Statistics as a Management Tool

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Abstract

Bergen Off. Bibliotek is the second largest public library in Norway, serving 232,000 inhabitants. At Bergen Off. Bibliotek statistics are used

Monthly
• To calculate circulation figures, number of visitors and arrangements

Annually
• To calculate circulation figures for different kinds of material on loan
• Number of visitors
• Costs per loan
• Circulation figures per employee

Statistical data is used to work out future plans for library activities and to compare services with the other, larger libraries in Norway and Scandinavia. Benchmarking is considered vital to allow constant improvement. Information about users and how they make use of the services offered, is used in administration of staff, budgets and localities. The cost of every loan or circulation figures per employee do not tell the whole story of library activities, but when compared each year, they do give an idea of efficiency level.

Apart from the regular statistics, surveys are made to monitor for instance particular user groups:
• Age
• Sex
• Address
• Use of main library and/or branch libraries
• Frequency and purpose
• Are acquisitions exploited to maximum efficiency?

This knowledge is applied to improve selection and arranging of materials, and to give visitors better services. Projects are started only when basic figures are known, and they are always followed by careful evaluation. All preparations and conclusions are based on statistical surveys and user interviews.

Example

In a particular project towards young people aged 11-17, some branches tried out alternative presentation of collections and used detailed statistics in order to map the youngsters’ reading. The results were compared with branches that continued traditional presentation.

What kind of material do youngsters aged 11-17 years borrow in the traditional public library? This group, and especially the boys, is said to read very little, but is that really so?

Are there differences between boys and girls?

Does a different presentation of materials have any influence on circulation figures?
Bergen Public Library

Bergen is the second largest city in Norway and the “Gateway to the Fjords of Norway”, situated in the western part of the country. Bergen Public Library is the second largest public library in Norway, serving 232,000 inhabitants. The library has seven branches and a book bus.

From the annual report 2001

- Improved services, especially for young people
- Implementing software to enable users to access the library from home or workplaces
- The library homepage is to be further developed. Cultural cities’ cooperation continues in a new project called “Young-Lit”, led by Bologna and with funds from EU
- Internet presentation of Grieg-related material is started, but progress will be slow without financial support from external sources
- New book bus arrived in November
- Implementing quality standards according to ISO 2000 in all areas of the library is postponed, due to the increased activity level. It is, however, still maintained in the reference departments and lending services

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It has been an important principle to use statistics as a basis for analysis of activities and efficiency in all parts of the organisation, and to make decisions accordingly. Statistical data are used to work out future plans for library activities and to compare services with the other, larger libraries in Norway and Scandinavia. As the society changes, the library has to catch up, and benchmarking is considered crucial to improvement. Information about users and how they make use of the services offered is applied in administration of staff, budgets and localities. The cost of every loan or circulation figures per employee do not tell the whole story of library activities, but when compared each year, they do give an idea of efficiency level.

Apart from the regular statistics, surveys are made to monitor, for instance, particular user-groups to provide the necessary background before changes are made.

The activity level from 1989 till 2001 has increased by 89.7%, whereas staff have increased by only 8.1%. To deal with such a rise in activity has been possible only because library routines have been fully automated, but as the activity continues to rise and the municipal funding does not, the library has to face difficult decisions. Statistics and thorough analysis of the entire organisation has, however, helped to promote the library in the political system, and it has been saved from the worst budget cuts the last few years.

Annual reports to local and state authorities

In addition to statistics generated from the library system, the number of visitors is counted daily, whereas reference enquiries, newspapers requested, etc are counted for only two weeks a year, one in spring and one in the autumn. The annual report also contains figures for holdings and acquisitions, expenditure and funding.

Key figures
- Visitors
- Circulation figures
Statistics as a Management Tool

- Cost per loan
- Circulation figures per employee
- Circulation figures per head of population
- Holdings

Loans and visits per inhabitant is now 6.44 and 6.56, whereas the average for the whole country is 5.21 and 4.9.

**Table 1 Key figures for 2001**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visitors</td>
<td>1,516,853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans</td>
<td>1,487,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock</td>
<td>App. 700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>88.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross expenditure per loan</td>
<td>NOK 30.88 (4.11 €)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net expenditure per loan</td>
<td>NOK 27.75 (3.69 €)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bergen Public Library had approximately 25,000 loans per employee in 2001, and that is considered a maximum workload. The library administration has used this figure in arguing for an increase in staff. There is, however, some hesitation about stressing a certain figure because of the risk involved if activity should decrease.

**Statistics possible to generate from the library system**

**Comparing number of borrowers with number of visitors**
- How many visitors are borrowers?
- What do the rest do in the library?

A survey on how many users actually borrow material in the main library gave a surprising result. Only one third of the visitors took away any kind of material, and that means approximately 1,400 people visit the library every day to read newspapers, use reference books, read their e-mail or perhaps just to meet someone. Surveys in the branch libraries would probably have given the same result. When all statistics and calculations are based on borrowed material, the picture of activity in the library is incomplete without any figures for use on-site. The calculated cost per loan must therefore be used with caution, but it makes it possible to compare efficiency levels from one year to another.

Comparing borrowers’ addresses with which library they use, presented by age-groups:
- Large branch libraries have many local users
- The main library has many users from other parts of the city/neighbouring districts
- Young people use the main library to a larger extent than users in other age-groups

In reorganising the municipality in 2000, some of the central administrations were dissolved and placed in different parts of the city. The idea was to improve local government by placing the decision-making bodies closer to the people concerned. The library was organised with a main library and administration in the heart of Bergen, and branch libraries in each part of the city. That each branch library should belong to its local community was considered disadvantageous. Statistics were used to show how most people use both their local library and the main library, and therefore to argue for maintaining a centrally organised library system. Together with the fact that the Norwegian Library Act restricts the municipalities’ authority in organisational matters, Bergen Public Library was fortunately not decentralised.

**Loans**
- For main library and/or branch libraries
- For a given period – from a year to an hour
- By type (books, videos, CD-ROMs, science, etc)
- By users’ age/sex/address
Reports can be generated for shorter periods: a month, a quarter of a year, even hours. Changing of opening hours is always based on detailed surveys of activity during the day, and comparisons made from day to day. When an extension of the library building was opened for the public in October 2000, opening of the library was postponed from 9.00 am till 10.00 am and Fridays were now made one-shift by closing at 4.30 pm. Instead, Saturday opening hours were extended by two hours, since the peak of activity was reached around closing time.

The knowledge obtained from statistics is also applied to improve the selection and arrangement of materials, and to give visitors better services. Projects are started only when basic figures are known, and they are always followed by careful evaluation. All preparations and conclusions are based on statistical surveys and user interviews.

**Borrowers**
- By age/sex/address
- By date of library card issue
- By date of last loan
- By number of loans
- By number of reminders

**Holdings**
- For main library and/or branch libraries
- For a given period
- By type of material
- By function: acquisition, decrease (gain and loss), etc

**What kind of material is most popular, for children, the young and adults**
- Differences between branch libraries/main library
- Does acquisition policy mirror users’ needs?

The librarians who provide library material are mostly women in their forties/fifties, whereas 44% of users are between 15-30 years, and approximately 38% of them are male. Librarians traditionally know too little about the areas young people of today are interested in; comics, film, fantasy and extreme sports, to mention some of the subjects all surveys showed were in demand, but rarely found on the shelves. The decision was made to do something about this, and a new department was created.

**Improving services for young people**
In 1996 an extensive survey was made by Statistics Norway covering a wide range of questions about young peoples’ leisure activities. It was issued after public debate on young peoples’ reading abilities.

This survey, together with statistics available in the library system, was used to monitor different age groups and differences in library use.

**Questions to be answered:**
- To what degree is reading a spare time activity for young people?
- Pupils and students use the library to do their homework, but do they choose their leisure reading from the library shelves?
- What kind of material do youngsters borrow in the traditional public library?
- It is a truth often stated that girls read more than boys – is that really so?
- Does a different presentation of materials have any influence on circulation figures?

In a project aimed at young people aged 11-17, some branches tried out alternative presentation of collections and used detailed statistics in order to map the youngsters’ reading. The results were compared with branches that continued traditional presentation.

**Project 1**
Projects were started in four departments, all aimed at young people aged 11-17 years. The idea was to monitor differences in use when the presentation of material was changed.
Altered presentation was a clear success only in one department, probably due to the following facts:

- A wide range of subjects were covered, but with only a few books displayed at a time
- Any hint that “this is for young people only” was avoided
- Categorisation and untraditional display attracted attention

In spite of efforts made in three other departments to buy the right books and magazines and to give them a prominent display, there was no significant rise in circulation figures for these three departments.

**Project 2**
A new department was created in the main library named “The Gallery”, aimed mainly at young adults 15-25 years. In percentage of the population this age group is the largest user group. “The Gallery” has a prominent position between the children’s department and the music department, which means that lots of visitors pass it every day, and the area was already used as a social meeting place. It was an instant success, and quite a few users go straight to this department because it contains exactly what they are looking for.

Video, science fiction, fantasy, comics, books on film, dance, photo, design and architecture, sports and a selection of fiction were categorised and displayed, and in spite of a very small area, the librarian in charge of the project managed to create an interesting collection attractive to the young, but without scaring away other age-groups.

*Do boys read?*
They do, but their reading pattern is different. They read fiction, but usually modern Norwegian literature, fantasy or comics. They also read much more science than girls, but very often only a chapter here and there. They also seem to do their reading more on the premises than girls do. This department has approximately 60% male users, which is unusual in any public library. All along the activity has been monitored by reports on loans and borrowers, and compared with circulation figures from before the project started.