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THE QUALITY OF LIBRARY COLLECTIONS: EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Чтобы улучшить качество обслуживания читателей надо глубже изучить качество библиотечного фонда и его состава, так как именно библиотечный фонд является основным фундаментом всех услуг библиотеки.

Можно изучить качество фонда со двух сторон – с состава фонда и с точки зрения использования.

В Латвии недостаточно уделено внимание вопросам состава фонда.

Можно использовать статистические, библиографические и экспертные методы.

Нам надо изучить не только количество названий и средний возраст информации в целом и в каждой отрасли, но и лингвистическая структура.

Сравнение библиотечного фонда с стандартами и библиографическими изданиями показывает обновление фонда.

Эксперты изучая фонд у полка дает ответ, что устарело, что нехватает или чего слишком много.

Метод Конспектус (Conspectus) самый главный метод изучения качества состава фонда, в который входит все выше сказанные методы и указанные уровни комплектования каждой отрасли.

Necessity of research

Acquiring of actual and qualitative library collection is the most important task of every library in order to be able to perform its functions, which are increased and become very serious during the years and these functions are: reducing of digital gap, providing of all-round information services and lifelong education of society.

During last 15 years Latvian libraries have rapidly improved their collections by acquiring machine-readable documents and Internet connections, more and more automating collection's processing and obtaining information by electronic catalog. Society has become more exacting to libraries; besides librarians themselves feel necessity to improve quality of their services more and more. The main service of every library is to create qualitative and readers required collection. Here rises a question: what determines the quality of collection and how to improve the main service of the library? Of course, this question could be answered by libraries themselves if they can follow some legislative documents and guidelines, how to develop library collections, and state standards according to type of current library. Unfortunately, there are no such documents established in Latvia yet, we will be the ones who will be in charge of creating them. However, many things we can already do today. The Association of Latvian

academic libraries (*abr. in Latvian – LATABA*) during international conference one year ago discussed about necessity to evaluate the quality of collections accordingly to IFLA guidelines using Conspectus method. The idea was good, but then it turned out, that it takes a lot of time to study it. For this purpose LATABA organized a seminar this year to learn more detailed about Conspectus method; one of the developers of Conspectus method, Ms Dr.Mary Bushing, was invited to the seminar. Of course, this method is very important to describe the quality of collection. Conspectus method has been used in the world by more than 30 years. Around 1000 libraries worldwide use this method and are satisfied with it, both library personnel and library users. But this method is very time-consuming. It took approximately 15 years for the Czech Republic to establish this method through explaining to society about its necessity. Latvia is not an exception. In the very beginning it seemed to acquisition committee of LATABA, that evaluation of collection's content would take rather short time. But later on, when they faced lack of understanding and even unwillingness from part of librarians to change something, it appeared, that there is valid necessity to start step-by-step explanatory work among librarians and start to evaluate collections with easier and more understandable methods first.

I think, all librarians will agree that library collections must be improved; more new documents and financial resources are needed. But in the other hand we clearly understand that financial resources for libraries are not going to be increased rapidly. This is the reason why we must evaluate what we already have, is it adequate to contingent of users, have we collected those information resources, which are required by our users.

Sooner or later every library must define principles of acquiring its collection, defining criteria for collecting and popularizing them among inhabitants. We cannot be care less about it, if we do not want to lose. If library doesn't think about improvement of its collection, it could happen that its users turns their back on the library, but its owner, state or self-government, decides to close such an unprofitable library. So, what to do? The easiest way is to be aware of the real situation and to study own collection accordingly to generally accepted methods.

Statistical methods of collection quality research

Library collection can be researched from standpoint of collection's content, as well as collection usage. I will not talk about collection usage this time, as Latvian libraries already know and do it. Every year different statistical reports of circulation and readability must be submitted. Does circulation number really means, that the current document has red and its users have got the information they were looking for, it is a point of contention. Of course, this number gives good overall insight into circulation, but it does not indicate collection quality.

My task today is to introduce you to facilities of improvement of library collection quality, using methods oriented to collection research, starting with easiest ones, passing over to more complicated and concluding stage: Conspectus method.

If we want to judge about collection quality, we must be familiar with it, therefore we must use different statistical methods. First of all, we must determine collection size. I think you are quite sure, that you know the collection size of your library. But is it really so? Practically, we know the number of copies, but more important is to know the number of titles, which is one of criteria of quality research. For example, the size of library of Business Administration School Turība collection is 100 000 copies. It sounds impressive. But, if I say, that the number of titles is 12 000? The attitude is different. Actually, we should not fear to face the truth. The quality is important, not quantity. Many copies guarantee simultaneous usage of the same document, but it does not increase collection quality. Such criteria as quality and accessibility should be parted. The total size of Latvian library collection is around 62 billion copies, but what is the number of titles? Unfortunately, nobody can answer.

After we have determined the number of titles, the next step is to find out percentage and the number of documents per branch. After that we can calculate, how much documents of current branch we can supply, as well as what we can supply on the whole to every library user or inhabitants of community. All we must know is the number of library users or inhabitants of community and the number of collection titles. By dividing number of collection titles with the number of library users we get a number of document titles per library user. Of course, we can calculate the same accordingly to the number of copies if we suppose, that everybody will wish to read the same. The number of document titles per inhabitant or user is very good indicator to find out how multiform literature is in library's collection. Next step is to study linguistic structure of documents of whole collection and per every branch. It is good to do it per number of titles and per number of copies, especially percentage, in order we could compare proportion of branches, titles and copies. These statistical data can be easily obtained and clearly show to user, what kind of literature library supplies.

The other very important statistical indicator is copyright date of current branch documents and all library collection. Exactly this indicator the best can answer the question if library supplies actual information in current branch. Libraries, which use IT ALISE modules, can easily find answers to these questions, but others, who work with card catalogue, also can find these answers. If we sum up copyright dates and divide with number of titles we get average copyright date of documents.

When we have all statistical data above mentioned, we can understand better features of our collection development and find answers, which documents must be restored or supplemented and which must be additionally checked with other methods. These measurements give us better understanding of library potentialities in running its functions as well as help us through giving arguments to prove to library owners the necessity of expansion of the library collection.

Bibliographic methods of collection quality research

These methods are determinative in qualitative collection research. Sounds simply, just take state standards, which define library collection's content for current library type and make comparison of your library collection and defined percentage of

compulsory documents, which must be included into library's collection. The problem is that there are no such standards in Latvia. There is no either standard, which define content of local, regional or state library. If there is no standard, libraries cannot make mutual comparison. Nevertheless, libraries must compare their collections to serious bibliographic indexes, where branch authorities and their most important editions are included in order we could consider about level of our collection quality. I regret to say, that even if branch bibliography is presented in Latvia, their products cannot be found. What to do? The answer is: to find other bibliographic lists, for example, catalogues of publishers, bibliographic lists of branch libraries in foreign countries, but they can be used mostly to compare how much of published documents current library has acquired accordingly to its profile. This comparison can help to improve library collection quality with branch accessions. Of course, we can compare our catalogue to catalogue of leading library in order to evaluate if accessions are acquired in sufficient level. In practice very few libraries use bibliographic methods of collection quality research, because it is easier to do nothing as nobody asks to do it and still libraries think, that they can live without it. If we don't pay adequate attention to collection quality, it could turn out that libraries acquire more advertised not more qualitative products in current field. There is no institution in state level, which deals with centralized acquisition of library collections. Libraries can do it freely as they wish. In due to lack of advisory branch bibliography and state standards it is easy to go wrong. Lack of these documents brakes successful development of Latvian libraries in comparison with European libraries.

Financial regulations issued by the Cabinet of Ministers are like library financing standard that will come into force in 2006. It defines, that minimal standard of accessions in self-government libraries should be LVL 0.30 per inhabitant, but in university libraries LVL 8.00 per student and teaching staff. Of course, it is good, that this document is created, but the standard is too low to achieve serious influence on improvement of library collection quality. In the world information play essential role in development of every branch of economics, but in Latvia, unfortunately, it is not applied to libraries. Maybe librarians themselves are partially responsible for this situation, because they too rare openly talk about collection content and its unconformity to users needs, instead of that they are proud, that libraries, in spite of bad financial support, excellently can deal with the situation. Instead of setting up desirable situation as real better is to analyze facilities of collection renovation by comparison own collection with published documents in current branch. If we could use percentage criteria, how much percents of published documents every year in Latvia and rest of the world has been acquired by our libraries, we could consider if our collections are actual and valuable. Of course, for that we must have good knowledge of publishers' work and information searching tools.

Examining the collection directly (shelf scanning method)

In order to identify quality of library collection, it is useful to use experts, who physically examine materials on the shelf and evaluate every single document. The advantage of this method is, that expert can draw immediately conclusion about material's content and is it up-to-date or morally obsolete. At the same time the expert can quickly evaluate, which materials should be write-off, restored or supplemented with additional copies. The expert must be familiar with current branch. Librarian can be an

expert too. The most important is that the expert is familiar with current branch and its leading authors, their most important publications and branch subjects. With this method we can discover which branches are properly and fully acquired, which are over-loaded and which are poorly and insufficiently acquired or we can even discover lack of some parts of a branch. If branch experts are represented in library council or library acquisition council they can help evaluate the collection. Possibly an expert can be found among library users. There can be many experts, separate for each branch or even several experts for one branch in order to avoid loss of objectivity. By practical watching of each document expert can easily find its physical condition, is it often used and therefore a little bit damaged or in opposite - calm laid on the shelf. Besides, expert can conclude if copies of one title are sufficient or too much. Anyway, this method helps very much to examine quality of library's particular branch. Of course, it is rather time-consuming method. On basis of expert's conclusions libraries can easier develop their collection quality improvement programs.

Conspectus method

When library collection is examined using all above-mentioned methods, we can start research with Conspectus method. Conspectus is a systematic, subject-organized survey of the collections to provide a baseline for future management decisions. Conspectus method describes collections in a uniform overview or summary format. It is arranged by 24 broad subject divisions, using 500 categories that are correlated with classification numbers and 4000 detailed subjects. IFLA guidelines suggest use this method for development of collection acquisition policy.

Conspectus uses collection 6 depth indicators:

- 0 = out of scope (the library does not collect);
- 1 = minimal level;
- 2 = basic information level;
- 3 = study or instructional support level;
- 4 = research level;
- 5 = comprehensive level.

Libraries themselves define the level for each branch they are going to collect and which level they plan to reach in the future (to step level up or down). This information helps libraries to co-operate with each other, to supply information services and coordinate acquisition and usage of collections. This method gives very detailed insight to collection content also to library users.

We can research quality of collection by several methods simultaneously, but each library itself should choose, what should they start with in order to reach their aims. The best way is to combine all methods. It will be possible to use Conspectus method

when state standards are developed, because measuring of collection percentage proportion to state standards is required. This is the reason why this method will not be established here in Latvia soon. It is important to remember, that results of library collection research must be fixed and saved. Of course, collection research is time-consuming process, but it is worth to do it, because, firstly, you will learn strengths and weaknesses of your library collection, secondly, the numbers you have got can be used in different ways when speaking about improvement of collection quality. You will be able to analyze acquisition process and better define library's mission and tasks.

Qualitative collection acquisition is the main service of every library; all other services are depending on it.

Therefore in the conclusion I would like to regard 5 library science rules:

- 1) Books are meant for reading;
- 2) Own book for each reader;
- 3) Own reader for each book;
- 4) Save reader's time;
- 5) Library is growing organism.

Information sources

1. *A Guide to the collection assessment process/ Australian libraries gateway.* – <http://www.nla.gov.au/libraries/help/quide.html>
2. *Collection assessment/Collection development office.* –
3. <http://www-lib.uwyo.edu/cdo/collass.htm>, (29.04.2004.)
4. *Collection assesment.* – 6 pgs. – <http://www.dlapr.lib.az.us/cdt/collass.htm>
5. *Collection strengths measurement methodologies/ SCONE project reports.* – <http://scone.strath.ac.uk/About/Progress/repStrenMeas.cfm>