The Difficulty of Indicating Transformation: The Challenge for Library Statistics and Surveys

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Contents

- Background
- ISO 16439 standard for impact evaluation
- Possibilities and challenges of national statistics & surveys
- Discussion
The challenge of tracking transformation and impact

- Starting point: libraries need to demonstrate their value and impact

- The analysis showing impact should also provide indications about change, i.e. **societal transformation**

- It is important to recognise such transformation that may affect customers’ behaviour and information needs

- To what extent are statistics and survey data able to reveal changes?
ISO 16439 standard for impact evaluation

- ISO 16439: Methods and procedures for assessing the impact of libraries
- The first documentation concerning the evaluation of the impact of libraries
- Suggested to be used for the following purposes:
  - Strategic planning and management of libraries
  - Comparison of library impact in the course of time and between libraries of similar type and mission
  - Promoting the libraries’ role and value for learning and research, education and culture, social and economic life
  - Supporting political decision making that concern the services and strategic goals of libraries
Input to the library turns on the service processes as a result of which outputs and outcomes are created. Turning of any of the cogs affects all the others. To get the desired impact, one must define the number and quality of the needed outputs and outcomes. Input must be adapted to produce the needed outputs and outcomes. Quality is the “oil” that makes the processes more effective. Having the library operations positive impact, societal or monetary value may be detected.
National surveys

- The national user survey of Finnish libraries
  - Online questionnaire conducted in 2008, 2010 and 2013 by the National library of Finland
  - 2013: 34 967 respondents
  - Topics: use of local and electronic library services and resources, user satisfaction, impact of library services

- Issues to consider with survey data
  - Surveys do not reach all user groups
  - Collection of long-term time series vs. keeping questions up-to-date?
    -> Need to develop practices of data collection
National statistics

- The statistics database of scientific libraries
  - ISO 2789, International library statistics
  - Maintained by the National Library of Finland
  - Can be accessed through the Internet
  - Open for all interested without logging in
  - The two official languages of Finland (Finnish and Swedish) plus English

- Towards more proactive way of planning the future!
- The need to show that
  - investment in the library and availability of resources produced better results and value to the patrons
  - the services were being delivered in an efficient manner
- The chance of rhetoric from measuring resources only to conducting an analysis of the library’s impact
An example of cost-efficiency
Combining "soft" and "hard" data

- "Hard methods" - system view: Statistics, Key figures, etc.
- "Soft methods": User surveys, etc.
- "Hard methods" - organization view: Resources (Funding, Premises, etc.)

Mixed methods

Impact assessment

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF FINLAND – Library Network Services
Comparison of number of e-journal full-text articles downloaded, e-journal titles in use, e-journal cost and user satisfaction in Finnish universities of applied sciences (2006=100)
Discussion

- The evaluation data should help the libraries in showing impact and recognising end users’ changing needs and behaviour.
- A cost-effective service may turn into ineffective if the motives of customer behaviour are not reflected.
- The need to move beyond the traditional library performance measurement.
- Focus shall be put on the contribution and value that library services provide to their users.
- The value is not necessarily constant; libraries’ desired impacts and expected benefits change in time.
- Statistics regarding academic performance within library’s frame organisation, population statistics, non-user studies, studies on information behaviour, urban studies, or leisure time studies may all provide viewpoints that can help in identifying change – and thus figuring out customers’ needs and understanding the impact.
Thank you!

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