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Librarians facing the crisis: ACTION

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Abstract:

Concern about how financial crisis has hit Spanish libraries in recent years has driven the reaction of the library sector not only to evaluate the results and indicators about collection building and high use of the libraries services, but now also to provide tools which evidence the value social of the library. A methodology has been defined to demonstrate that libraries contribute to a competitive economy and to provide library managers with arguments to defend their position against competition from other sectors that libraries are an investment and not an expense. Nevertheless as we know, financial crisis can be solved if we react and be brave but the problems around e-reading and copyright issues in libraries could get worse if librarians don't act as soon as possible.

Keywords: Diputació de Barcelona, FESABID, social value of libraries, financial crisis, Spanish Library System, Library budgets, Library evaluation, Library Management,.

Librarians are currently deeply aware about the effects of the crisis.

Usually when we talk about crisis we talk about economic crisis and especially budget cuts. In Spain the effects of the economic crisis in libraries are still quite profound as we can see reflected on the facts and results of recent years. The crisis is a very sad discussion topic, and is heartbreaking because Spanish libraries have changed considerably in the way librarians and policy makers have driving library services during the last 20th years in order to extend and expand the Spanish Library System and has made an arrest in evolution, even better in 'involution' is suffering since 2008.

Public Libraries, who make up 62.9% of total Spanish libraries, had an average budget cut of 35.9% between 2008 and 2012.

Talking about Collections

The most serious effect of these huge cuts has been the 43.6 % decrease in purchases of their collections. The biggest cut was in audiovisual material, which accumulated a decrease of 43.6% between 2008 and 2012, mostly in audiovisual and electronic records. A significant reduction was also observed in the book collections, which were a third less compared to the increase in 2008.

The cuts in spending on book collections are in my point of view, the most unfortunate result of the effects of the financial crisis.

How can librarians provide information, books and materials for our users if we don't have enough money for collection building?

Talking about staff

Public libraries in 2012 had nearly 600 (594) fewer employees than in 2010. This has had a very negative impact on employee morale throughout the library community in our country.

We all know that it is demoralising to be expected to work harder and longer hours, in return for fewer wages, not to mention less investment in employees through training and less vacation entitlement. These circumstances have led in many cases to a sense of panic among employees, most of them civil servants with low salaries.

In Spain, the average reduction of the number of employees in libraries has been 20% and this means a reduction of less than 1 person in 5 people in the workforce.

Given that the average employee at every point of service the library is 1.91 employees today, compared with 2.5 per point of library service in 2008, we note that this indicator goes back to that of 2002, when the average was a little higher, at 2.0 employees per service point library.

Talking about results

The two main negative effects of the financial crisis have been the poor supply of library collection with few new books and/or other media, and the resulting low morale of staff.

On the one hand there is the paradox that in Spain, there has been an increase in visitor numbers to the library, as opposed to the bad feeling from librarians who are aware of the financial constraints and impacts on collection building and also changing content consumption habits.

Economic investment in libraries has stalled in 2012 and collections are therefore not as attractive as they were in the past, and there have been a change in the habits of library users.

The 6.1% decrease in borrowing was mainly in audiovisual, sound recordings and periodicals, because subscriptions were cancelled while there has been a slight increase in the lending of books. Of course, the decrease in the lending of audio and visual media can be explained by changes in consumption patterns of music, where hardware has now been replaced by access and downloads via the Internet.

Regarding e-books lending, other than a few exceptions, there has not yet been a collection in Spanish libraries.

A large proportion of the population of Spain is still unemployed: by April 2014 unemployment is still 25.1% among adults and 53.5% among young adults. I believe these people need a warm and comfortable place to relax, as is offered in the reading rooms of our

libraries. Our internet services are also invaluable. Libraries have given shelter to thousands and thousands of people. This is clear from the municipal survey assessment year after year in Barcelona, as well as other cities of this province.

The demand for library services has grown steadily and there has been an exponential increase in users. Visits have increased by approximately 20.5%. The number of registered users has almost doubled, has gone from 8.2 to 15.2 million.

And let me mention again this paradox:

Librarians felt and still are feeling unhappy because of the limited supply of their library collection and what's more, they are expected to cover the work of their colleague who have been dismissed; on the other hand, users and citizens are very proud of our library network, and are giving good reviews in evaluation surveys of public services to libraries and librarians in their daily work.

ACTION

The phenomenon of such an enormous increase of use and the main objective to clearly demonstrate the social value added by public libraries to society has driven [Diputació de Barcelona](#) (Barcelona's Provincial Council) in charge of the [Xarxa de Biblioteques Municipals de la Província de Barcelona](#) (Barcelona's Province Public Libraries Network), to manage the study: [Public value of Municipal Libraries Network of Barcelona Province \(XBM\)](#) in order to try to measure how much, financially speaking, public libraries contributes to society.

Library services need to be seen as an investment, and in any case as an expense.

Alongside the [Consejo de Cooperación Bibliotecaria](#), the Spanish National Libraries Council, decided to include this important issue in the [Strategic Plan of the Council](#) as well, establishing a [Strategic experts Group for Socio-Economic Impact Study Libraries in Society](#), coordinated by [FESABID, Federación Española de Sociedades de Archivística, Biblioteconomía, Documentación y Museística](#) (Spanish Federation of Libraries, Archives, Documentation and Museums Associations) including libraries sectors as [REBIUN](#), the Spanish Universities Libraries Network, representatives of public libraries as Barcelona's Public Libraries Network as well, experts of several Spanish Regions and the Spanish Ministry of Education Culture and Sports working together to shed light on this important point of focus.

FESABID in fulfilment of one of the priority objectives set out in the 2013 Activity Plan (Line of Action 2 — Study and Analysis) kindly wanted to keep the libraries agent's visions of in an important cooperation work. The Federation was the co-ordinator of these thoughts after seeing how the financial crisis was changing the face of the Spanish Library System and also concerned how to manage the new scenario where libraries were decreasing their development. The Federation started its action by working in a cooperation project to give a tools kit to librarians and, most importantly, for keeping them and society aware of the importance of the investment in libraries and information centres. The useful result was the Study of the Economic and Social Value. With these two main objectives: The useful result was the [Study of the Economic and Social Value of Information Services: Libraries. Report of Findings. Co-ordinated by: José Antonio Gómez Yáñez & Estudio de Sociología Consultores.](#)

With these two main objectives:

Define a methodology that convincingly demonstrates that libraries contribute to contemporary competitive economies

Provide library managers with arguments and information with which to defend their position against competition from other sectors that have already defined methodologies that measure, to a greater or lesser extent, their contribution to society in monetary terms.

The main goal of this study is to provide evidence based facts and data about the value of information services and libraries in particular, and their contribution to society and the national economy.

Libraries are not a centre of expense, they are an investment - a profitable investment in the economic field and there is a return of investment to society as a whole as a result.

We need:

to show that libraries are not a cost but an investment

to approach the way we present our outcomes to other public services outcomes

to show that libraries are contributing to building stronger societies

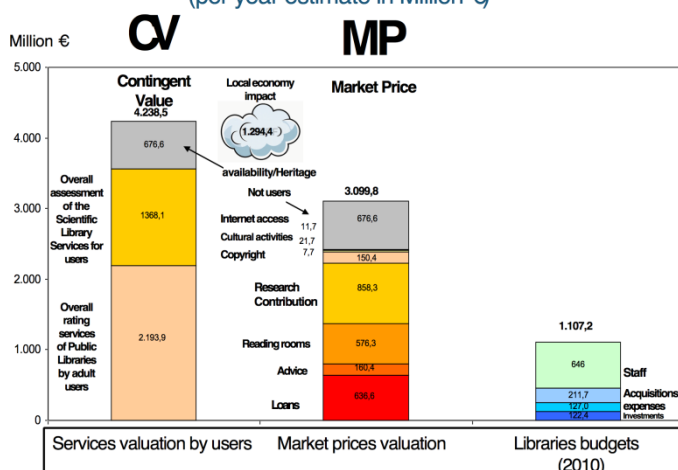
What are we getting with this study?



Two methods were used in:

the Market Pricing method (MP), which uses the price of alternative services as the monetisation criterion and the Contingent Valuation method (CV) based on surveys that ask users to estimate the cost of services provided free of charge where they are provided by private companies at market prices.

Economic and social contribution of the libraries (per year estimate in Million €)



(See the economical and social contribution of the libraries per year estimate in Million Euros)

In large numbers, libraries contribute between 3,099.8 and 4,238.8 million euro to society per year, depending on the system used for estimation. All data were certified of the [INE, Instituto Nacional de Estadística](#) (Spanish Statistical Office).

The Spanish Library System (public, academic and scientific libraries) contributes to between 3,100 and 4,200 million euro per year to society - facts 2010 -, and the return of investment (ROI) is between 2.80 and 3.83 euro per euro invested, based on the annual investment and expenditure of 1.10 billion euro.

The lower figure (3,100 million euro per year) is the result of (PM) Market Pricing method to the services provided by libraries to researchers, academics, professionals, students and users of public libraries.

The higher figure 4,200 million euro per year as (VC) Contingent Valuation method, meaning what users would have paid for the services offered by libraries, had they been provided by a private company.

And specific conclusions were that citizens' uses of public libraries would pay 17.7 euro per month to library services if they had to pay a private company. University or academic library users would pay 28.2 euro per month. And "non-users" of libraries, valued at 676.6 million euro per year, to have at their disposal an extensive network of libraries throughout the country, its contribution in increasing the level of culture and its fundamental role in the conservation of cultural and literacy, local and national heritage; willing to pay, through their taxes, the amount 32.1 euro per year for maintenance of the network and its services.

According to the INE, each citizen pays 32 euro taxes per year to maintain library network services, compared to this, the measurement of the cost of a user - type public library is 212 euro per year; considered is the amount that would have had to pay for such services, if a private company had provided them. For academic and research libraries, user valuation services which may be provided, rises to 338 euro per year, when the average annual investment from tax is 230 euro.

As you can see the results of this work show the position information services and libraries in particular, have on our economy and our society.

Qualitative facts

Concluding this brief presentation of this important study, let's summarize also the qualitative facts that were born:

Libraries are the most highly valued cultural and educational public service.

Libraries are seen as welcoming and comfortable meeting places.

Professional help by librarians is valued at the top.

A large proportion of non-users would be willing to participate in the activities libraries organize.

Situation and trends

Libraries are evolving from a place to read and borrow, to becoming a multipurpose space in which technology plays an increasing prominent role.

Despite this, libraries in Spain are not still perceived as being particularly helpful when looking for work or trying to enhance professional skills, although new users say that they use them for that purpose.

Crisis, as we know, also means change. I believe we are in front of a double crisis nowadays. Of course, facing a very well known economical crisis which we are fighting and action and reaction could be a medium-term solution if we are also willing to solve the lack of national sponsorship laws which could benefit taxes to private companies who help libraries.

But let me beg for your attention by asking you as important managers of libraries the following questions:

- Is our libraries mission still up to date?
- Do governments have a good understanding about the role of the libraries?
- Do librarians, as we are, know how to manage the new paradigm of access to information, building collections, e-reading and copyright issues?
- Do librarians advocate for the right to e-read?

And this brings me to the end of my speech, my dear colleagues:

Don't leave these important issues to anyone else. Financial crisis in libraries nowadays can be insignificant compared to how the e-read changes can bring us a new paradigm to manage libraries collections in the very near future. We have to be responsible of this essential part of our mission in the libraries field, that is provide access to information and the guide to citizens into the content they need for their development.