

## LIBRARY PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION TOOLS IN FINNISH PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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*In Finland, the Libraries Act decrees that both the Ministry of Education and the local library service conduct evaluations. The Ministry maintains a statistical database in support of these evaluations. It allows time series comparisons, comparisons between local authorities, and the calculation of various parameters. In 2001 the Library Policy Committee put forward some quality recommendations which can be used as benchmarks in evaluation. The Ministry of Education, assisted by the provincial offices, evaluates the development of library services annually by means of some central parameters. Apart from basic services, each year the evaluation also focuses on some specific aspect of library services. The findings are published both in book form and on the internet. New challenges facing the evaluation of Finnish library services arise from the measures and parameters of cost-effectiveness, value for money and performance used in local economy, which should also be applied to libraries.*

The Finnish Library Act (904/1998) has a separate chapter on evaluation. According to Section 6:

*The municipality shall evaluate the library and information service it provides.*

*The purpose of the evaluation is to improve access to library and information library and information services and the quality and cost-effectiveness of the services.*

*Each municipality is obliged to take part in evaluation referred to by this clause.*

*Decisions about national evaluation and about national participation in international evaluations shall be made by the relevant ministry, which shall carry out the evaluation together with the Provincial State Offices. The municipality shall contribute to the evaluation referred to in this subsection.*

*Salient findings of the evaluation shall be made public.*

In Finland library services form part of the statutory local services.

The aims of library services are laid down at a very general level in the Library Act:

*... to promote equal opportunities among citizens for personal cultivation, for literary and cultural pursuits, for continuous development of knowledge, personal skills and*

*citizenship skills; for internationalisation; and for lifelong learning. [...] to promote the development of virtual and interactive network services and their educational and cultural contents.*

For evaluation, one must (1) choose the evaluation criteria; (2) collect data; (3) determine the point of comparison; and (4) draw conclusions.

Statistical data do not readily lend themselves for measuring or assessing quality. However, we can presume that some data, such as new acquisitions, the number of trained personnel or opening hours, indicate something about the quality of services. Customer satisfaction is generally left for the local authorities or libraries to gauge. In 1999, Statistics Finland interviewed 2000 persons about their library use and its importance for them. Some 82% of the respondents used the library annually. The library services met the expectations and needs of 56% of the respondents fully and those of 27% fairly well. Questionnaires specific to a municipality or a library enable library services to be gauged in more detail: how quickly one gets a new book; how well the opening hours meet the library users' needs; how willing the personnel is to serve; how friendly the service is; how knowledgeable the personnel is; etc.

### **Evaluation criteria and data collection**

In Finland the foremost tool for national library evaluation is the annual library statistics published by the Ministry of Education. The data in the Finnish Public Libraries Statistics Database ([www.libraries.fi](http://www.libraries.fi)) and its maintenance are the responsibility of the Culture and Media Division of the Ministry of Education. The database contains data from 1999 onwards. Each year's data are published in March the following year. The municipal libraries update their data directly into the database, but the provincial state offices verify the data before the statistics are published.

The database contains numerous – mostly traditional – statistical data, which have been combined into parameters. The definitions used in the statistics are based on the ISO standard. In most parameters, the statistical data is in proportion to the number of inhabitants (e.g. loans /inhabitant, book acquisitions /1000 inhabitants). Some indicators measure efficiency (e.g. loans, total/person years, lending circulation= loans/collection).

As regards electronic transactions, there have been some problems regarding the compilation of statistics, and the data have been collected on a trial basis so far. In 2005, an electronic transaction is defined as follows: "A virtual visit to the web site of the library by a client not physically present at the library; the visit may comprise several different transactions, just as a physical visit to the library. Visits made to different pages of the web site during one visit are not counted as separate site visits. Visits to the web site made from terminals situated in the library are not counted as electronic transactions. The estimated number of visits to the web site is based on the visitor counter at the site or on reliable sampling." There will be many other problems to solve regarding web service statistics in the coming years.

The Ministry of Education database allows comparisons between different local authorities and between one municipality and the national or regional data. It is possible to create ranking lists of different statistical data, for instance, which municipalities have the largest number of loans per inhabitant or which municipalities have the smallest number of acquisitions per 1000 inhabitants. The database also enables time indicators from 1999 onwards.

### Point of comparison

In its 2001 report, the Library Policy Committee put forward some quality recommendations for library services on a trial basis. They relate to accessibility, service provision, the use of services and financing.

<b>A. Accessibility</b>	
1. Location	The service point at least within a radius of 2 km or a bookmobile stop at least 1 km for 80% of the inhabitants
2. Library system	Computer-based, conforming to the recommended standards (technical standards, cataloguing standards, open interfaces)
3. Internet connections	One terminal for library users /1000 inhabitants
4. Opening hours	Sufficient and rightly deployed/placed opening hours
<b>B. Services</b>	
1. Book acquisitions	Minimum 400 books /1000 inhabitants
2. Other material acquisition	Minimum 100 recordings /1000 inhabitants
3. Newspapers and periodicals	15 annual subscriptions /1000 inhabitants, the minimum is 45 (+ net magazines)
4. Premises	Minimum 100 sq.m./1000 inhabitants; location, condition
5. Personnel	One person-year/1000 inhabitants
6. In-service training	Minimum 6 training days/person-year annually
<b>C. Use</b>	
1. Library visits	10 visits/inhabitant (+ distance use separately)
2. Lending	18 loans/ inhabitant
3. Borrowers	Minimum 45% of inhabitants
<b>D. Financing</b>	
1. Operational expenditure	Minimum national average unit cost (gross expenditure minus income from services sold to other local authorities and local consortiums)

So far, we have not been able to agree on a recommendation for opening hours. Similarly, the recommendation concerning operational expenditure is only satisfactory. The sizes of Finnish municipalities vary greatly, ranging from 250 inhabitants to 550,000 inhabitants. The number of library service points varies accordingly. One recommendation for all the municipalities may not be enough. Even so, the recommendations are only roughly indicative. Individual local authorities are often better served by comparisons between municipalities of the same size and with the similar library networks.

### **Conclusions**

The national evaluations have been jointly conducted by of the Ministry of Education and the provincial state offices. The annual basic evaluation uses the following parameters:

- accessibility of service points (library network)
- operational expenditure/inhabitant
- person years/ /1000 inhabitants
- book acquisitions/1000 inhabitants
- other acquisitions/1000 inhabitants
- loans/inhabitant
- physical visits/inhabitant

In Finland, library services are considered a basic social service, just like the school system and the social and health services. This means that the evaluation of library services forms part of the evaluation of basic local services. The annual evaluation also includes a more focused assessment of some aspect of the services in order to ensure the best possible evaluations with the personnel resources available.

We have looked into changes in library services from 1991 to 1999, the extent and quality of personnel resources, and the accessibility of library services.

In 2003 we focused on book acquisitions and found that:

Books are still by far the most popular library material, even though demand for other materials is rapidly growing. In 2002, books accounted for 73% of the overall lending, 85% of all acquisitions and 90% of the collections.

At their present level, the appropriations for material acquisitions will not ensure a sufficiently high quality and a large variety of book collections in all libraries. In 2002, book acquisitions represented some 10% of the overall library expenditure, but there were vast differences between municipalities. Where a small municipality in the archipelago may spend about 14 euros per inhabitant, a medium-sized rural municipality may only spend 2 euros. At the national level, however, book lending grew by nearly three per cent from 2001 to 2002.

Library materials must be supplemented by new, current materials every year. New books are in the greatest demand, but some literature has a lasting value. Acquisitions

and disposals must be in balance. In 2002 the disposal of books was only 3.8 % of the collection, while the international recommendation is around 8%. The low level of both acquisitions and disposals undermines the freshness and quality of collections.

The circulation is an indicator describing the lending of books in relation to the number of books in the collection. The median circulation in 2002 was 1.37, ranging from 0.25 in a small archipelago municipality to 4.12 in a major city.

Circulation can be boosted by means of intermunicipal cooperation and effective logistics. This has already been done in many regions, where libraries have formed library pools. But cooperation should still be enhanced.

The collections of children's and youth literature are appraised according to the recommendations put forward after an evaluation and development project conducted in the north of Finland, known under the acronym PARKKI. PARKKI recommended that the library collection should contain at least eight volumes per every resident aged between 0 and 14. The recommended number of acquisitions is one volume per child. On average, Finnish libraries have 11 volumes per child, but for instance the major cities in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area have only 4-6 volumes per child. The average national figure in acquisitions is 0.6 volumes. As the public library is a very important factor in promoting literacy and inspiring children to read, it is vital to ensure that children's and young people's books are acquired in sufficient numbers and that public libraries have expertise in this field.

*The evaluation led to the following conclusions:*

- Achieving the recommended acquisition does not necessarily guarantee a serviceable collection.
- The new forms of material have not supplanted traditional books. In many municipalities, book acquisitions remain below recommendations.
- The renewal in library collections is very slow.
- Libraries need other libraries' collections but even joint material registers do not guarantee brisk circulation.

*The conclusions led to the following recommendations:*

- Libraries should agree on a regional collection policy.
- Book acquisitions must be secured by means of sufficient appropriations.
- The monitoring of acquisitions and disposals must be developed. The disposal and acquisition rates must be as similar as possible.

- Collaborating libraries must use the most efficient and cost-effective transportation systems possible with a view to speeding up circulation.

The use of licensed web materials and the acquisition and use of e-books were estimated in 2004; the report will be published during the spring of 2005.

### **New challenges**

In recent years, Statistics Finland has calculated the value for money in different public services at the request of the Ministry of Finance.

In library services, value for money is calculated on the basis of operational expenditure and physical visits. At the Ministry of Education, we have been dissatisfied with this parameter and discussed it with the Statistics Finland official, who has admitted that it does not sufficiently describe the entity of library services. We need to develop an indicator which uses a weighted combined measure to calculate the division of expenditure. This measure should include the largest possible number of different library services whose use can be measured with the least possible effort, preferably automatically.

Another challenge derives from the municipal sector. Local authorities are adopting a producer model in their economies. Each administrative sector is a service producer with a product or products to sell to the local authority. The municipal leadership and the service provider agree on the price of the service and the quantities to be bought.

What is the library's product? How is it priced? The Rovaniemi Town Library in Lapland has received a grant from the Ministry of Education for investigating the matter. Some local authorities have already applied the system, using loans as the library product. But this is altogether too narrow and one-sided a measure for library services. I do not believe that the definite answers will be found with the Rovaniemi study, but it will take us one step forward.