

The Libecon Project: Library statistics for international benchmarking and advocacy

Phillip Ramsdale

Executive Director, Institute of Public Finance, UK

David Fuegi

Consultant, Institute of Public Finance, UK

John Sumsion

Senior Honorary Fellow, Department of Information Science, Loughborough University, UK (1)

DGINFOS of the European Commission is to fund for 3 years from mid 2001 a project called LIBECON, which is of great interest and crucial importance to everyone interested in library performance. LIBECON will continue, expand and develop earlier work known as LIBECON2000 (see www.libecon2000.org), which has just ended. IPF, the executive arm of CIPFA, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy [UK] is responsible for the work and will work through its expanding network of international contacts ("country coordinators").

The project will collect, publish and interpret library statistics aggregated at the national level not only for the 30 countries included in LIBECON 2000 (all countries of the EU, EFTA and Central and Eastern Europe) but will also extend its coverage to the following countries: Australia; Canada; Korea; New Zealand; USA; Japan; Mexico; Turkey and Russia and to any other country willing to participate. At least 5 years' data will be sought from the new countries and 3 years' new data will be added for LIBECON2000 countries. LIBECON will thus expand from its European roots and assume truly international stature.

The overall project aims are to build on the previous work of DGINFOS, ISO 2789 (International standard on library statistics), ISO 11620 (Library Performance Indicators) and of IFLA and UNESCO so as to:

- [i] Improve the quality of implementation of standardised methods in the collection and publication of data relating to library economics and statistics.
- [ii] Make the data "user-friendly" and disseminate the results to policy makers, managers and the European Commission itself as a benchmarking tool, thus facilitating a more European approach to library policy.
- [iii] Provide an advocacy tool for key stakeholders such as library associations at national and international levels.
- [iv] Accelerate implementation of new measures in the new draft of ISO 2789 when it is finalised and pro-

vide a means to pilot possible new measures at the international level.

- [v] Examine the feasibility of extending the LIBECON model to other cultural sectors (museums and archives).

LIBECON will have an advisory committee consisting of all key stakeholders in this field, not simply those from Europe.

LIBECON will produce the following results:

The LIBECON website will be available from day one.

- It will be updated with 3 years new data in 2001, 2002 and 2003
- New countries will be added (from 2001)
- Results will be summarised and communicated to stakeholders (each year)
- Feasibility study on archives and museums will be produced and validated (year 1)
- New data lines will be added in consultation with the Strategic Advisory Committee (each year).

The result will be a management tool for advocates, policy makers, researchers and managers for economic monitoring and benchmarking of the libraries sector and possible knock-on effects in the museum and archives sectors.

The second part of the article summarises the findings of LIBECON 2000 as published in the Millennium Report.

Introduction

The LIBECON Project, funded by DGINFOS of the European Commission, officially began work on July 1, 2001 and will run for 3 years. This article describes the project's plans for the next 3 years and also what was achieved by the predecessor project, LIBECON2000. The LIBECON2000 Project was funded by DG13 under FP4. On its website (libecon2000.org) statistics on the libraries of 29 European countries are found, constituting an indispensable resource for policymakers and

others with an interest in libraries at the European level. The Millennium Report (which can be seen in full on the website) evaluates the main trends and lessons from the financial and statistical data over the last 10 years.

The LIBECON2000 website, where statistics on the libraries of 29 European countries (2) are found, constituting an indispensable resource for policymakers and others with an interest in libraries at the European level, will continue and be enhanced by LIBECON. This has been achieved with the assistance of EBLIDA, IFLA, UNESCO and colleagues throughout Europe. During 2001-2004, we will add on 3 more years of data.

Our aim is to create a virtual community of those who create and use library statistics. There are a number of advantages arising from this approach:

- Potentially achieve more rapid publication;
- Achieve wider dissemination to users who are scattered and mainly require facts rather than whole publications;
- Overcome language barriers;
- Facilitate communication between producers and users.

LIBECON, like LIBECON2000 before it, ensures that data is recent, formulated to a common standard, validated and grossed up in appropriate cases to produce valid trend lines. Financial data for LIBECON2000 was standardised on the Euro to allow comparisons between countries and over time. As LIBECON will extend the database to countries outside Europe, currency standardisation is under review. It is most likely that the U.S. dollar will also be used. The website provides quick and easy access to the data and to the sources. Besides providing a tool for research, monitoring, benchmarking and comparison, LIBECON2000 impacted on the revision of ISO2789 (library statistics) and influenced a number of countries to adopt ISO2789 or to carry out surveys for the first time or in an improved format.

LIBECON could become a key focus for international library statistics in the future. UNESCO, which has pioneered the production of international library statistics since the 1970s has reduced the numbers of its statistical staff and the consequences of this for library and other cultural statistics will not be good. EURO-STAT, which collects statistics for the European Union, has recently been asked to compile cultural statistics at the EU level but has not included libraries in its program. A considerable onus thus lies on LIBECON to first maintain the series of statistics and secondly develop their utility for policy makers and advocates of libraries and library managers. The challenge is to develop the international framework for producing reliable statistical information to monitor the success or otherwise of libraries. LIBECON2000 made a start in Europe. LIBECON is going global.

Scope of LIBECON

LIBECON has decided to invite ALL countries to contribute to the database. Because of its European roots, its initial strength is in Europe, but we expect data from other countries to come on stream rapidly. Invitations to contribute were dispatched in July 2001 and new data is added continuously as it arrives and is validated.

ISO2789

A major problem in assembling meaningful statistics is gaining access to information prepared to consistent definitions. UNESCO pioneered standardisation in this field and has been publishing library statistics of many countries for many years and formulated the six [former] standard sectors (3) that they respectively survey on a three-year cycle. ISO, the worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies) undertakes the work of preparing International Standards through its technical committees. International organisations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work of refining the definitions, and LIBECON seeks to inform the standards debate. Our ability to do this arises from the fact that we are one of the few to have attempted to collate and compare library statistics from many countries and thus have first-hand experience of the pitfalls.

What LIBECON does is both more extensive and more limited than UNESCO. More limited in that we cover only 29 countries at present though this will change rapidly in the light of our new "open house" policy. We are more extensive in that we ask more questions and attach importance to financial data which are presented in standardised form (euros and soon, probably, US dollars) and not in national currencies. We also have the resources to check more thoroughly with our sources and, unlike UNESCO, we gross-up to account for missing data and provide a bibliography, list of contacts and translations of major column headings in the original publications. Like UNESCO, LIBECON surveys countries, not libraries. In other words, we do not undertake primary survey work. We go beyond UNESCO also in publishing a commentary on trends. Previous publications in the series include *Library Economics in Europe* (Fuegi and Ramsdale, 1997) and *Library Economics in Central and Eastern Europe* (Ramsdale, 1995).

LIBECON2000 piloted certain data elements for the revision of ISO2789, especially the revision of the library sectors resulting in dropping of the "other major non-specialised libraries" sector and the subdivision of the "specialised" sector. LIBECON would like to increase its contribution. We have not only revised our questionnaire in light of the ISO2789 revisions (which should accelerate their adoption) but have created a LIBECON Strategic Advisory Committee to advise on how LIBECON can best be used as an agent for change

and compliance. Links with international stakeholders will be formalised through the Committee that will consist of such players as UNESCO, ISOTC46, IFLA [Statistics Section] and Eurostat. This group will ensure that maximum synergies are achieved between players and stakeholders in the relevant field. It will meet once a year to consider major issues on content, marketing and synergies between the players.

Website Development

All the data from predecessor projects will be maintained on the website and data for later years and new countries will be added, as already described. A new interface will make it possible for users to select and manipulate data for specific countries, groups of countries and years. A site server search function will also be added in 2001.

Other LIBECON Developments

LIBECON will investigate the feasibility of extending its coverage to museums and archives. If this seems to be feasible, LIBECON would need to obtain additional funding to actually do the work.

Early in 2002, LIBECON will organise a workshop to bring together stakeholders in this field for mutual learning and group planning for the first time since 1997 (in Europe). This workshop will provide stakeholders with an opportunity to validate and influence the direction of LIBECON and to clarify LIBECON's role in international standardisation. Many of the people we wish to involve are attached to statistical institutes and are not librarians and do not attend major library events nor do they meet each other anywhere else. All LIBECON country coordinators will be invited plus other key stakeholders (UNESCO, ISO, EUROSTAT, IFLA, EBLIDA, CoE). Papers and conclusions will be published on the web.

Outline of the LIBECON2000 Millennium Report

The Millennium Report and the website cover Central and Eastern Europe, the EFTA countries and the European Union and all library sectors- schools, higher [tertiary] education, national, public, special [broken down for the first time into sub-sectors] and other major non-specialised. For the sake of brevity, comment is here restricted mainly to the public library and tertiary education sectors. For details and for the full text, please visit the website. The Report is available from IPF on CD Rom and is soon to be published by the European Commission.

1. OPERATIONAL TRENDS [ALL SECTORS]

i. Staff

We estimate that about 374,000 staff were employed in libraries, an increase of 3.7% since 1991. This increase in staffing numbers is weighted towards the professional staff whose numbers increased by 4.9% over the period. The increase in Trained staff occurs mostly in EU States.

The number of trained librarians in all sectors of libraries (206,000) is higher than previous estimates for the mid-1990s (175,800 for 1991). However, the number of other support staff is substantially lower than previous estimates. Proportionately the returns for 'Other Staff' are appreciably lower in the CEE than in the EU.

Table 1 Staff FTE* (000s)

	Qualified	Other	Total
1991	196	165	361
1992	195	163	357
1993	191	164	355
1994	195	163	357
1995	199	162	361
1996	201	159	360
1997	206	160	367
1998	206	168	374

* Full Time Equivalent, i.e. part time staff count as fractions in proportion to hours worked

ii. Materials

The overall position and trends are summarized in this table:

Table 2 Trends in Materials Provision (millions)

RESOURCES	1991	1998	% change
Book stock	2,778	2,944	+ 6
Audio Visual stock	104	127	+ 22
Periodical subscriptions	19.5	21.3	+ 9
Manuscripts	29.5	32.0	+ 8
Microforms	316	313	- 1
ANNUAL MOVEMENTS:			
Book Additions	171	171	=
A/V Additions	9.7	12.1	+ 25
Inter Library Loans (received)	15.2	29.0	+ 91

The trends in annual additions to stock appear to vary between sectors. National libraries report a growth in their annual additions in books and audio-visual materials. Public libraries' book acquisitions fell between 1991-1995 but have since stabilized, while their audio-visual materials have increased steadily. With a large increase in the population served by Tertiary Education, so have their book acquisitions grown hugely, but there has been a decline in audio-visual additions.

iii. Use and users

The count of Registered Members increased in total from 126 million to 139 million, an increase of 10.5 per cent. As this count includes those who use several libraries, the proportion it represents out of the total population (484 million) - 29 per cent - is disappointingly low. But the trend is moving upwards. Estimates for Loan Transactions at 3,543 million and Visits at 3,468 million are close and show only a small difference in trend: + 5.2% against - 1.3%. When taken together the ratio for Loan Transactions per Registered Member point to high intensity of use - moving from 26.8 to 25.5.

iv. Modernisation

Overall total estimates show the following: Workstations for users increased more than four-fold from 74,000 in 1991 to 310,000 in 1998. The stock of CD ROMs went up exponentially during the second half of the period, going from an estimated 456,000 in 1991 to 2,500,000 in 1998. The percentage of catalogue records automated is estimated to have gone up from 36 to 46 per cent.

v. Service points

Including all sectors, it is estimated that in 1998 there were 224,000 service points throughout the study area. There has been a considerable contraction since 1991, averaging 7.1%, but this has taken place particularly in the Central & Eastern European countries (CEE) where the proportionate drop was 14% and where the main closures took place in public libraries.

2. FINANCIAL TRENDS (4)

There has been greatly increased activity in Tertiary Libraries and lack of growth - overall - in the Public Library sector, with modest growth in National Libraries. The obvious expectation from this is that levels of expenditure have increased more in the Tertiary sector than in others. Here we look at the situation overall.

Table 3 Main trends in financial results
(All sectors of library)

EXPENDITURE	1991	1998	% change
<i>(in millions)</i>			
Staff	5,007	6,697	+ 34
Materials	2,342	3,121	+ 33
Electronic information	317	528	+ 67
Total revenue exp.	10,347	13,965	+ 35
INCOME ITEMS			
Fees & Charges	382	648	+ 70
'Other' (i.e. special funds)	432	1,034	+ 139
CAPITAL PAYMENTS			
	487	695	+ 43

Since staffing costs represent the largest part of the budget, expenditure on staff has increased at a rate reflected by the charge in total expenditure.

The total expenditure on conventional materials also shows an average increase, but this average conceals an estimated + 64% for Special Libraries, + 40% for Tertiary, + 27% for National, + 33% for Schools, and only + 1% for Public Libraries.

The data show a dramatic (67 per cent) increase in expenditure on electronic materials. This is heavily concentrated in the Tertiary and Special Libraries sectors - and Special Libraries are more fully represented in these statistics than ever before.

It is significant, however, that the 1998 results show electronic information still at only 15 per cent of total materials expenditure - so confirming that conventional materials are still dominant.

Perhaps the most surprising revelation in this set of statistics lies in the specifically identified 'Income Items'. The magnitude of the increase in Fees & Charges - 70 per cent - is impressive, and the pattern is virtually universal across all countries. This is a new trend.

i. The importance of the library sectors

One would expect, even over a lengthy period, to find little change in the relative size of the various library sectors. Estimates in previous surveys showed that, between 1981 and 1995 public libraries and higher education libraries increased their share of total spending on libraries - with the share of other sectors largely unchanged. In this survey we find a very different result - as illustrated in this table:

Table 4 Library sector shares

SECTOR	by total expenditure		by total staff	
	PREVIOUS ESTIMATE		PRESENT ESTIMATE	
	1981*	1995 [§]	1998	1998
National	6.0%	5.9%	5.4%	4.1%
Higher Education	15.3%	16.9%	19.9%	16.5%
Public	47.3%	49.5%	45.0%	45.2%
Special	8.6%	8.6%	21.3%	16.7%
Other Major	4.9%	4.5%	0.8%	2.2%
School	17.8%	14.7%	7.7%	15.5%

* EU States only § estimated in The Historic Database, LIBECON2000 Project Deliverable D, 1998

The main reason for these changes is the stricter application of sectoral definitions and better returns for the Special Library sector in this later canvass. In view of this major change Table 4 above also includes a column to show how different the sector proportions appear when analysed by the numbers of staff employed rather than by expenditure.

ii. Tertiary education sector

Between 1991-1998 staff plus Student totals in Tertiary education went from 1,534,000 to almost 2 million. Changes in expenditure are as shown in the following table 5.

Table 5 Tertiary libraries expenditure and income – all states

Responses			1991	1998	%	1991	1998
No.	%	EXPENDITURE	in millions	in millions	change	%	%
16	86	Employees	799	1,210	+ 51	44.7	43.5
22	93	Materials	559	780	+ 40	31.3	28.1
5	30	Electronic materials	17	81	+ 376	1.0	2.9
4	34	Automation	59	81	+ 37	3.3	2.9
6	36	Premises	170	277	+ 63	9.5	10.0
5	53	New Building & Ref't	2	5	**	**	0.2
17	56	Other expenses	183	347	+ 90	10.2	12.5
17	62	TOTAL EXP'RE	1,788	2,780	+ 55	100	100
		INCOME					
13	53	Institutional	1,686	2,466	+ 46	94.0	88.7
12	51	Fees & charges	38	77	+ 103	2.2	2.8
12	51	'Other income'	64	237	+ 270	3.8	8.5
7	32	CAPITAL PAYMENTS	83	78	- 5	4.6	2.8

iii. National Library Sector

Financial trends for national libraries are as shown in the following table.

Table 6 National libraries expenditure & income – all countries

Responses			1991	1998	%	1991	1998
No.	%	EXPENDITURE	in millions	in millions	change	%	%
19	68	Employees	272	373	+ 37	50.2	49.2
21	66	Materials	78	99	+ 27	14.3	13.1
10	8	Electronic materials	3	11	+ 267	0.5	1.4
13	79	Automation	\$1	3	**	0.1	0.4
11	39	Premises	41	51	+ 24	7.5	6.7
14	44	New Building & Ref't	29	40	+ 38	5.3	5.3
19	77	Other expenses	120	181	+ 51	22.1	23.9
21	78	TOTAL EXP'RE	544	757	+ 39	100	100
		INCOME					
17	52	Institutional	434	608	+ 40	79.8	80.3
16	46	Fees & charges	73	103	+ 41	13.8	14.0
16	49	'Other income'	35	44	+ 26	6.4	5.7
12	30	CAPITAL PAYMENTS	33	127	+ 285	6.1	16.8

§ '3' in 1993

iv. Public libraries sector

Over the seven years, service points have decreased by 18 per cent. The scale of this decline is much influenced by the position in Poland (decrease from 10,300 to 3,565). But most countries show decreases between 8 and 15 per cent.

The following general conclusions emerge from the data:

- There is a huge difference in the scale of public library operations between those countries which have had a well resourced public library service for many years and those countries without this historical tradition.
- There are some countries developing their public libraries from a low base showing significant increases since 1991 - and others with no apparent development. Many countries have a long way to go to begin to match the activity levels accepted as normal elsewhere.
- There are obvious connections between high levels of Stock, Loans and Additions to Stock - which can be studied in the statistical database.
- There are well-publicized initiatives to develop networking, IT and the Internet in public libraries. So far, with the possible exception of the UK, this does not seem to have diminished the take-up of traditional services.

Table 7 Public libraries expenditure and income – all countries

Responses			1991	1998	%	1991	1998
No.	%	EXPENDITURE	in millions	in millions	change	%	%
21	75	Employees	2,585	3,348	+ 30	50.2	53.3
22	77	Materials	758	762	+ 1	14.7	12.1
4	26	Electronic materials	0.8	4.6	x 6	0	0.1
5	24	Automation	103	167	+ 62	2.0	2.3
7	30	Premises	726	808	+ 11	14.0	12.9
10	38	New Building & Ref't	58	60	+ 3	1.1	0.9
21	63	Other expenses	914	1,130	+ 24	17.8	18.0
20	59	TOTAL EXP'RE	5,146	6,279	+ 22	99.9	100
		INCOME					
15	37	Institutional	4,870	5,632	+ 16	94.6	89.7
13	44	Fees & charges	135	316	+ 134	2.6	5.0
13	32	'Other income'	142	331	+ 133	2.8	5.3
12	51	CAPITAL PAYMENTS	353	448	+ 27	6.9	7.1

Some Future Challenges

The report's recommendations cover the need for further work and for improved statistical representation of information technology in libraries. More importantly, perhaps, they draw policy makers' attention once again to issues such as the small average size of university libraries in some countries and of public library authorities in others. Disparities in provision are quite marked and stand out from the data. The report calls upon governments to use the information provided to benchmark aspects of their services with a view to improving to the standard of the best.

References

- Fuegi, David and Ramsdale, Phillip (1997) *Library Economics in Central and Eastern Europe*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- Ramsdale, Phillip (1995) *Library economics in Europe: An Update-1981-90*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publication of the European Communities

Notes

1. John Sumsion was involved in drafting the Millennium Report and the section of this article relating to it.
2. The LIBECON2000 survey area included the States in Central & Eastern Europe (CEEC): Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, and Slovenia; the member states of the European Union (EU): Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the UK; and these other states within the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA): Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.
3. Library sectors, as defined in (ISO 2789): NATIONAL LIBRARIES, typically functioning as a "deposit" library and normally compiling a national bibliography; LIBRARIES OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, primarily serving teaching at the tertiary level; PUBLIC LIBRARIES, serving the population free of charge or for a nominal fee; SPECIAL LIBRARIES, catering for government, health services, professional associations, industrial & commercial concerns, and other specialised interests; OTHER MAJOR NON-SPECIALISED LIBRARIES, those libraries of a learned character with collections in excess of 150,000 stock items; and SCHOOL LIBRARIES, attached to all types of schools and colleges below the tertiary level of education.
4. Estimates of expenditure and income have been derived by a careful and sophisticated set of calculations aimed to extract the maximum value from those data provided, but there are particular notes of caution to be borne in mind. First, data for some large countries are missing. This weakness affects estimates of absolute value much more than it does estimates of trends over time, where there can be good confidence. Second, there are some heads and categories with a particularly low response where the confidence in the total estimates has to be qualified. For example, the tables on spending on electronic materials and on automation were completed by very few responders.