Background Project Information

The LibEcon project uses internet communications to develop a continuously updated database of library activities and associated costs in the context of their national economies. LibEcon provides a suite of benchmarking and comparative tools. LibEcon currently an EU-funded research project under the 5th Framework Programme.

LibEcon has successfully promoted the international uptake of benchmarking, the use of statistics and performance measurement and indicators by policy makers.

Methodology

LibEcon (www.libecon.org) works through a network of country coordinators to collect statistical data on libraries of all types in a standardised way using its own questionnaire which is based on the ISO 2789 standard International Library Statistics [2003] and ISO 11620 [Library Performance Indicators]. Information is collated from EU, Accession countries, EFTA and a number of other European countries, plus a selection of other countries worldwide including; Japan, Canada and USA. The data is validated, standardised for an international audience, rapidly published on the web, commentated upon to draw attention to key trends and publicised widely. All LibEcon services have been provided to users free of charge.

Headline figures

In 2001 in the Enlarged EU (covering EU plus countries joining the EU 1/5/04) results for all libraries (National, Tertiary, Public, School and Other) were:

- Registered users were more than 138 million [137,963,199], 30% of the population
- Spending on libraries was 14,271,412,575 Euros
- There were 336,673 full time equivalent staff
- Number of service points 186,826
- Number of visits 3,171,215,882
- Number of visits per head 7.0
- Number of loans 3,324,238,175
- Number of loans per head 7.3

Applications

The study adds value to the original source material by making it accessible, transparent and useful. This is achieved by providing in depth analysis and comprehensive benchmarking tools via the website ***(http://www.libecon.org/database/default.asp).***

The study has enabled the collection of comparable data in the library sector, spread best practice between countries, enabled policy makers to utilize the data to reform or gain increased resources for libraries and facilitate a more European approach to library policy.

The project has published annual newsletters. Highlighting developments and case studies from different countries and relevant news stories and guidance for the library sector. ***(http://www.libecon.org/newsletters/default.asp)***

Future Options

The funding of the project ends in June 2004 and IPF are currently investigating the feasibility of the sustainability of the project. Following the following five options;

- Find a new source of funding to continue with the current business model
- Charge contributing countries to be included in the database
- Charge for use of the data
- Find an organisation willing to take over the work from IPF
- Find several organisations to each take responsibility for a library sector.

Project input requirements

There are a number of inputs, which are required to maintain the LibEcon service, these can be broadly separated into 5 headings;

1) Contact Networks

LibEcon is relies on the submission of data from a network of data providers. Each country has a designated co-ordinator who organises the provision of data to feedback to the project team.

The library sectors covered are the following;

- National Libraries
- Higher Education Libraries
- Public Libraries
- School Libraries
- Special Libraries (including Government, Medical, Professional Institutions, Industrial and Commercial, Media, Regional and Other)

Data on the first three sectors is fairly complete, robust and reliable. Due to the nature of School and Special libraries, these sectors are less complete and it is harder for countries to collect aggregated statistics for these sectors.

It is important the list of contacts is up to date, is able to access the relevant national information and is able to produce statistics following the survey guidelines.
Contacts will over time change and it is possible that new providers of data will emerge and other organisations will no longer collect data, it is important to maintain as current a list as is possible.

The work requirements to develop and maintain these networks are listed below;

1 Update and maintain contact details for all library sectors in contributing countries
  - change any details when informed. Manage database to investigate any contacts which are no longer live.

2 Ensure contact details on website are up to date.
  - up date web databases frequently.

3 Explore contributors in new countries
  - use networking opportunities to foster links with new countries.
  - investigate and follow up possible links from national websites.

2) Database Enlargement Management

Back up work is required to update background data, such as populations (both national and populations served by particular libraries such as higher education libraries), economic and exchange rate information. For any additional countries that data is collected from there is also a need to collect historical background data.

More national information is now being published on web sites, a frequent monitor of the information and whether this information is compatible with the ISO guidelines is needed.

A frequent liaison with other major data providers is required.

4 Expand contact and statistical databases to include data from new countries.

5 Use web searches to identify new and update existing data sources.

6 Update background data (demographic, economic etc.) for new countries using UNESCO/ OECD data.

7 Liase with UNESCO / EUROSTAT / EIB & OECD on data sharing and the non-duplication of data collection.

3) Data Collection - Survey

The physical collection of data involves considerable time input. Any changes in the ISO definitions need to be annually included within the survey, decisions are also made on any extra data to be collected and any information that is no longer required. The questionnaire can then be finalised and prepared in electronic format.

The circulation of the questionnaire in a spreadsheet format can reduce the amount of time needed to enter data into the database.

It is advisable to distribute the survey both by email and by post to ensure that country contacts receive the data request.

The use of statistics published on the website will assist in validating the collected results and could fill in where some countries are unable to respond to the survey, care needs to be taken to ensure that the statistics follow the same guidelines as the LibEcon survey. Use of data published on the web requires an additional time resource input.

It is usual to perform around four chases for extra responses, these can be conducted by a mixture of email, postal and telephone contacts of the country coordinators and data providers.

Despite the careful guidance provided, it is inevitable that there will be inconsistencies in the data provided. These can be caused by unique conditions within the country, simple mistyping, a lack of understanding of the guidance, incomplete coverage of the statistics over the country or inaccurate grossing up methodology.

It is important to compare data received to that submitted in previous years, comparison with other countries, data published by other organisation (such as UNESCO), previously calculated grossed totals and per capita calculations.

Where figures are questionable it is necessary to contact the data provider to query these figures. Further chases may be required to elicit a response.

To produce a complete database with regional totals it is necessary to gross up for missing data. This is calculated using data submitted in previous years, UNESCO and other source data and per capita comparisons with similar countries. These calculations need to be validated themselves before being accepted as being an accurate estimate.

8. Update survey with any ISO changes
9. Distribute survey by email and / or post.
10. Identify and contact any national statistics published on websites to identify whether these can be utilised and whether they are ISO compliant.
11. Chase responses email / post / telephone.
12. Validate responses by email.
13. Gross up for missing data.

4) Data Assimilation and publicising of results

Once a validated and grossed data set is produced it needs to be published and publicised. There is scope for differing levels of publicity and usage of the data that can be considered. However, once the resource input has been used on producing the dataset, it is seems imprudent not to utilise and publicise the results as extensively as is possible.

At the lowest level, data can be made available in a spreadsheet to be downloaded form the website with no annotations or analysis.

There are a number of comparative tools and data presentation techniques that have been used in the current website www.libecon.org. These can be updated annually as information is received. There is also the option to develop extra services for data analysis and dissemination.

It is suggested that an annual brief headline statistics sheet is beneficial for publicising the results. This gives a brief outline of aggregated results and commenting on trends.

LibEcon has been running an annual newsletter to publicise the project and inform contributors of developments. Articles are provided by the project management team and contributions are invited. There is the option to continue this, but there is a time input. It is advisable to contribute articles to relevant publications and conferences.

The production of a full report (the Millennium Report) was very useful and we have recently updated this. However, there is considerable time input in producing such a publication and this is not recommended to be repeated frequently.

A policy on the presentation of results and findings is needed to ensure that the project direction is maintained and continues to foster the increased use of statistics, benchmarking and performance standards and measurement. This in turn strengthens the sector's ability to raise it's own profile and to protect or lobby for more funding.

14 Range of data outputs are possible;
- a Simple Excel spreadsheet with no annotations or analysis.
- b Updating of comparative benchmarking tools.
- c Updating of key ratios on web.

15 Production of articles / publicity of results;
- a Headline statistical fact sheet and trend analyses.
- b Newsletters / published articles to publicise results.
- c Full report with commentary on statistical findings on different sectors can be useful for users.

5) Management and co-ordination

There is the need for the project to be co-ordinated. If the data collection side were to be split there would be the added management of quality assurance across the library sectors and a need to ensure that the same standards are being applied to all fields. Otherwise there is the likelihood that it would not be possible to aggregate the results.

16 Co-ordinate progress of project and contributors.
17 Co-ordinate the position of LibEcon with other activities in Cultural Heritage field.
18 Quality assure all outputs.
19 Arrange for project to be publicised and / or represented at conferences / meetings.

Summary

1. Contact Networks
2. Database Management
3. Data Collection
4. Data Assimilation
5. Management
6. Total