

# Assessing library impact

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# Methods of library evaluation

## **Statistics**

*measure the input and output of libraries*

**quantitative**

## **Performance indicators**

*measure the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of library services*

**quantitative (some qualitative)**

## **User satisfaction surveys**

*measure the perceived quality, the users' impression of library services*

**qualitative**

## **Impact (outcome) assessment**

*tries to show the benefits, the value for individual users and society*

**quantitative and qualitative**

# From statistics to impact assessment

## Statistics

- Size of the library's population
- Attendances at user training lessons

## Performance indicator

- Attendances at user training lessons per 1.000 capita

## Satisfaction survey

- Satisfaction with user training on a 5-point scale

## Impact assessment

- User shows higher information literacy skills after a training lesson

# ***ISO standards for quantity and quality in libraries***

**ISO Technical committee 46:**

Information and documentation

**Subcommittee 8:** Quality - statistics and performance evaluation

## **WG 2: International library statistics**

- ISO 2789 (2006) International library statistics, 4th edition  
Revision for 5<sup>th</sup> edition nearly finished

## **WG 4: Performance indicators for libraries**

- ISO 11620 (2008) Library performance indicators, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition  
Revision for 3<sup>rd</sup> edition started December 2010

## **WG 7: Quality measures for national libraries**

- ISO TR 28118 (2009) Performance indicators for national libraries

**ISO Technical  
committee 46:**

Information and  
documentation

**Subcommittee 8:** Quality - statistics and  
performance evaluation

### **WG 8: Statistical data for library buildings**

- ISO TR 11219 Qualitative conditions and basic statistics for library buildings  
Published May 2012

### **WG 9: Statistics and quality issues for web archiving**

- ISO TR 14783 Statistics and quality issues for web archiving  
to be published 2013

## **WG 10: Methods and procedures for assessing the impact of libraries**

- ISO 16439 Methods and procedures for assessing the impact of libraries

Work started December 2010

First voting planned this summer

## **Libraries are expensive**

**Collections, equipment, buildings, and especially qualified staff**

## **Libraries compete for funding with**

- **cultural institutions like theatres, orchestras, museums, etc.**
- **recreational facilities like swimming baths, sports grounds, etc.**

***Can we prove that we produce value for money?***

**Library services aim ultimately at effects that are difficult to identify,  
e. g.**

- social inclusion
- knowledge life
- f
- 

*„measuring the unmeasurable“*

*„nailing jelly to the wall“*

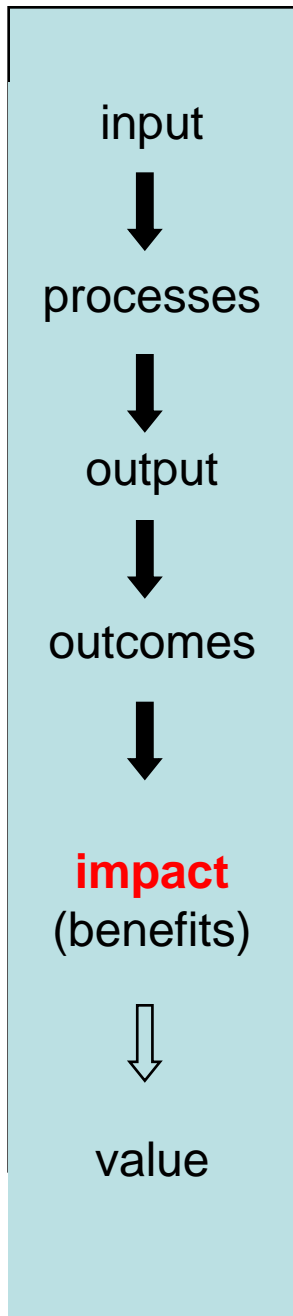
*„six impossible things bevor  
breakfast“*

***Can we assess such effects?***



## ISO 16439 aims at

- standardising the **terminology and definitions** for impact assessment
- describing and harmonising the **methods** that have been tested and found to deliver meaningful results



## **input**

contribution of resources in support of a library (e. g. funding, staff, collections, space, equipment)

## **process**

activities which transform inputs into outputs (e.g. cataloguing, lending, reference service)

## **output**

products of library processes (e.g. number of titles catalogued, number of loans, number of information requests)

## **outcomes**

pre-defined effects of the output related to goals and objectives of the library's planning (e.g. number of users, user satisfaction levels)

## **impact**

difference or change in an individual or group resulting from the contact with library services

## **value**

the importance that stakeholders (funding institutions, politicians, the public) attach to libraries (monetary value may be included)

# impact

- **on individuals**
  - changes in skills and competences
  - changes in attitudes and behaviour
  - higher success in research, study, or career
  - individual well-being
- **social impact**
  - social inclusion
  - free and equal access to information
  - education, life-long learning
  - local culture and identity
  - health care
- **economic impact**
  - ROI, cost-benefit
  - direct influence on economic life (local, regional, etc.)

**Methods  
for  
assessing  
impact**

## **Inferred impact**

### **1. Statistics**

(libraries, cultural statistics, etc.)

**Example: Increase in library visits by children**

### **2. Performance indicators**

(especially indicators concerning usage)

**Example: Higher market penetration in a target group**

### **3. Results of user satisfaction surveys**

(perceived quality of library services)

**Example: High satisfaction with reference service**

***The data must be validated by other methods***

**Methods  
for  
assessing  
impact**

- **surveys** (in-house, telephone, mail, online)
- street surveys
- interviews
- focus groups
- self-assessment of users
- collected anecdotal evidence  
(the story behind the data)



**Asking  
users and  
non-users**

**The results must be made quantifiable to show  
patterns of impact**

(e.g. 80% of respondents say they have acquired new skills  
when using the reference service)

**Methods  
for  
assessing  
impact**

***Solicited evidence of impact:  
Examples***

***Street survey***

What do you see as the most important functions of public libraries?

- Popular reading
- Area for study
- Access to information
- Children's reading
- Internet access
- Local information
- Meeting place

**Methods  
for  
assessing  
impact**

***Solicited evidence of impact:  
Examples***

***Self-assessment***

*Please rate your self-confidence as follows (1=very confident, 5=not confident)*

- Using an online catalogue to look up books 1 2 3 4 5
- Finding books on the shelf using call numbers 1 2 3 4 5
- Using a database to find periodical articles 1 2 3 4 5
- Writing a correct citation in a bibliography 1 2 3 4 5
- Finding sources on a specific topic on the Internet 1 2 3 4 5
- **Evaluating an Internet source (authority, bias) 1 2 3 4 5**



## Methods for assessing impact

### *Observed evidence of impact*

- observation
- log analysis
- **tests** for ascertaining an increase of skills and competences (e. g. before and after user training)



## Methods for assessing impact

### ***Observed evidence of impact: Example***

Records of reference interviews were used for identifying whether library instruction had influenced the users' knowledge and skills. Before each reference interview it was ascertained whether the user had attended a library instruction or not.

*The questions and remarks of users with library instruction showed a higher degree of information literacy.*

## ***Combined methods***

***combining e.g. statistics and focus groups,  
survey results and tests, ...***

Best-known example:  
library use compared to success

### **Example:**

***Do students that were frequent library users  
achieve better grades in examinations?***

## ***Economic impact***

### **1. Can we express the library's impact in money?**

- Calculation of market prices
- Time spent on library services (calculated as prices)
- **Contingent valuation**

***willingness-to-pay:***

What would users pay for the maintenance of a service?

***willingness to accept:***

Which sum would users accept as equivalent for the deletion of a service?

### **2. Does the library influence the economy of its surroundings?**

# Problems of identifying the impact of libraries

- The impact is for the most part intangible and difficult to quantify.
- **Long-term effects cannot be ascertained if the users are no more available.**
- The results of qualitative methods have a subjective bias.
- Libraries are not familiar with the methods used for impact assessment.
- The expenditure of time and effort can be considerable
- **The library's influence is generally not the only and possibly not the strongest one.**

# Impact surveys:

## *Introductory questions*

- **How often** do you visit the library (or its online services)?
- Why do you **not** visit the library?
- **What do you do** when you visit the library (or its online services)?

# Have you benefited from visiting the library or using its online services?

- Have you developed **new skills**?
- Have you obtained new ideas, new interests?
- Have you got **helpful information** for
  - school and learning?
  - job seeking?
  - health and well-being?
  - business and commerce?
  - about your community?
- Has the library helped you to **save time**?
- Have you enjoyed the visits; have you felt comfortable?
- Have you experienced the **library as safe and quiet** place?
- Have you made **contacts** with other people?

## **Have you benefited from visiting the library or using its online services?**

- Have you developed **new skills**, e.g. in information seeking?
- Have you obtained new ideas, new interests?
- Has the library supported you in **studying**?
- Has the library supported you in your **research**?
- Has the library helped you to **save time**?
- Has the library helped you to be better in examinations?
- Has the library helped you to be better in your job?
- Have you experienced the library as **safe and quiet place** for study and reading?
- Have you made **contacts** with other people?



## All libraries

***If this library did not exist, could you have got the same information and help elsewhere?***

- From another library?
- Via the Internet?
- From teaching staff?
- From colleagues, friends etc.?
- In the media (newspapers, radio, television)?
- ***Perhaps, but it would have taken more time and effort***
- No, I do not think I would have got the same information

***Time and effort saved can mean costs saved  
(very interesting for funding institutions)***



# Using the results

- **for internal management** (comparing the impact to the library's goals)
- **for benchmarking with other libraries**
  - with similar tasks and population
  - who have used the same method
- **for the stakeholders**
  - the library's institution or community
  - funding institutions
  - politicians
  - the media
  - the general public

***Libraries  
influence  
the  
individual  
well-being***

