations (Berghaus-Sprengel & Söllner, 2022). Their task is not only to provide information or manage resources but primarily to create an inclusive environment that encourages active citizen participation in public, cultural, and educational life. In this understanding, the role of librarians requires not only professional knowledge but, above all, well-developed soft skills – interpersonal, communicative, intercultural – which become crucial when working with users from diverse social, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds.

Librarians, positioned at the intersection of the institution and the community, take on the role of "cultural translators" and moderators of social interactions. Their activities not only support the integration of groups at risk of exclusion but also foster the creation of spaces for dialogue, co-presence, and symbolic belonging. In the context of increasing cultural diversity and social challenges, the library becomes an institution where employees' soft skills – including empathy, mediation ability, and cultural awareness – gain the status of strategic organizational resources. The level of social inclusion of users and the durability of trust-based relationships largely depend on the quality of interpersonal contacts cultivated in everyday library practice, as well as on librarians' ability to recognize, understand, and respect the complex, individualized needs of those using the institution's resources and services. Crucial here are communication, empathy, and intercultural competencies, which enable staff not only to provide services but also to serve as companions in the process of social and cultural participation. However, the effectiveness of this work cannot rely solely

on personal initiative or individual ethos – it requires systemic embedding within an organizational culture that promotes shared responsibility, knowledge sharing, and the building of relationships based on mutual respect and trust.

As Flämig et al. aptly observe (2023), the development of relational and human capital in public sector institutions, including libraries, cannot take place in an organizational vacuum nor be left solely to individual initiative. This process is closely linked to the existence of durable, multi-layered support structures: clear training strategies, integrated mentoring systems, self--assessment tools for competencies, and formal institutional mechanisms promoting inclusion, diversity, and openness. These elements create an organizational environment where human capital can not only be developed but also effectively utilized to fulfil the social mission. It is precisely within this institutional framework that attitudes conducive to active social inclusion and the building of long-term, partnership-based, and empowered relationships are rooted. The librarian – liberated from the reductionist role of an information service operator – becomes a moderator of social relations, a cultural guide, and an initiator of processes of symbolic transformation. Their role is not limited to providing access to resources but involves supporting communities in developing competencies related to participation, co-responsibility, and civic self-awareness. The quality of this relationship is not a random variable or dependent on external, circumstantial conditions; it is the result of a consciously shaped work environment where professionalization goes hand in hand with a public service ethos, and management and operational relationships are based on trust, participation, and recognition of diversity. In such a model, management processes do not neutralize social bonds through bureaucratization; on the contrary, they actively support them, making the library organization a structure founded on relational capital and internalized responsibility. Consequently, the library emerges as an institution capable not only of providing informational services but also of genuinely co-creating the social fabric of the local community – through durable, intentional, and culturally embedded relationships, grounded in intellectual capital understood not technically but axiology-wise. It is precisely the infrastructure supporting the development of intellectual capital – understood not as an abstract construct

but as a dynamic network of relationships, competencies, and values – that becomes the foundation of the long-term effectiveness of the library as a democratic and inclusive institution.

As a result, it is not only individual competencies but the overall organizational climate – based on transparency, dialogue, and learning – that becomes the condition for the library's effective fulfilment of its social function. Only in such an environment is a lasting transformation of the institution toward a participatory and democratizing model possible in which intellectual capital is not an internal resource but a social potential developed through action. Only then does the role of the librarian gain not only an operational dimension but also an axiological one – as an agent shaping the social fabric and supporting long-term processes of democratization of knowledge, culture, and interpersonal relations. Thus, library staff become not only implementers of social policies but also co-creators of local social and symbolic capital. Their role takes on a strategic dimension, especially in the context of culturally diverse societies, where the library ceases to be merely a place for access to information and becomes a space of active coexistence and negotiation of shared meanings. The effectiveness of these efforts does not depend solely on personal predispositions but on being embedded in a stable and reflectively managed organizational system that supports the development of soft skills, promotes the ethos of public service, and unites employees around the values of inclusion, equality, and cultural openness. It is precisely from this perspective that intellectual capital takes on a social dimension – it becomes a tool of change that transcends organizational boundaries and impacts the quality of citizens' lives as well as the durability of community bonds. At the organizational level, intellectual capital shapes how the institution's mission and goals are formulated, influences the structure of undertaken activities, and intensifies innovation processes. An institution with a high level of human and relational capital is capable not only of efficiently delivering services but also of designing developmental activities: educational, participatory, and community-engaging. The organizational culture also shifts – from a culture of control and hierarchy to a culture of dialogue, collaboration, and collective learning (Krebber & Hitschfeld, 2021).

Research Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative approach and has an exploratory-diagnostic character embedded in the interpretative research paradigm. Its primary aim is to identify and interpret the factors determining the development of intellectual capital in German public libraries and to present the relationships between human, structural, and relational capital within the context of non-profit organizational practice. The research material consisted of:

– strategic documents and institutional reports, including the cyclical reports of the Deutscher Bibliotheksverband (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband, 2018–2023), which define development priorities and highlight key challenges for German public libraries,

– scholarly studies and empirical research on intellectual capital management in non-profit organizations,

– comparative publications concerning German libraries and other European systems,

– internal and reporting materials from selected libraries, such as organizational statutes, staff development plans, and annual reports.

This diverse selection allowed for the inclusion of both the strategic-institutional perspective and the everyday practices of management. The analysis encompassed documents and studies from the period 2013-2024, which made it possible to:

– capture changes occurring before and after the Covid-19 pandemic,

– identify accelerated processes of digitalization and their impact on the structural and intellectual dimensions of human capital,

– trace long-term trends in the mission and vision of German public libraries.

A set of qualitative methods was employed in the research process. Critical literature analysis was conducted with the aim of identifying theoretical models of intellectual capital management and comparing approaches applied in different contexts (public sector, non-profit organizations, academic and public libraries).

Content analysis of strategic documents and reports was carried out by mapping institutional priorities, developmental objectives, and performance indicators, and then relating them to the dimensions of intellectual capital: human, structural, and relational.

The case study of selected German public libraries included the examination of implemented solutions in the areas of human resources policy, recruitment and training programs, community engagement initiatives, and digitalization projects. The study adopted a multi-faceted perspective, focusing on a comparison of diverse models of intellectual capital management without attempting to homogenize them. Another applied research method was the triangulation of sources and interpretations, through the juxtaposition of literature, documents, and institutional data, with the aim of capturing both areas of convergence and divergence in intellectual capital management practices.

The research process concentrated on the selection of materials according to three criteria: timeliness (2013-2024), thematic relevance (intellectual capital management, public libraries, non-profit institutions), and source reliability. Thematic coding was applied by categorizing content from documents and publications into the three dimensions of intellectual capital. Comparative analysis of practices in selected libraries enabled the identification of similarities and differences in institutional approaches, and the synthesis of findings from individual stages in the form of a dependency map illustrating relationships between institutional, social, and technological factors.

A key assumption of the study was to move away from the search for a single common denominator. The objective was not to propose a universal model but rather to demonstrate the diversity of factor combinations influencing the development of intellectual capital. The adopted methodology thus enables a multi-level examination of the issue, ranging from theoretical models through strategic documents to the practical experiences of individual institutions.

The analysis of sources is intended to yield both theoretical insights concerning the development of the concept of intellectual capital in non-profit organizations and practical conclusions that may serve as recommendations for the management of public libraries in Germany.

Intellectual capital in institutional practice: a document analysis and case study

The conducted analysis encompasses key strategic documents and institutional reports that outline the development trajectories of the German public library system and define the assumptions underpinning cultural and educational policy. Among the most significant are the *Bibliotheksentwicklungsplan 2025* developed by Bibliothek & Information Deutschland (Erwachsenenbildungsforum Oberösterreich, 2021), reports by the Deutscher Bibliotheksverband (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband, 2021), and regional strategies such as the *Fachinformationen der Fachstelle für Öffentliche Bibliotheken NRW* (Fachstelle Öffentliche Bibliotheken NRW, 2023). These documents consistently emphasize the importance of intangible organizational resources, including staff competencies, the sustainability of external relations, and institutional capacity for adaptive change management. Particular attention is drawn to the alignment between organizational goals and the needs of local communities, as well as the identified necessity for developing innovative managerial practices in response to the social and technological challenges of the twenty-first century. The role of libraries is notably underscored as spaces for social integration, educational support, and the mitigation of information exclusion. Content analysis of these documents reveals a conceptualization of the library as a strategic and mission-driven institution, wherein intellectual capital – understood as a system of interrelated competencies, values, and relationships – constitutes the foundation of effective and sustainable operations (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband, 2021; Erwachsenenbildungsforum Oberösterreich, 2021).

The analysis also incorporated a case study component, focusing on selected library institutions operating within the German public system. The subjects of observation included Stadtbibliothek Köln, Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin, and Stadtbibliothek Bremen – libraries widely regarded as among the most dynamic and institutionally advanced in the country. The selection criteria extended beyond operational scale to encompass a high degree of organizational innovation, the application of contemporary knowledge management solutions, and a consistent policy of supporting staff competency development. Particular

attention was paid to initiatives aimed at systematically strengthening organizational culture, developing information management structures, and fostering partnership-based relationships with local communities and external stakeholders. The data collected provided detailed insights into the operational logic of these institutions, revealing both their strengths and areas in need of further optimization. The case study also offered an empirical foundation for identifying best practices that may be replicable in other public libraries across Germany (Stadtbibliothek Köln, 2023).

A common denominator across the analyzed institutions proved to be the presence of a coherent and consistently implemented organizational vision, which integrates the development of human and relational capital with the overarching strategic objectives of the institution. A central element of this vision is the conviction that staff development and the cultivation of external networks are not supplementary to library operations but rather constitute their core foundation. Notable observations included the existence of extensive mentoring systems, regular competency-based training programs, and advanced tools for self-assessment and internal evaluation – tools designed not only to measure effectiveness but also to inform future development planning. Of particular significance was the openness to external partnerships – both inter-institutional and cross-sectoral – involving collaboration with educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, cultural bodies, and municipal structures. Such cooperative efforts contributed not only to the expansion and accessibility of library services but also to the deepening of libraries' embeddedness within local community structures. The case study thus confirmed that the development of intellectual capital in public libraries requires more than managerial vision alone; it also necessitates well-designed support structures, a coherent institutional policy, and an organizational culture oriented toward continuous development, shared responsibility, and participatory practices. It is precisely this synergistic combination of factors that determines the institutional resilience of public libraries and their capacity to act as social integrators amid an increasingly complex and unpredictable environment (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband, 2021; Freie Hansestadt Bremen, 2023).

The analysis of intellectual capital in German public libraries highlights its critical importance to the contemporary operational model of cultural and educational institutions. In an era marked by increasing environmental complexity, financial resource volatility, and growing societal expectations, intangible assets – such as knowledge, competencies, values, and relationships – emerge as the foundation not only of operational efficiency but also of the long-term legitimacy of public institutions. Intellectual capital, as a resource that is difficult to replicate and deeply embedded within the organizational context, enables libraries not only to maintain continuity of service but also to be active in shaping local knowledge communities.

Discussion

The intellectual capital of public libraries consists of three interrelated components: human capital (the competences, experience, and attitudes of staff), structural capital (procedures, systems, knowledge bases, and informational infrastructure), and relational capital (relations with users, partner institutions, and local communities). Their synergistic interaction determines the institution's ability to adapt under conditions of uncertainty and to fulfill its educational and cultural mission. The specificity of public libraries as non-profit organizations further intensifies the importance of intangible resources. Limited external funding opportunities, the absence of profit orientation, and high expectations from local communities mean that the institution's effectiveness largely depends on the quality of its internal organizational potential. In this light, intellectual capital becomes not only a functional resource but also a foundation of social legitimacy and an instrument for building trust in public institutions.

In the context of German public libraries, particular importance is attached to the relational component, which is reflected in partnership-based forms of cooperation with social institutions, schools, non-governmental organizations, and representatives of minority groups. Strengthening this dimension of intellectual capital supports processes of social inclusion and the building of

institutional trust. At the same time, maintaining a high level of human capital requires a consistent training policy, incentives for professional development, and working conditions that foster creativity and engagement. Libraries thus function as learning organizations in which intellectual capital not only shapes current activities but also forms the basis of their future capacity to generate public value. Well-designed strategies for managing this capital have the potential to contribute to the long-term strengthening of the libraries' position within the sphere of public services and to the development of local communities.

Public libraries as natural environments for the development of intellectual capital highlight their multidimensional role in the knowledge society. The analysis presented confirms that the institutional strength of libraries does not stem from material or infrastructural resources, but from human and relational potential embedded in coherent organizational structures. Intellectual capital serves to integrate various aspects of library operations – from operational to normative – and significantly influences their ability to respond to changing social needs. Conditions that support its development have also been identified, particularly in the context of non-profit institutions. Special emphasis is placed on the importance of relationships with the external environment and organizational culture as factors that enable the lasting embedding of intangible capital within the organizational framework. This provides the foundation for the next part of the study, which analyzes the determinants of intellectual capital development, management implications, as well as the social and organizational consequences of its deliberate shaping.

In conditions of unstable funding and growing social expectations, libraries must operate in a hybrid mode – combining internal resources with the potential of external partners. This kind of institutional relationality becomes the foundation not only for relational capital but also for systemic resilience: enabling rapid response to changes, joint value creation, and the development of innovative public services. Finally, one of the most significant organizational effects of managing intellectual capital is the transformation of the very concept of efficiency. Instead of classic quantitative indicators (e.g., number of loans or users), increasing importance is given to qualitative and strategic measures – such as the level of employee engagement, durability of relationships with the

environment, capacity to generate knowledge, and the social impact of conducted activities. This shift in perspective forces a revision of evaluation systems, redefinition of operational goals, and adaptation of management models to the logic of development based on intangible resources. In this approach, evaluation loses its traditional, audit-like character and becomes a tool of organizational self-awareness – a dynamic process of institutional reflection that does not end with the diagnosis but opens space for planning, change, and creative adaptation. As a catalyst for development, the measurement of intellectual capital enables the library to move beyond a reactive logic toward the environment and enter a phase of active, intentional shaping of its own identity, functions, and place in the knowledge society. It is precisely this dimension that makes the library not only a public utility institution but a truly strategic organization.

Intellectual capital, as an internal axis of strategic management in public libraries, redefines the role of managerial staff from operational managers to knowledge leaders and agents of organizational transformation. The effectiveness of the institution depends not only on formal structures and procedures but decisively on the quality of relationships, organizational culture, and the ability to manage tacit knowledge. The process of shaping and consolidating intellectual capital must be embedded in the overall institutional strategy, encompassing coherent actions in recruitment, training, leadership, and change management. A key challenge for public libraries remains the implementation of mechanisms for evaluating intangible assets, which requires both technical competencies and a culture of reflection. The above content introduces an organizational perspective on managing intellectual capital, representing a crucial stage in the transition from identifying intangible resources to their practical utilization in designing modern models of library functioning.

A high level of relational capital enables public libraries to serve as intermediary institutions between the individual and the system – integrating the efforts of local government, NGOs, and local communities. Structural capital – in the form of information systems, procedures, and digital resources – supports the durability and transparency of activities, and its integration with knowledge and relationships makes the library a learning, resilient, and proactive organization.

Table 3. The impact of intellectual capital on public value

Dimension of Intellectual Capital	Internal Effects (Organizational)	External Effects (Social)
Human Capital	Increased operational efficiency, better service quality, greater organizational flexibility	Better adaptation of offerings to social needs, development of user competencies
Structural Capital	Process standardization, easier access to knowledge, improved management	Increased accessibility of knowledge, transparency of institutional actions
Relational Capital	Better communication, higher level of internal cooperation, employee loyalty	Increased public trust, social integration, local partnerships

Source: own elaboration.

The above content demonstrates that intellectual capital in public libraries is not merely a resource supporting their internal operations but becomes a factor generating public value – measured by the level of social integration, access to knowledge, and the capacity to include and build community. The effectiveness of libraries is thus expressed not only through organizational efficiency but also through the strength of their social impact. The analysis emphasizes the significance of the synergy between the three dimensions of intellectual capital – human, structural, and relational – as the foundation for the institution's durability and adaptability. The presented effects are divided into internal and external categories, allowing an objective assessment of the impact of intangible capital on various levels of library functioning. This serves as a basis for concluding that intellectual capital must be treated as a key element of the management strategy for public institutions, especially in the culture and education sectors. It also highlights the need to design tools for evaluating public value based on qualitative and relational variables (Table 3).

The social dimension of intellectual capital in public libraries constitutes a key element of their institutional identity and their integrative function within the local community. The analysis shows that the relational and human components – anchored in a stable organizational system – determine not only the quality of services provided but also the extent of social inclusion, the level of trust in public institutions, and the durability of community bonds. In this

perspective, the library functions as a space for encounter and dialogue, and the librarian acts as an agent of social change who not only transfers knowledge but also co-creates conditions for cultural participation and civic agency. It is identified that the effectiveness of the library's social functions depends on the conscious embedding of staff competencies within organizational structures that support training policies, mentoring systems, evaluation tools, and management practices oriented toward inclusion, participation, and openness. Institution-alizing these elements enables the lasting anchoring of relational practices in the library's daily operations. At the same time, it is demonstrated that the social potential of intellectual capital does not arise merely from the number of interactions but from their quality – defined by the level of trust, partnership in relationships, and their sustainability over time. The ability to recognize user needs, mediate intercultural relations, and support informational agency forms the foundation for a modern library model as an institution that democratizes public space and fosters social cohesion. Thus, intellectual capital – understood in its social dimension – ceases to be solely an internal organizational resource and becomes a tool for the systemic co-creation of community. Its development should be treated as a priority investment for public institutions, one that not only strengthens their operational resilience but also redefines their role within the knowledge society and civic culture.

Conclusion

The analysis of intellectual capital in German public libraries clearly demonstrates its pivotal role in shaping the contemporary model of cultural and educational institutions. In the context of growing environmental complexity, financial insta-bility, and rising societal expectations, intangible resources – such as knowledge, competencies, values, and relationships – have become the cornerstone not only of operational efficiency but also of the long-term legitimacy of public institutions. Intellectual capital, as a resource that is difficult to replicate and deeply embed-ded within the organizational context, enables libraries not only to maintain

continuity of service but also to actively contribute to the development of local knowledge communities. Understood as a dynamic configuration of knowledge, competencies, relationships, and values embedded within organizational structures, intellectual capital not only facilitates the fulfilment of libraries' core mission but also conditions their capacity for adaptation, innovation, and the creation of long-term public value. It represents a strategic resource of which development requires a deliberate and integrated approach: one that combines a strategic perspective with a developmental orientation, supports a coherent organizational culture, and ensures the full engagement of all levels of the institutional structure – from senior management to operational staff. Only under such conditions is it possible to sustainably strengthen organizational capacity and respond effectively to changing external conditions.

The findings of the analysis indicate that the development of intellectual capital should be understood as a systemic and iterative process, grounded in long-term planning and participatory mechanisms. Of particular importance are policies that support the enhancement of communication competencies, institutional learning capacity, and the willingness to establish partnerships that transcend the cultural sector. In a context of increasing adaptive pressure, the systematic cultivation of human and relational capital enables libraries to perform a stabilizing and integrative role within local communities. German public libraries that recognize intellectual capital as a strategic asset gain the opportunity to redefine their place within the social fabric – from service-oriented information providers to institutions that foster social cohesion, civic inclusion, and participatory engagement. Their future will depend on the ability to manage intangible resources in a planned, integrated, and reflective manner – resources that determine their capacity for renewal, innovation, and effective response to evolving socio-cultural challenges. This concluding synthesis serves both a summarizing and applicative function. It brings together the core insights presented throughout the study and positions intellectual capital not as a supportive asset but as a foundational component of the institutional architecture of public libraries. It is emphasized that organizational success in the non-profit sector requires a redefinition of prevailing management models: moving away from a dominant focus on material resources and

formal processes toward a logic centered on knowledge, relationality, and shared cultural responsibility.

This study underscores the necessity of recognizing intellectual capital not as a supplementary aspect of institutional functioning, but as its structural core – shaping not only the identity of public libraries but also their capacity to endure and evolve as institutions of public trust. This perspective aligns with contemporary paradigms of public sector management, in which the strategic integration of knowledge, relationships, and values with community development goals and systemic resilience is increasingly prioritized. The analysis also advocates for the cultivation of reflective leadership and the investment in organizational learning mechanisms, which are essential for transforming libraries into proactive, adaptive, and genuinely community-oriented institutions. From a long-term perspective, these characteristics will determine the sustainability, regenerative capacity, and strategic relevance of public libraries within the architecture of a democratic knowledge society.

Final conclusions and organizational implications:

1. Intellectual capital must be recognized as the institutional core of which development determines the resilience and effectiveness of public libraries in a dynamic social environment. Managing this form of capital cannot remain a peripheral aspect of organizational policy; rather, it must be fully integrated into the institution's overarching mission and vision.

2. The sustainable development of intellectual capital demands coherent human resource strategies, stable organizational frameworks, access to knowledge, and leadership that fosters innovation, collaboration, and reflexivity. Institutions should prioritize mechanisms for knowledge transfer, mentoring, and collective learning.

3. Only an organizational culture rooted in trust, transparency, engagement, and participation can ensure the long-term development of human and relational capital. Strengthening a culture of shared responsibility directly enhances operational effectiveness and the institution's ability to respond to the needs of local communities.

4. A modern library is not merely a service provider but a reflective environment where staff continuously develop their skills and the institution adapts proactively to emerging challenges. Organizational learning should be embedded in the institutional structure as an ongoing process, supported by tools for evaluation and internal dialogue.

5. Library leaders must move beyond the role of resource managers to act as visionaries and integrators of values, strategies, and competencies. Transformational leadership promotes institutions that are mission-driven, development-oriented, and socially impactful.

The future of German public libraries will to an increasing extent depend on how effectively they are able to manage their intellectual capital. Institutions that perceive it not as a cost but as a strategic investment will gain the ability not only to survive but also to create real public, educational, and cultural value.

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