

The Romanian Public Libraries' Situation: A Radiographic View of the Year 2001

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Library Statistics in Romania

The period 1998-2002 offered some major changes concerning library statistics, data collection and communication, development of performance indicators and their use in evaluation, the promotion of a unitary technology, and the use of comparisons.

Stage Characterization

- a sustained activity of statistical data collection and communication was developed;
- automated statistical data collection was started;
- the *ISO 2789 Standard for Library Statistics* was adopted and is being used;
- the *ISO 11620 Standard for Performance Measurements and Indicators* was adopted;
- a special research program for library statistics and performance indicators took place, entitled *Romanian Performances in Public Libraries – PROBIP 2000*;
- starting from 1998 Romania participated in the *LIBECON European Project* for library statistics;
- the *Libraries National Committee*, a newly created body, stipulated by the Libraries' Law, decides on special tasks concerning library statistics and performance evaluation;
- in professional associations (ANBPR, ABIR, ABIDOB, ABBNR) there are statistics' committees coordinated by *The Statistics Committee of the Romanian Librarians' Associations Federation*;
- the librarians' associations became constantly preoccupied with the adjustment of library statistics to the changes in libraries;
- statistical data and information were more and more used in library management.

What Do We Have Available?

We have statistical data that cover:

- all types of public libraries during the 1991-1999 and 2001 period;
- university libraries and the National Library of Romania in 2001;
- public libraries from EU and CEE countries in 2000.

We have statistical instruments of data collection:

- Statistics module integrated in the TINLIB library software;
- library activity evidence book and The Register of Stock Movement adjusted to the current stage;

We have specific performance measurements and indicators:

- Main performance indicators (17) are used at a national level for the evaluation and comparison of public library activity.
- Secondary performance indicators (12) are used at a local level by each public library for a more profound activity evaluation.

Conclusions

In Romania there are constant preoccupations for:

- the adjustment of library statistics to the current stage of library development;
- the harmonization of library statistics with the requirements of international standards;
- the usage of statistics as a management instrument;
- the improvement in standardization and the increase of standards.

The Main Performance Measurements (1999, 2001)

The *resources* the public libraries possessed in 2001 emphasize the trends that existed. A *decrease in the number of public libraries* (2.814) by a number of 70 libraries was observed, as compared to the year 1999. This phenomenon often occurred in a rural environment, where many village libraries were temporarily or permanently closed because of lack of funds for staff salaries.

The *number of service points* (3.190) increased by an additional 33, with the foundation of new branches or loan points in the villages belonging to the communes.

The disparity among public library types is very large. County libraries have one service point for 33,000 inhabitants, town libraries for 16,000 inhabitants and village libraries for 3,779 inhabitants.

Public library collections increased by 907,439 items, totaling 49,348,344 documents. The main causes of this increase were the acquisition of documents and the small quantity of removed documents. If we analyze the structure of the collections according to the category of documents they contain, we find: 98.72% books and serials, 0.14% manuscripts, 0.62% AV documents, 0.01% CD-ROMs, and 0.48% other documents. This structure emphasizes the traditional character of our collections.

Document acquisition (1,040,752) registered an increase by 247,137 documents, a fact that should be appreciated. The tendency has constantly been increasing for the last 12 years, albeit by small degrees. The main reasons for this increase are: concern of the libraries in finding financial resources other than those from the state budget; the Program for book acquisition in public libraries of the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs; and funding obtained from projects. 12.78% of the funds meant for acquisition were obtained from financial resources other than the budget.

The acquisition rate of various document categories differs from the rate of document representation in collections: 77.94% are books and serials, 0.6% manuscripts, 1.03% AV documents, 0.15% CD-ROMs, 0.64% other documents.

Emphasis is visibly moving towards the ensuring of other information sources over and above those on paper: AV documents and electronic documents.

The *library staff* comprised 5,257 employees: 4,475 librarians, 66 IT employees and 716 other staff members. Compared to the year 1999 the number of the employees increased by 276 members, from which 95 were librarians and 18 were other staff members.

Financial Resources (15,001,176 Euro) increased by almost 50% and were provided in a percentage of 97% by budget incomes. 89.45% were used for current costs and 10.55% for capital costs. Among current costs, employees costs range the highest, 72.85%. Only 10.39% represent acquisition costs.

Facilities and Services

According to the LIBECON questionnaire three important aspects were evidenced:

Stock percentage offered for open access (73.8%) has increased by 9%.

The high percentage comes from village libraries in which 96.4% of the stock is open access.

Town libraries offer 79% of their stock for open access, whereas county libraries offer only 42.1% because of an acute space deficiency.

The percentage of catalogued records in automated system (9.11%) increased by 1.3%.

1992 was the first year in which databases were created in county libraries, and 0.23% of recordings were achieved.

The increase has been constant for the last 10 years but only in the county libraries with adequate technology.

The number of workstations for the users (288) has increased by 189.

With the economic and financial conditions of the past years in Romania, increase and development is a good sign that the situation is ameliorating.

In 1993 there were only 3 workstations for the users, but now many more town and village libraries have computers and access to the Internet.

Out of these 288 workstations 114 are connected to the Internet. According to the law, libraries play a strategic role in the development of the information society, and the programs established according to the adopted national strategy will ensure the required technology for the fulfillment of this "role".

Use and Users

Registered users (2,046,676) represented 9.12% of the population, *decreasing* by 22,335 registrations compared to the year 1999. This decrease may be explained by the fact that, starting with the year 2001, public libraries have adopted the use of a personalized borrowing card, valid for all service points, thus eliminating "multiple registration". The borrowing card is valid for five years.

Loan transactions (36,324,232) increased by 1,166,893. From this viewpoint 2001 was a good year. Libraries were largely used for document loans.

Library visits (16,890,884) have increased with 937,885. These include both direct use of the library and distant use by phone, fax, mail. Very few libraries have web pages and therefore the monitoring of online access has not been adopted yet.

Conclusions

- the resources for the libraries are insufficient;
- the facilities and services offered are adequate but insufficient;
- library use is increasing;
- the impact of libraries on the society is not powerful enough, as seen from the number of users;
- most libraries use a unitary method of statistical data collection and reports;
- management based on evaluation instruments is being developed;
- important stages have already been covered in the adjustment of library statistics to stages in library development;
- harmonization with international practices is mostly achieved;
- because of the data supply Romania can now be compared to other countries.

2002 was the first year when all types of libraries in Romania reported the same categories of statistical data, following a unitary pattern. Over 5300 libraries returned their statistical data.

Features of the statistical data collection and communication stage

- the greatest number of respondents answered;
- except the Mehedinți County Library, all other 40 county libraries returned their statistical data;
- the data returned were more accurate;
- there were differences among libraries with respect to the understanding of the required information;
- 15 libraries only partially completed the 2002 Annual Statistics Report: *Alba, Argeș, Bihor, Botoșani, Brașov, Constanța, Covasna, Dâmbovița, Dolj, Gorj, Ilfov, Mureș, Prahova, Sibiu, Vaslui;*

- the practice of returning municipal and town library situations separately was still maintained, making centralization difficult;
- some county libraries used the 2001 ASR: *Argeş, Constanţa, Covasna*;
- relative to collection and communication of financial data, results are:
 - their complete absence in certain counties: Botoşani, Covasna, Dâmboviţa, Mureş, Prahova, Vaslui (for municipal/town and village libraries)
 - absence of income although current costs are recorded
 - absence of acquisitions costs from library's own income or other income although acquisition costs from other sources are reported
 - current costs are greater than income
 - reporting sums in millions or billions instead of thousand Leis
 - unrounded sums
 - unverified adding operations

Performance Indicators Obtained By Romanian Public Libraries in 2001

Library Context

1. Current costs from budget income per capita: 16,402.08 Lei
 - 1.1 Current costs from library's own income or other income per capita : 277.86 Lei
2. Costs for the staff per capita: 11,948.23 Lei
 - 2.1 % costs for the staff: 72.85%
3. Acquisition costs from budget income per capita: 1,511.77 Lei
 - 3.1 Acquisition costs from library's own income or other income per capita: 221.64 Lei
 - 3.2 Percentage of costs for acquisition from budget income: 9.22%
 - 3.3 Percentage of costs for acquisition from budget incomes per capita: 79.76%
4. Capital costs per capita: 1,964.52 Lei

Library Staff

5. Employees at 1000 inhabitants: 0.23 employees

- 5.1 Number of inhabitants per specialized employee: 4,939.54 inhabitants for 5.2 % specialized employees or for 86.38 specialized employees

Library Collections

6. Documents in stock per capita: 2.20 documents
7. Documents acquired from budget incomes per capita: 0.03 documents
- 7.1 Books and serials acquired from budget incomes per capita: 0.01 books/serials
- 7.2 Documents acquired at 1000 inhabitants: 46.40 documents
8. Added copies per added title: 2.37 copies
9. Stock Renewal Rate: 47.42 years

Use and users

10. Enlisted users as % of population: 9.12%
11. Active users as % of population: 8.91%
12. Costs per active user: 187,266.06 Lei
13. Documents on loan per capita: 1.62 documents
- 13.1 Documents on loan per active user: 18.18 documents
- 13.2 Documents on loan per employee: 6,909.69 documents
- 13.3 Documents on loan per visit: 2.15 documents
14. Library visits per capita: 0.75 visits
- 14.1 Library visits per active user: 8.45 visits
15. Cost per library visit: 22,150.33 Lei

Main Performance Indicators

– a comparative presentation, 2001-2002 –

The *resources* available for public libraries registered minimal differences compared to the year 2001, with slight pluses and minuses, determined by an insignificant increase in financial resources.

The number of public libraries was 2,796, that is, 18 less than in 2001 and 155 less than the number of administrative units existing in Romania.

There were 18 more counties containing municipal cities or towns and villages without public libraries (see Appendix 1).

The main causes:

- lack of funds for insuring working conditions

- non-observance of Law 334/2002
- disinterest of county libraries
- inefficient methodological service

The **number of service points** was 3,162, that is, 28 less than in 2001.

Correlated to population dynamics, the number of inhabitants pertaining to one service point is less than in 2001 for county libraries (27871/33000), for municipal and town libraries (14185/16000) and slightly increased for communal libraries (3912/3779).

Library collections have totaled a number of 49,675,032 documents, with an increase of 326,688 items compared to the year 2001. The rate of the different document categories in collection structures did not present any changes.

Books and serial publications still are at the forefront by a rate of 98.72%.

Document acquisition counted 843,482 items, 197,270 less than in 2001. In relation to the requirements stipulated by the Libraries Law, acquisitions were unsatisfactory.

The main causes:

- insufficient budget funding;
- lowering of funds obtained from the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs for book acquisitions for public libraries;
- the high price of books.

Over 34% of acquired books came from the libraries' own income, including sponsoring, donations, projects.

Structure of acquisitions according to document categories:

- books and serial publications: 98.13% compared to 77.94% in 2001
- manuscripts: 0.02% compared to 0.6% in 2001
- AV documents: 0.94% compared to 1.03% in 2001
- CD-ROMs: 0.14% compared to 0.15% in 2001
- other documents: 0.71% compared to 0.64% in 2001

Library staff comprised 5,369 employees, from which:

- 4697 specialized staff
- 298 administrative staff
- 374 maintenance staff

Compared to the year 2001, the number of employees increased by 112.

Financial resources: 15,204,337 Euros, which in 98.20% were obtained from budget funding.

Compared to the year 2001, resources have increased by 1.20% (203,161 Euros).

The structure of costs in categories:

- current costs: 88.81% compared to 89.45% in 2001
- capital costs: 11.19% compared to 10.55% in 2001

Main current costs are structured as follows:

- employees costs: 70.82% compared to 72.85% in 2001
- acquisitions costs: 10.58% compared to 10.39% in 2001.

Facilities and services

Stock percentage offered for open access was 68.76%, 5% less than in 2001.

The situation for library categories:

- County libraries: 48.78% compared to 42.1% in 2001
- Municipal and town libraries: 58.63% compared to 79% in 2001
- Communal libraries: 88.4% compared to 96.4% in 2001

The main causes:

- the number of documents offered for open access is not reported with precision (there are differences in reporting from year to year)
- permanent closing of a number of service points

The rate of catalogued recordings in automated system was 9.43%, with an insignificant increase of 0.52% compared to the year 2001.

Full number of workstations: 1337, out of which 405 connected to the Internet. Related to the population of Romania, it shows:

- 1 computer to 16,229 inhabitants
- 1 computer with Internet access to 53576 inhabitants

With such results it can be said that the involvement degree of public libraries in the development of information society is very low.

Use and users

Registered users: 2,652,539 members, representing 12.22% of the entire population, compared to 9.12% in 2001.

The number of registered users has increased by 3.10% compared to the first year of report (2001).

The main causes:

- adoption of the personalized borrowing card accepted at all service points, and valid for 5 years;

- decrease of target-population

There are great differences among libraries regarding the reporting of registered users:

- not all libraries started personalized registration in 2001;
- there is still no full understanding of the difference between a registered and active user;
- there is no clear record kept about these categories of users.

Loan transactions were 36,682,966, increasing by a number of 358,734, much smaller than in 2001 (1,166,893).

The main causes:

- great discrepancies in the monitoring methods of loan transactions;
- low document acquisitions.

Library visits: 16,530,001, decreasing by 360,883 compared to the year 2001.

The main causes:

- great discrepancies in monitoring methods for visits;
- low document acquisitions.

Conclusions

- library funding has been insufficient with regard to users' needs;
- facilities and services offered by libraries have not developed much;
- library use has been decreasing, although the number of registered users has increased;
- the involvement of libraries in the development of an information society is very low;
- most libraries use a unitary methodology of collecting and reporting statistical data.