The Usage of National Library Statistics – What can be done better?

Petra Düren
Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, Germany

Ane Landøy
University of Bergen Library, Norway

Abstract

National library statistics are helpful for comparing the own library with other libraries in your own or in other countries, to give an overview about the libraries of the country and to show their development. But in comparing 22 public and academic libraries of five countries difficulties arose in finding key performance indicators in national library statistics to use. Out of this, the idea to conduct a workshop with librarians from different countries was born. In the workshop, we asked the participants for their ideas about what is good and what is missing in national library statistics; what kind of data is relevant for librarians; why not every library is participating in collecting statistics and what might be done about it. Results of this workshop will be presented and discussed in this paper.

1. Introduction

National library statistics are helpful for comparing the own library with other libraries in your own or in other countries, to give an overview about the libraries of the country and to show their development. But in comparing 22 public and academic libraries of five countries difficulties arose in finding key performance indicators in national library statistics to use.[i]
This research followed another research project[ii] about national library statistics that led to the following critical aspects:

- Good quality control of the data libraries provide is not always found.
- Mergers of libraries are not identified, and the data of previous years is not consolidated, so manual work is needed to use the data.
- The actual / last year of the statistic differs from country to country, as the data is published very late in some countries.
- The definitions – especially of e-resources-data – are unclear and with this this indicators not comparable.

To go deeper into this topic and to find out, what practitioners think, the authors conducted a workshop "The Usage of National Library Statistics – What Can Be Done Better?" at the IFLA WLIC Satellite Meeting of the Statistics and Evaluation Section "More Than Numbers: Implementing New Assessment Methods for Libraries" as well as a round table at the IFLA WLIC World Library and Information Congress – International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions 2019 in the Session "Assessment and Data Visualisation for Librarians – Statistics and Evaluation".

2. Results of a workshop and a round table with librarians from different countries

During the workshop at the IFLA WLIC Satellite Meeting of the Statistics and Evaluation Section the participants were divided – after a brief introduction into the topic – into two groups which discussed the following questions.

1. What is good about national statistics? And what is missing in national statistics?
2. What kind of data would you like to find in your national statistics, and why?
3. Why are not all libraries of the country participating, and what can be done about it?

These are some results of their discussions.

What is good about national statistics?
The general view is that these national statistics exist and that there is a lot of data is beneficial. The data can be used for analyzing the own library in comparison to other libraries, to execute a benchmarking-study.
Especially when this data is collected in a uniform way, comparable data can show performance compared with other libraries. It is then possible to demonstrate the value of the own library, but also the value of libraries overall.
It is also possible to get an overview of libraries' activities in a country.

And what is missing in national statistics?
There is no high quality of data and clear definitions are missing. But if definitions are not equal and leave room for individual interpretation, then the comparison of data is impossible, and the interpretation of results is often missing.

Furthermore there is often a delay in getting current statistics, and some concepts are too general.

What kind of data would you like to find in your national statistics, and why?
The statistics have to go beyond numbers. There should be qualitative data and traditional statistics side by side, including more qualitative analysis.
Narrative statistics, storytelling with numbers / quantitative information, are wanted as well as ROI (return on investment) data.
Also there is a huge wish for impact data and more indicators that are related to library services, in addition to "classical" indicators (e. g. loans).
Other data that librarians would like to find in national statistics are e. g. the ration of virtual vs. traditional users, and more indicators for e-resources.

Why are not all libraries of the country participating and what can be done about it?
In some countries the supply of the libraries' data for the national statistic is optional. These data submission and with this participation in the national statistics should be compulsory for all libraries.
That not all public funding depend on collected data hinders the supply of data, as there is at the moment no need for these libraries to participate.
Another aspect that complicates the collection of data is that some libraries – e. g. research institutes and public sector special libraries – are a too heterogeneous group to find a common understanding what kind of data should be collected.
But even without these hindrances there is another important aspect to consider, as technical problems sometimes arise and make it difficult to add the library's data to the national statistic.

Results from the round table-discussion at the IFLA WLIC World Library and Information Congress – International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions 2019
Also this second group of librarians sees problems that the supply of the libraries' data for the national statistic often is not compulsory, and that there are no clear definitions of the indicators, making interpretation difficult. Furthermore the quality control of the data delivered by libraries is not good enough.
A new aspect is that not in all countries the data of the national statistics are available open access for everyone.
There are countries without national statistics at all. Here one who wants to find data e. g. for benchmarking has to search for different sources "all over the country".

3. Examples of national library statistics

All in all there are or have been good national statistics, also good interpretation of the data and statistics that are well used, as the following examples show. But there are still some of the above mentioned problems.
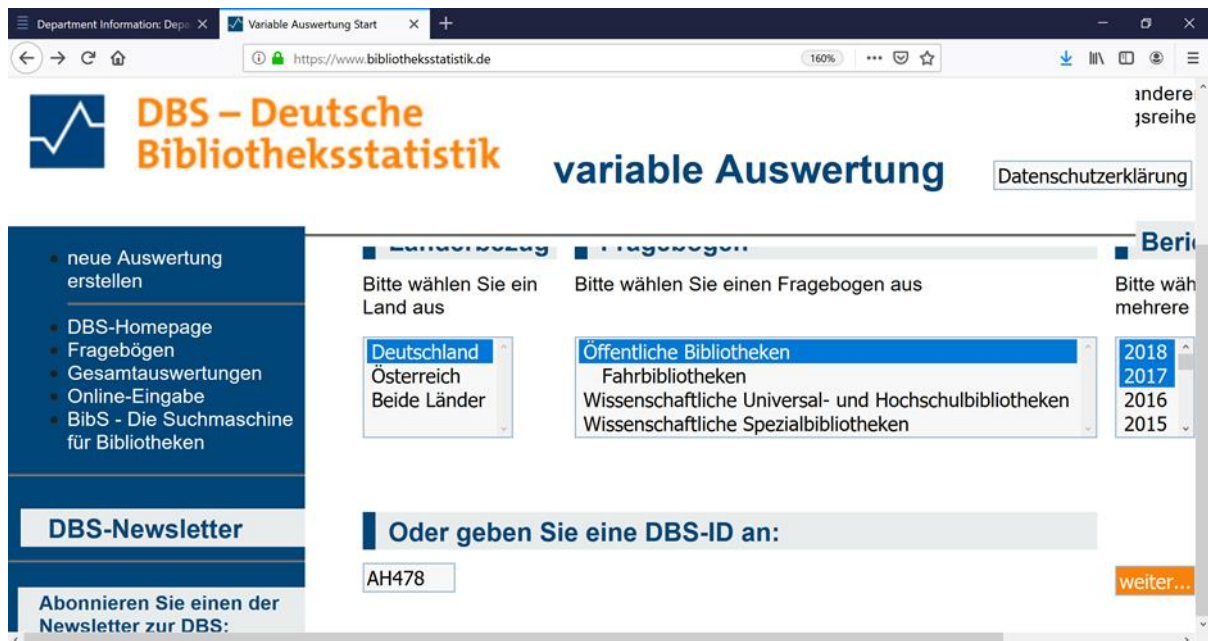
Figure 1 The German National Library Statistic (Source: https://www.bibliotheksstatistik.de/)

The German National Library Statistic (DBS) (see figure 1) follows the definitions of the ISO Standard 2789[iii], but the participation is optional and the quality control is insufficient. Also you need to know the DBS-ID to find the data of a special library directly. But unlike the handling in some other countries the DBS is available open access for everyone.

There has been – it unfortunately stopped a few years ago – a data poster (see figure 2) which summarized the most important data out of the DBS and offered well-chosen charts and diagrams that made it easy to get a lot of information about public, academic as well as special libraries at one glance.

2015

Öffentliche Bibliotheken

Entleihungen

Öffentliche Bibliotheken	Entleihungen Medien insgesamt in Tsd.	Anteil der virtuellen Entleihungen in Tsd.	Anteil der virtuellen Entleihungen in %
2013	374.901	7.063	1,9
2014	354.935	11.443	3,2
2015	363.217	16.321	4,5

Die physischen Entleihungen gehen zunehmend zurück, während die virtuellen Entleihungen in der Bibliotheksnutzung ansteigen. Jeder Bundesbürger hat 2015 aus Öffentlichen Bibliotheken durchschnittlich physisch oder virtuell 4,5 Medien pro Jahr ausgeliehen.

Medien

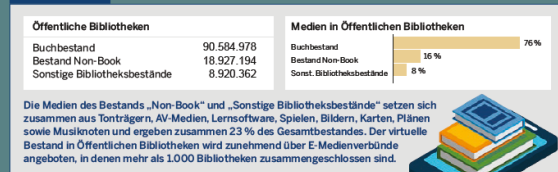| Öffentliche Bibliotheken	
Buchbestand	90.584.978
Bestand Non-Book	18.927.194
Sonstige Bibliotheksbestände	8.920.362

Medien in Öffentlichen Bibliotheken:
Buchbestand 76 %
Bestand Non-Book 16 %
Sonst. Bibliotheksbestände 8 %

Die Medien des Bestands „Non-Book" und „Sonstige Bibliotheksbestände" setzen sich zusammen aus Tonträgern, AV-Medien, Lernsoftware, Spielen, Bildern, Karten, Plänen sowie Musiknoten und ergeben zusammen 23 % des Gesamtbestandes. Der virtuell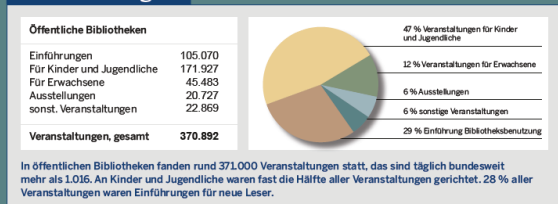e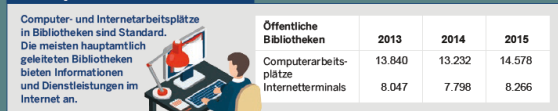 Bestand in Öffentlichen Bibliotheken wird zunehmend über E-Medienverbünde angeboten, in denen mehr als 1.000 Bibliotheken zusammengeschlossen sind.

Veranstaltungen

Öffentliche Bibliotheken	
Einführungen	105.070
Für Kinder und Jugendliche	171.927
Für Erwachsene	45.483
Ausstellungen	20.727
sonst. Veranstaltungen	22.869
Veranstaltungen, gesamt	370.892

47 % Veranstaltungen für Kinder und Jugendliche
12 % Veranstaltungen für Erwachsene
6 % Ausstellungen
6 % sonstige Veranstaltungen
29 % Einführung Bibliotheksbenutzung

In öffentlichen Bibliotheken fanden rund 371.000 Veranstaltungen statt, das sind täglich bundesweit mehr als 1.016. An Kinder und Jugendliche waren fast die Hälfte aller Veranstaltungen gerichtet. 28 % aller Veranstaltungen waren Einführungen für neue Leser.

Computer und Internet

Computer- und Internetarbeitsplätze in Bibliotheken sind Standard. Die meisten hauptamtlich geleiteten Bibliotheken bieten Informationen und Dienstleistungen im Internet an.

Öffentliche Bibliotheken	2013	2014	2015
Computerarbeitsplätze	13.840	13.232	14.578
Internetterminals	8.047	7.798	8.266

Ausgaben

Öffentliche Bibliotheken	Erwerbungsausgaben pro Besuch	Gesamtausgaben pro Bundesbürger	Gesamtausgaben in Tsd.
7.623	0,89 EUR	12,04 EUR	972.320

In Öffentlichen Bibliotheken wurden für jeden Bundesbürger mehr als 12 € ausgegeben.
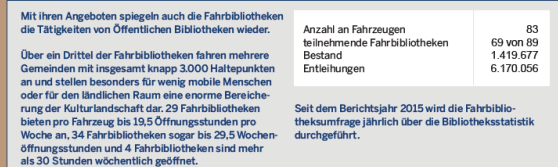
Wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken

Bestand

Wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken	Fachhochschul-/ Hochschulbibliotheken	National-/Zentrale Fachbibliotheken	Regionalbibliotheken	Universitätsbibliotheken
Buchbestand	18.274.110	48.881.661	21.835.149	166.976.387
Bestand sonst. Druckwerke	4.906.757	8.999.481	1.942.557	33.667.032
Bestand nicht-elektronischer Materialien (analoge AV-Materialien; Tonträger; Dias, Filme, Videos, Kunstdrucke, Bilder etc.)	691.165	18.492.341	1.597.114	27.438.102
Bestand Handschriften	9.894	919.631	410.244	1.151.633
Digitaler Bestand ohne digitale Zeitschriften	10.708.044	4.543.654	541.215	12.059.249
Bestand gedruckter Zeitschriften-Abonnements	40.217	132.045	54.076	182.646
Bestand digitaler Zeitschriften-Abonnements	1.519.635	116.664	188.076	2.687.298

Wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken verfügen über einen Bestand von über 387 Millionen Bücher und Zeitschriften, analog und digital. Dazu kommen rund 2,5 Millionen Handschriften und Nachlässe.

Digitale Medien

Ausgaben für Erwerbung	Ausgaben insgesamt Mio €	Ausgaben für digitale/ elektronische Medien Mio €	Anteil von den Gesamtausgaben für Erwerbung %
Fachhochschul-/ Hochschulbibliotheken	40,65	17,95	44
National-/Zentrale Fachbibliotheken	34,82	7,59	22
Regionalbibliotheken	14,70	1,71	12
Universitätsbibliotheken	237,28	147,41	62

Erstmals werden mehr als die Hälfte der Erwerbungsausgaben in Wissenschaftlichen Bibliotheken für digitale und elektronische Medien aufgewendet.

53 % Ausgaben für digitale/ elektronische Medien
47 % Ausgaben für andere Medien
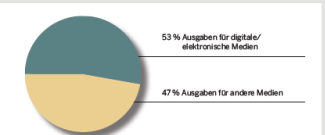
Informationskompetenz

Wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken	Benutzerschulungen (Std.)		
	2013	2014	2015
Fachhochschul-/Hochschulbibliotheken	13.313	15.550	15.550
National-/Zentrale Fachbibliotheken	2.004	2.049	2.077
Regionalbibliotheken	3.435	3.275	3.313
Universitätsbibliotheken	30.625	31.491	33.674
Summe	49.377	52.365	54.614

In Wissenschaftlichen Bibliotheken fanden mehr als 54.600 Stunden Schulungen zur Informationskompetenz statt. Die Einführung in die Nutzung einer Wissenschaftlichen Bibliothek ist in vielen Universitäten und Hochschulen in den Studienplänen verankert.
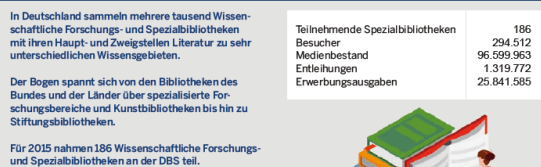
Fahrbibliotheken

Mit ihren Angeboten spiegeln auch die Fahrbibliotheken die Tätigkeiten von Öffentlichen Bibliotheken wieder.

Über ein Drittel der Fahrbibliotheken fahren mehrere Gemeinden mit insgesamt knapp 3.000 Haltepunkten an und stellen besonders für wenig mobile Menschen oder für den ländlichen Raum eine enorme Bereicherung der Kulturlandschaft dar. 29 Fahrbibliotheken bieten pro Fahrzeug bis 19,5 Öffnungsstunden pro Woche an, 34 Fahrbibliotheken sogar bis 29,5 Wochenöffnungsstunden und 4 Fahrbibliotheken sind mehr als 30 Stunden wöchentlich geöffnet.

Anzahl an Fahrzeugen	83
teilnehmende Fahrbibliotheken	69 von 89
Bestand	1.419.677
Entleihungen	6.170.056

Seit dem Berichtsjahr 2015 wird die Fahrbibliotheksumfrage jährlich über die Bibliotheksstatistik durchgeführt.

Spezialbibliotheken

In Deutschland sammeln mehrere tausend Wissenschaftliche Forschungs- und Spezialbibliotheken mit ihren Haupt- und Zweigstellen Literatur zu sehr unterschiedlichen Wissensgebieten.

Der Bogen spannt sich von den Bibliotheken des Bundes und der Länder über spezialisierte Forschungsbereiche und Kunstbibliotheken bis hin zu Stiftungsbibliotheken.

Für 2015 nahmen 186 Wissenschaftliche Forschungs- und Spezialbibliotheken an der DBS teil.

Teilnehmende Spezialbibliotheken	186
Besucher	294.512
Medienbestand	96.599.963
Entleihungen	1.319.772
Erwerbungsausgaben	25.841.585

Figure 2 Data poster for the DBS
(source: https://service-wiki.hbz-nrw.de/display/DBS/Datenposter%2C+BJ+2007+-+2015)

In Norway for example, the National Library of Norway collects data from school, public and academic libraries. The data are aggregated before being published at the National Library webpage and at Statistics Norway, but it is possible to access the "raw data" – the data that has been submitted by the libraries in a five-year time span, separately for each library type. Unfortunately, not all libraries are submitting good quality data.

The lack of comparable data is also influenced by the fact that Norwegian public libraries are small (half of them have less than two members of staff in 2018). This obviously influences the statistical accuracy and interest, and it will be interesting to see if the widespread mergers of public libraries that follow the reorganisation of municipalities and regions in Norway will help. Also, the national library statistics for public libraries are said to move from the municipality statistics given for financial statistics to Statistics Norway. In addition, the National Library of Norway promised to implement a better and more intuitive statistic tool.

Also for example in South Africa "[t]here seems to be consensus among academic libraries […] that statistics have to be collected and made available nationally."[iv] "In south Africa, ever since its inception, CHELSA recognised the need for and potential usefulness of a common set of standards that should guide libraries in the quantitative and qualitative assessment of their services."[v] Here the focus is not only on quantitative but also on qualitative data, as was brought up as a wish in the above mentioned workshop. At 2015 "work [was] […] in progress to develop and sustain a national library database for university libraries for The Committee of Higher Education Libraries of South Africa (CHELSA)."[vi]

And – as another example – there has been a Russian National Standard developed that "[…] creates conditions not only for drawing comparisons but also for accurate analysis to be used in planning, accounting, and forecasting."[vii] The idea of the developers of this standard was that it can be used "[…] in all types of library, independent of institutional affiliation, legal position (whether the library is a separate legal entity or another legal entity), or the organization compiling the information."[viii] The "unified indicators and units of calculation will promote uniformity in the primary statistical data submitted."[ix] As can be seen, in this example of a national library statistic standard one goal was the definition of unified indicators. The missing of clear definitions of indicators was one of the aspects that have been criticized by the participants of the workshop as well as the round table.

4. Conclusions

National library statistics are needed and wished for and should made available open access for everyone. The delivering of data should be compulsory for all libraries and the indicators should be clearly defined so that no interpretation is needed or possible. Next to quantitative data qualitative data is needed and also an analyzation of the data and an interpretation of indicators. As there is often a delay in getting current statistics, these should be published as fast as possible.

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[i] Düren, Petra/Goldstein, Stephane/Landøy, Ane/Repanovici, Angela/Saarti, Jarmo 2019.

[ii] Presentation "Experiences using national statistics while doing research in 22 libraries in five countries" (Düren, Petra/Laitinen, Markku Antero/Landøy, Ane/Repanovici, Angela) at the QQML 2019 Conference – The 11th Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries International Conference; paper "Experiences using national statistics while doing research in 22 libraries in five countries" (Düren, Petra/Laitinen, Markku Antero/Landøy, Ane/Repanovici, Angela) [not yet published].

[iii] https://www.hbz-nrw.de/produkte/bibliotheksstatistik

[iv] Chiware/Becker 2015, p. 6.

[v] Chiware/Becker 2015, p. 2.

[vi] Chiware/Becker 2015, p. 1.

[vii] Dzhigo 2015, p. 148.

[viii] Dzhigo 2015, p. 142.

[ix] Dzhigo 2015, p. 148.