

HOW TO USE STATISTICS TO PUT ‘LIBRARIES ON THE AGENDA’

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‘Libraries on the Agenda’ is my presidential theme as president of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions from 2007 to 2009.¹ I have chosen this theme to strengthen the advocacy work of librarians all around the globe and to broaden the impact of our work. In my view to put libraries on the agenda of government of national, state and local level is a key to sustainable development not only of libraries but of regions and countries. Libraries support not only literacy and reading but access to knowledge and the information society as such. For this reason there are good opportunities to put libraries on the agenda of funding agencies and foundations and to explain the role libraries can play in their development framework. This may open up possibilities for a better funding and support of library services in many countries.

To convince our partners of the value of libraries, the use of statistics in advocacy for different levels and audiences is one key element. Politicians and administrations need results when they allocate money to a library institution. Even if it is not the only reason for them to support libraries, it is always an important part to keep them informed about the good outcome of their investment. Library statistics are a basis for library board members to decide on the further development of a library and it is a good marketing tool for the library in relationship with partners and researchers. Library managers and library staff need statistics to analyse the result of their work, to be able to compare it with previous years or with the results other libraries have achieved. It is important for them to understand statistical data to be able to explain different reasons for good or bad results. Statistics can also be important for users and user groups to motivate them to come to a library and use the library services. Moreover, statistics are a key in public relations of a library, as journalists always need data and use figures frequently. They are convinced that statistical data shows the accuracy of an article – even if the data are not one hundred percent correct.

If we are convinced about the value of statistics for our library, why and when is library statistics important for IFLA and for advocacy at the international level? I believe that library statistics at an international level and the work of IFLA Statistics and Evaluation Section² are very important to strengthen advocacy work of libraries internationally. From my own experience at WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organisation) and WSIS (World Summit on the Information Society) library statistics are often a surprise for the officials of those organisations, as they are not aware about the high figures of libraries and library users world-wide we

¹ <http://www.ifla.org/III/PresidentsProgram.htm#President> (10.01.2009)

² <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s22/index.htm> (10.01.2009)

represent. As a result a better acknowledgement of libraries and their interests can be noted.

Also the IFLA Management of Library Associations Section³ plays an important role in global advocacy and global statistics of libraries. As it is very difficult to collect correct data for statistical use it must be a part of the advocacy activities of library associations in all countries to convince their own members not only to collect data but also how to collect data. And in doing so it can be of great relevance to connect to different official bodies and to partner with them. I recommend institutions like national and regional statistical units, ministries of culture, education or science and local administrations or universities and research institutes. Sometimes it costs more time but the process itself can be used to advocate for libraries and to find good support in the future. This 'advocacy by library statistics' is not easy but very useful.

But when it comes to the basics, library associations and librarians have to teach a better understanding of statistical methods. One basic element is the discussion about 'unique' data or standardised data. Unique data will open doors for misinterpretation. Good statistics need one standard and I want to refer to the sections work on ISO 2789 here.⁴ I shall give just one example: of why it is sometimes difficult, to convince the use of statistics. When librarians have to explain loan figures as number of loans it may include:

- Normal first-time loans
- Plus renewals
- Plus in-house loans (into the reading room)
- Copies instead of loans
- Inter-library loan

These figures may differ a lot and only a few persons outside the library and information field will understand the complexity and the difficulty to keep count of these services consistent over years as technology changes. Therefore we have to advocate the use of clear defined standards in library statistics to make it comparable over years and comparable between our institutions, too. The work of IFLA Statistics and Evaluation Section for achieving this goal is very valuable, and it provides important information for library advocacy work. The results are even more valuable when they do not neglect quality aspects and when methods to measure the impact of our services are developed as it is concept of the section.

If we want to put libraries on the agenda in a country, it is very useful to have statistical information at hand like

- The input into libraries by authorities
- The output of libraries in services delivered to the user

³ <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s40/index.htm> (10.01.2009)

⁴ Poll Roswitha : High Quality – High Impact? Performance and Outcome Measures in Libraries.IN: <http://www.tilburguniversity.nl/services/lis/ticer/08carte/publicat/04apoll.pdf> (10.01.2009)

- Quality aspects, when performance indicators are used
- The impact of libraries on society.

Nevertheless not only the data are important; it is also not easy to convince politicians and partners with data only. As a school librarian, a national librarian or as an IFLA President we all have to use statistics for well-prepared and clear arguments to put libraries on the agenda. Is IFLA's Statistics and Evaluation Section able to develop these arguments in a way, that it is usable for all IFLA members? When the section helps to prepare a world library statistics will we be able to answer questions like:

- In 2008 – are there more libraries world-wide than ever? How many libraries exists in the year 2000 and how many in 2008?
- How many of the world libraries add knowledge to the web? What is the estimate percentage of all web information?
- How many successful students use libraries? Is there a correlation between library use and higher grades?
- How many literacy activities in libraries happen each day? Are there other measurable activities to explain libraries' contributions to development better?

Your answers with proved statistical data will show the potential and the impact libraries contribute to the information society. But there are many more valuable data which we can use in advocacy for libraries:

- Statistics on how many readers are reached by libraries
- Visitors in libraries and on libraries' web-sites
- Number of schoolchildren with a library card
- Children signed up in a reading program or summer reading club

All these data give us an excellent opportunity to explain the role libraries play in society. As a rule we will see, that nearly 100 percent of those people who have influence in policy, culture and economy today have used libraries at least once in their life. They remember the books only, but we have to remind them of their library experience. There are great examples like the former mayor in Houston, who explicitly said that he would have never become a mayor without the chance he had to use a library in his youth.⁵ I used this story once when I had to advocate for my library at a meeting of honourable people and decision makers. I asked the audience, how many of them have never used a library in their life. Nobody raised their hands. And even if there were somebody, in the social group as such nobody would admit to have never used a library in his or her life, because libraries have a certain kind of cultural reputation. And supported by figures from the library services, I could explain how important libraries are to reach the same higher educa-

⁵ <http://www.ala.org/ala/online/currentnews/newsarchive/1998/january1998/houstonmayor.cfm>
(11.01. 2009)

tion they have and how libraries help people to develop cultural activities and active participation in democracy.

Other important statistical data⁶ for library advocacy work are:

- Number of libraries in the world
- Number of internet access in libraries
- Number of users
- Money spend by libraries on acquisition and technology

The combination of these very basic data can support our international and national advocacy work as we can show the market power of libraries in using these data. In advocacy we often meet politicians who ask us how relevant libraries are for development and often they just mean economic development. Hence it could be nice to have data about the following at hand:

- Money lost in companies due to lack of information
- Efficiency of development activities due to a clear answer at ask-a-librarian
- Set up of small businesses with help from library information services

It looks more difficult to retain these kind of data as we need to analyse the impact of library and information services. It often makes sense only when it is combined with success stories. Since the World Summit of the information society IFLA has collected success stories from libraries from all over the world to market the impact of libraries on the information society.⁷ The combination of statistical data and success stories can be developed into a very powerful and convincing tool to put libraries on the agenda of economic development.

There is another important aspect of the relevance of statistical data: the preparation of statistics to strengthen a new image of libraries! When we use statistics in advocating for libraries people are often very surprised about the figures our work relies on. In putting libraries on the agenda we need to use the excellent statistics we have better, for example in a way that we support the new image of modern librarians through comparison. This method is an excellent marketing tool, but we need more preparations done by IFLA Statistic and Evaluation Section, when we want to use it successfully.

What do I mean with the 'comparison'? Many library associations are doing it already in their daily practice, like the Library Association in Germany, where soccer is the most beloved sport, often repeats this comparison: 'There are more users in libraries than people going to the soccer games in Germany.' This statement is very convincing, and it is always good to have the real figure with you to explain it. It is easy to use in radio or television interviews and even politicians,

⁶ See the excellent activity of the section: <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s22/project/GlobalStatistics.htm> (10.01.2009)

⁷ <http://www.ifla.org/success-stories/> (11.01.2009)

who supports us, are repeating it and use it frequently.⁸ Does IFLA Statistics and Evaluation Section have enough imagination to develop more comparisons of this kind? Or just give hints, what can be used, as you know best where the strength of library and information services lay in comparisons. Comparisons produce pictures in people's mind. This could be a simple example: In one year, users of the library in Montreal lend material (in kilometres) to reach from Montreal to ... Ontario, Vancouver or Hawaii. We need more like this.

Very often administrations prepare material for policy decisions and they develop a library policy or a cultural framework without notice to library and information professionals. Hence we have to learn better how to influence policy before it is set. This is exactly what 'Library on the Agenda' is all about. As we know that policy makers analyses library statistics without any consultation and that statistics are used without explications there is a lot to do in presenting and marketing the results. We need to present convincing explanations, when statistical data and performance data are given to those developing a library policy. Therefore I recommend to you a close co-operation with the IFLA Marketing and Management Section, which has proved to be very fruitful.

Whenever we advocate for libraries we can not do it without the preparation of background material. We need general information, connected with the advocacy goal, and we need statistics, which are well prepared and readable, that means short! And we need convincing comparisons on a statistical base. Enriched with library best practise from at home and abroad it will be key to our advocacy success. A combination that makes it easy for us to put libraries on the agenda at different political levels. It will empower us to describe the future impact of library and information services.

To conclude I want to emphasise a short menu for our future advocacy activities. Statistics are an important tool whenever library and information professionals advocate for their goals. Librarians have to use statistics better, but still they have to believe in more than statistics only. It is always important to focus positively on the goals and to present convincing success stories, like those IFLA collects in the success stories data base. When using data and figures, librarians and information professional should create pictures in the minds of their partners, using comparisons. And when librarians advocate for libraries they need to talk clear and short, not reading out from a paper, but present the main aspects with well-prepared statistical data. And however difficult the advocacy process is, librarians will be patient and 'stubborn' and always will stay controlled. They are open to critical remarks, they ask questions and add humour to their clear statements, they smile and thank. And whenever librarians have to present their projects on stage, they know that even more important than any statistics is their personality – this is the key. Marketing experts say, that people often do not recall the exact informa-

⁸ Goering-Eckardt, Karin (Member of German Bundestag) : Wir sind besser als Google. Grußwort zum 12. Thuringer Bibliothekstag 2006. in: http://www.goering-eckardt.de/cms/default/dok/233/233734.wir_sind_besser_als_google.html (11.1.2009)

tion given by a person, but they recall the personal charisma. Nevertheless to support 'Libraries on the Agenda', library and information professionals need well prepared statistics, convincing popular arguments, and a good practise in the use of statistics at multiple advocacy activities. This is why I personally value the high importance of the work of the IFLA Statistics and Evaluation Section and why I want to thank the group for their excellent work already done.

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