



IFLA Library Statistics Manifesto

Background

The initiative for this document was taken by then President Claudia Lux at the Section's conference in Montréal (August 2008). The idea is to have a certified document about the importance of library statistics, as they demonstrate the value that libraries provide to their users and to society. Statistical data are indispensable for the internal management of libraries, but they can do more. When presented to policy makers, funding institutions or the general public, they will influence the strategic planning, and they can create and maintain confidence in libraries.

Library Statistics Manifesto

"Libraries and information services serve society by preserving memory, feeding development, enabling education & research, and supporting international understanding & community well being."

(Alex Byrne 2005)

Library statistics: data can make a difference

Quantitative and qualitative data about library services, library use and library users are essential for revealing and confirming the outstanding value that libraries provide.

As the informative value of such statistics depends on their comprehensiveness and speed, the participation of all libraries in the country will be necessary.

Library statistics are necessary for the effective management of libraries, but they are still more important for promoting library services to the different types of stakeholders: policy makers and funders, library managers and staff, actual and potential users, the media and the general public. Where statistics are aimed at policy makers, managers and funders, they are essential for decisions on levels of service and future strategic planning.

Library statistics can reveal a wealth of material, of hidden success stories where libraries have opened and ensured access to relevant information for all groups of the population.

What library statistics show

By measuring the *input* into libraries (resources including buildings and equipment, staff and collections), library statistics show the engagement of politics and authorities for library services.

By counting the *output*, the usage of traditional and new electronic library collections and services, libraries show that their services are adequate to the respective population. Comparing input and output data demonstrates whether libraries are organising their services in a cost-effective way.

Data about the use and acceptance of library services can also indicate the *outcome* of libraries on the population. Such outcome (on literacy, information seeking skills, educational success or social inclusion) will be more visible where qualitative data from user surveys are added to statistical results.

Libraries have assumed new responsibilities in a changing information world; they need new statistics for managing and promoting these new tasks.

Quality of library statistics

Correct, reliable and comparable data are crucial for the value and usefulness of library statistics. The quality of national – and finally from them international - library statistics depends on accurate and timely delivery by each library and on careful editing to detect errors and misunderstandings. To make results comparable between regions or countries, the same definitions and methods must be used.

Libraries are not all under the same authority. Most of them serve specified institutions (universities, commercial firms) or communities. Other institutions may be responsible for the mission, functioning, or legal regulation of libraries in their domain. Therefore various institutions and organisations with differing objectives may feel responsible for collecting data about the libraries within their authority.

The collection of library data will always start in the individual library, but the aim should be a compilation of the data on the regional and national level. For this purpose, libraries should collaborate to form regional/national networks for library statistics in order to ensure that a national library system is running effectively.

The model questionnaire

Given this variety in responsibilities for library statistics, it is all the more crucial that a uniform questionnaire with standardised data and methods be used.

Therefore, a model questionnaire for public and academic libraries has been developed in a joint project of IFLA and UNESCO and ISO, the International Organization for Standardization. Based on the ISO standard for library statistics, a questionnaire with 23 questions has been developed that considers both traditional and electronic library services. Trials in Latin America and the Caribbean have proved the feasibility of utilising the model questionnaire for collecting library statistics on a comparable basis.

The model library statistics reveal input and output of libraries and show the library's role as access point to information, as meeting and communication centre, as place for learning and research. More information can be gained if the results of the questionnaire are set in relation to socio-demographic data collected by UNESCO and other international agencies, e. g. the state of literacy, education and Internet access in a country.

Funding, legislation and networks

Governments and other relevant decision-making bodies are encouraged to establish and adequately fund central units for the compilation of national library statistics on the basis of the model questionnaire and to support local and regional bodies in collecting them.

The international community should support libraries and information services in collecting and comparing uniform reliable statistics of their resources and services and thus promoting and supporting the role of libraries for literacy and information literacy, education and culture.

IFLA and UNESCO stand ready to support the development of systems for national library statistics to ensure that libraries are run effectively and that libraries' contributions to the knowledge society are recognised.

In order to achieve reliable data, teaching modules for library statistics should be developed in international cooperation. The ultimate aim must be on the one side to have individual libraries using statistics for effective management, on the other side to compile and coordinate library data on a national and finally international scale in order to visualise libraries' contribution to learning and literacy and to social, cultural and economic development.

Implementing the Manifesto

Decision makers at all levels and the library community around the world are hereby requested to disseminate this Manifesto and to carry out the principles and actions expressed

Endorsed by the Governing Board, 9 April 2010