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

Revision for 5th edition nearly finished

WG 4: Performance indicators for libraries

Revision for 3rd edition started December 2010

WG 7: Quality measures for national libraries

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, lifelong learning
- free access to information
- cultural awareness
- local culture and identity
- individual well-being

"measuring the unmeasurable"

"nailing jelly to the wall"

"six impossible things before 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.)
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
Solicited evidence of impact

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

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)
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
**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
- Finding books on the shelf using call numbers
- Using a database to find periodical articles
- Writing a correct citation in a bibliography
- Finding sources on a specific topic on the Internet
- Evaluating an Internet source (authority, bias)
**Observed evidence of impact**

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

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?
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