

RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 11 Recommendations

I. RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY MAKERS ARISING FROM THE DATA

i. LIBRARY SIZE & ECONOMIES OF SCALE

(a) Tertiary sector - Service points/decentralisation

Some countries are already moving towards fewer small service points. Other countries with a user population below 2,000 per service point should investigate the effectiveness of such a model which may be dictated more by academic convention than by considerations of library efficiency. There is obvious potential for benchmarking studies (A) among Eastern European and (B) among Scandinavian countries.

This pattern is reflected also in the ratios **Volumes per Service Point** and **Transactions per Service Point**. Situations should certainly be queried where results are below 20,000 for Volumes and 10,000 for Transactions. As expected this pattern is also seen in **Staff per Service Point** figures where the mid range can be seen to lie between, 8 - 17. The more typical results should be useful in benchmarking optimum service point provision in different situations.

(b) Tertiary sector - Periodicals

With the exception of Poland, the results for Eastern Europe are a long way below average. Furthermore, provision has declined markedly in every country since 1991. In a decade where science and technology are becoming increasingly vital to countries' development this situation must give rise to serious concern. Policy makers in the countries affected should investigate this with some urgency. This would include investigation of:

- how far the position is mitigated by provision through national and special libraries in these countries; and
- to ensure that CEE countries benefit from the provision of networked electronic journals.

(c) Public Libraries - Administrative units.

Policy makers in countries where there are very small local government administrative units should consider sponsoring international bench marking studies to examine the pros and cons of larger units - with particular reference to their ability to apply modern technology. This would include study of consortia arrangements between smaller authorities.

The same investigation could consider minimum viable catchment populations for public library service points to deliver effective modern services under various circumstances.

ii. AUTOMATION & TECHNOLOGY

(a) Workstations for users.

This metric which is relevant and significant for all major sectors avoids the complexities of measuring electronic use in detail, which is currently impossible at the international level. The development of networking, IT and the Internet in public libraries have great significance in many policy areas in support of Information Society initiatives. Whilst the response to this question was disappointing - six states only, this is most likely due to the novelty of the question relative to existing statistical series, rather than to paucity of provision. The responses received - as well as received opinion in the profession - point to greatly increased use of computer facilities by users in libraries. Policy makers at national level are urged to adopt this metric and to benchmark the results internationally.

(b) Percentage of Catalogue Records Automated.

Only five responses show that this measure is not commonly collected at the national level as part of conventional library statistics. It is not difficult to estimate - but it is more difficult to accumulate into a national total. States should be encouraged to produce informed estimates even if based on one off special surveys. The data points to CEE states being substantially behind norms in Western Europe. Progress recorded in Poland since 1992 is most encouraging.

(c) Associated with this is the acquisition of catalogue records from a specialist source in place of separate cataloguing in every library. This development needs to be encouraged where it has not happened - for which benchmarking exercises would be valuable.

iii. PUBLIC LIBRARY PROVISION

(a) Disparities in provision between countries and regions are of great concern.

Policy makers should consider the construction of an international policy framework and effective initiatives to tackle this issue.

II. ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE COVERAGE, QUALITY AND STANDARDISATION

i. Value of continuity

Given the increasing recognition by governments of the role and importance of libraries in delivering various policy agendas including education, the Information Society, social inclusion and economic development it is important to keep the LIBECON data updated, particularly as UNESCO is reducing its involvement in this field. International policy initiatives in this field may be imminent and will require baselines and benchmarking. Continuing to collect data on an annual basis optimises the chances of continuous quality improvement and increased coverage. It is therefore recommended that the data continue to be collected on an annual basis and that the LIBECON2000 website be maintained and updated.

ii. Improved coverage of sectors in some countries

Regional workshops of key players are needed to encourage all to benchmark on the best. Work in this area should focus on encouraging consistent interpretation and provision of standard tools such as model questionnaires and sampling methods.

iii. Improved presentation of data

It would also be useful if a continuing LIBECON were to make recommendations about the presentation of the data based on an examination of original publications. The use of graphs, ratios and time series in national publications would improve many of them enormously. This should be based on an examination of existing examples of good practice.

iv. Other data improvements

- (a) **Public library interlibrary lending.** Returns from Denmark are enormous – and they are very large from other Scandinavian countries. Any follow up to LIBECON2000 should investigate the statistical methodologies of the reporting countries.
- (b) **Interlibrary lending in Academic Libraries** should be investigated in the same ways. Returns from Germany and France are particularly high.
- (c) **Schools:** Investigate the possibility of a Europe-wide sampling exercise with standardised methodology. Investigate how far some countries may include the provision of textbooks and whether this should be counted separately.
- (d) Other major non-specialised libraries. **This category should be discontinued from 2000 i.e. 1999 data should be the last to include this sector.**

(e) Special Libraries

There is important research to be continued and extended across Europe to discover the features of libraries in the sub categories. These survey results demonstrate the potential as well as the problems.

v. Coverage of other advanced countries

It would further improve the value of the database for research and policy development if it could be extended to include other countries with active library services [not in Europe] as far as possible.

vi. Production of annual factsheets

A statistical factsheet should be produced annually covering libraries and knowledge institutions in Europe for distribution to key stakeholders in the countries concerned and to serve as a model for national factsheets.

III. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

i. Improved coverage of information technology in library statistics

The new draft of ISO 2789, by providing definitions and outline methodologies, provides an opportunity to collect data in this area. An action will be needed within the LIBECON context to encourage all European countries to adopt these definitions and methodologies to allow meaningful international comparisons. A series of regional workshops could speed up and co-ordinate this activity.

ii. Convergence of data on knowledge institutions

It would be useful to investigate the possibility of bringing together data on all the knowledge institutions [libraries, museums, archives], in one place. Covering finance, staff, visitors and extent of digitisation of collections.

iii. More complete statistical reporting should be given a high priority by agencies funding information service development.