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Information and documentation — Methods and procedures for assessing the impact of libraries

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Information and documentation — Methods and procedures for assessing the impact of libraries

*Information et documentation — Méthodes et procédures pour
évaluer l'impact des bibliothèques*



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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

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The committee responsible for this document is ISO/TC 46, *Information and documentation*, Subcommittee SC 8, *Quality — Statistics and performance evaluation*.

Introduction

This International Standard provides guidance to the library community on methods for assessing the impact and value of libraries. It was developed in response to worldwide demand for specifications of library impact assessment.

The methods described in this International Standard do not reflect all possible methods or evaluation techniques, but are those seen to be most heavily used and that have proved most effective for assessing library impact. This International Standard is not intended to exclude the use of assessment methods not specified in it.

There are many different types of libraries, with different tasks and populations, having a range of unique characteristics (structure, funding, governance, etc.), and affected by a number of situational factors. Since there is such a wide variation around the world, it is important to understand that not all methods described in this International Standard are useful to all libraries.

[Annex A](#) of this International Standard gives examples of impact surveys. [Annex B](#) recommends a choice of methods for different purposes. [Annex C](#) describes the case that library impact is assessed within broader institutional and organisational assessment.

Information and documentation — Methods and procedures for assessing the impact of libraries

1 Scope

This International Standard defines terms for impact assessment of libraries and specifies methods for such assessment

- for the purpose of strategic planning and internal quality management of libraries;
- to facilitate comparison of library impact over time and between libraries of similar type and mission;
- to promote the libraries' role and value for learning and research, education and culture, social and economic life;
- to support political decisions on levels of service and strategic goals for libraries.

This International Standard considers the impact of libraries on individuals, institutions and society. It is applicable to all types of libraries in all countries. However, not all methods described in this International Standard apply to all libraries. Limitations on the applicability of individual methods are specified in the descriptions.

2 Normative references

The following documents, in whole or in part, are normatively referenced in this document and are indispensable for its application. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 2789:2013, *Information and documentation — International library statistics*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

3.1

academic library

library whose primary function is to cover the information needs of learning and research

Note 1 to entry: This includes libraries of institutions of higher education and general research libraries.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.1.1]

3.2

access

ability of reaching and using a service or facility

3.3

accessibility

ease of reaching and using a service or facility

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.2]

3.4
active user

registered user who has visited or made use of library facilities or services during the reporting period

Note 1 to entry: This may include the use of electronic library services, if it is possible to identify electronic use and virtual visits of the individual user, or if data can be assessed with the help of surveys.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.3]

3.5
anecdotal evidence

evidence based on anecdotes or stories, obtained informally from personal observations and experiences, not collected systematically nor empirically tested

3.6
availability

degree to which content, documents, facilities or services are actually provided by the library at the time required by users

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.6]

3.7
benefit

helpful or good effect, or something intended to help

3.8
consumer surplus

amount of money by which consumers value a product or service above its purchase price

3.9
contingent valuation

method for assessing the economic value of non-profit institutions and projects of public utility depending on potential users' responses to survey questions, such as what they are willing to pay for a benefit or feature (willingness-to-pay), or what they would accept as financial compensation if a certain benefit or feature was missing (willingness-to-accept)

Note 1 to entry: The method is used in environmental protection and health care, for example.

3.10
cost-benefit analysis

process that assesses the relation between the cost of an undertaking and the monetary value of the resulting benefits

3.11
critical incident technique
CIT

research approach designed to draw out the most memorable aspects of an event or experience

Note 1 to entry: Critical incident technique can be used in individual interviews, focus group interviews or surveys.

3.12
cultural economics

branch of economics that studies the relation of culture to economic outcomes and explores cultural phenomena as economic factors

3.13
data mining

computational process that identifies patterns by analysing quantitative data from different perspectives and dimensions, categorizing it, and summarizing potential relationships and impacts

3.14

digitization

process of converting analogue materials into digital form

Note 1 to entry: Digitization for document supply from the library collection to a user or institution is excluded

Note 2 to entry: Digitization for preservation purposes is included.

Note 3 to entry: Mass digitization is included.

Note 4 to entry: Purchase of electronic copies for replacing print copies is excluded.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.3.15]

3.15

document

recorded information or material object, which can be treated as a unit in a documentation process

Note 1 to entry: Documents can differ in form and characteristics.

[SOURCE: ISO 5127:2001, definition 1.2.02]

3.16

economic impact

effect of a policy, institution, programme, or event on the economy of a given area

Note 1 to entry: Economic impact is usually measured in terms of changes in economic growth (output or value added) and associated changes in jobs (employment) and income (wages).

3.17

effectiveness

measure of the degree to which given objectives are achieved

Note 1 to entry: An activity is effective if it maximizes the results it was established to produce.

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.15]

3.18

efficiency

measure of the utilization of resources to realize a given objective

Note 1 to entry: An activity is efficient if it minimizes the use of resources, or produces better performance with the same resources.

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.16]

3.19

electronic collection

all resources in electronic form in the library collection, whether born digital or digitized

Note 1 to entry: The electronic collection includes databases, electronic serials, and digital documents. Free Internet resources which have been catalogued by the library in its online catalogue or a database should be counted separately.

Note 2 to entry: The resources can be networked, installed on stand-alone workstations or stored on physical carriers.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.3.21]

3.20

electronic service

library service delivered via electronic means, whether from local servers or provided via networks

Note 1 to entry: Electronic library services include the online catalogue, the library website, the electronic collection, electronic document delivery (mediated), electronic reference service, user training by electronic means, services for mobile devices, services for interactive use (including services on social networks), and Internet access offered via the library.

Note 2 to entry: This does not include booking physical services (e.g. rooms or library tours) by electronic means.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.8]

3.21

evaluation

process of estimating the effectiveness, efficiency, utility and relevance of a service or facility

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.19]

3.22

event

pre-arranged activity with cultural, educational, social, political, scholarly, or other intent, e.g. exhibitions, author visits, literary discussions, workshops, etc.

Note 1 to entry: Only events arranged by the library on its own or in partnership with other institutions are included, whether inside or outside the library premises. Events inside the library premises organized by institutions outside the library without the library's cooperation are excluded.

Note 2 to entry: User training lessons and library tours are excluded.

Note 3 to entry: Ongoing programmes are included. Each session of a programme is counted as one event.

Note 4 to entry: Virtual events are included.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.9]

3.23

focus group interview

focus group discussion

group interview in the form of a moderated discussion among a small number of selected individuals on topics introduced by the moderator

3.24

goal

desired state of affairs to be achieved by the implementation of agreed policies

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.24]

3.25

impact

difference or change in an individual or group resulting from the contact with library services

Note 1 to entry: The change can be tangible or intangible.

3.26

information literacy

the ability to recognize a need for information and to identify, retrieve, evaluate, and use information effectively

Note 1 to entry: Literacy in the sense of being able to read and write with a minimal level of proficiency is fundamental for information literacy.

Note 2 to entry: This includes the skills for using information technology to access and retrieve information.

3.27

informational question

directional and/or administrative inquiry delivered to library staff

Note 1 to entry: This includes e.g. questions for locating staff or facilities, questions regarding opening times and registering procedures and questions about handling equipment such as printers or computer terminals.

Note 2 to entry: The question can be delivered personally or by means of telephone, regular mail, fax or electronic media (via email, the library website or other networked communication mechanisms).

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.13]

3.28

input

contribution of resources in support of a library (e.g. funding, staff, collections, space, equipment)

3.29

Internet access

Internet connection by a user from a workstation owned by the library or from a user's private computer in the library via the library's network

Note 1 to entry: Internet accesses can only be counted if users have registered or authenticated themselves when accessing the Internet.

Note 2 to entry: Internet access via a user's private computer (e.g. laptop or hand-held) via the library's wireless network inside the library should be counted and reported separately.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.17]

3.30

interview

oral questioning technique which results in a transfer of information from the interviewee to an interviewer or researcher

Note 1 to entry: This technique obtains direct reactions to questions, in contrast to written questionnaires or self-assessment (self-recording).

Note 2 to entry: Interviews can be subdivided according to the number of interviewees into one-to-one interviews and group interviews.

Note 3 to entry: Interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured.

Note 4 to entry: Where semi-structured or unstructured interviews are used with a group of respondents, these are usually described as focus groups or group discussions.

3.31

library

organization, or part of an organization, the main aim of which is to facilitate the use of such information resources, services and facilities as are required to meet the informational, research, educational, cultural or recreational needs of its users

Note 1 to entry: The supply of the required information resources can be accomplished by building and maintaining a collection and/or by organizing access to information resources.

Note 2 to entry: These are the basic requirements for a library and do not exclude any additional resources and services incidental to its main purpose.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.1.6]

3.32

library collection

all documents provided by a library for its users

Note 1 to entry: Comprises information resources held locally and remote resources for which access rights have been acquired.

Note 2 to entry: Access rights can be acquired by the library itself, by a consortium and/or through external funding.

Note 3 to entry: Acquisition is to be understood as deliberately selecting a document, securing access rights and including it in the online catalogue or other databases of the library. Interlibrary lending and document delivery are excluded.

Note 4 to entry: Does not include links to Internet resources for which the library has not secured access rights by legal agreements (e.g. legal deposit right), license or other contractual and/or cooperative agreement. Free Internet resources which have been catalogued by the library in its online catalogue or a database should be counted separately.

Note 5 to entry: Documents in institutional repositories are not included, but should be counted separately, if the library is involved in collecting the items and/or operating the repository.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.3.28]

3.33

library of an institution of higher education

library whose primary function is to serve students, academic and professional staff in universities and other institutions of education at the third (tertiary) level and above

Note 1 to entry: It may also serve the general public.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.1.7]

3.34

library website

unique domain on the Internet consisting of a collection of web pages that is published by a library to provide access to the library's services and resources

Note 1 to entry: The pages of a website are usually interconnected by the use of hypertext links.

Note 2 to entry: Excludes documents that fit the definitions of electronic collection and free Internet resources that may be linked from the library website.

Note 3 to entry: Excludes web services in the library's domain that are operated on behalf of other organizations.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.18]

3.35

longitudinal study

two or more surveys, in which the same or a similar survey instrument is administered more than once to the same population, after a suitable time period has elapsed, to measure changes in patterns of usage, perceptions, attitudes, etc.

3.36

mission

statement approved by the authorities formulating the organization's goals and its choices in services and products development

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.33]

3.37

national library

library that is responsible for acquiring and conserving copies of all relevant documents in the country in which the library is located; it may function as a legal deposit library

Note 1 to entry: A national library will also normally perform some or all of the following functions: produce the national bibliography, hold and keep up to date a large and representative collection of foreign literature including documents about the country; act as a national bibliographic information centre; compile union catalogues; supervise the administration of other libraries and/or promote collaboration; coordinate a research and development service, etc.

Note 2 to entry: The definition of “national library” allows for more than one national library in a country.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.1.9]

3.38

nominal group interview

group interview without group interaction where each group member writes down answers to the moderator’s questions which are then discussed and prioritized one by one by the group

3.39

non-user

person belonging to a specific library’s population to be served but not using that library’s physical and/or electronic services

Note 1 to entry: The definition includes former users of the library.

3.40

objective

specific target for an activity to be attained as a contribution to achieving the goal of an organization

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.34]

3.41

observation

method of data collection in which the situation of interest is watched and the relevant facts, actions and behaviours are recorded

Note 1 to entry: There can be rating scales that the researcher would use when observing the behaviour.

3.42

open access

unrestricted access to information, documents or information services

Note 1 to entry: In a narrower sense, this means that information content is made freely available via the Internet.

[SOURCE: ISO 5127:2001, definition 5.2.11, modified – Note 1 has been added.]

3.43

opening hours

hours in a normal week when the main physical services of the library (e.g. reference and loan services, reading rooms) are available to users

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.4.7]

3.44

outcome

direct, pre-defined effect of the output related to goals and objectives of the library’s planning (e.g. number of users, user satisfaction levels)

Note 1 to entry: This includes outcomes that concern the library’s institution or community.

3.45

output

products of library processes (e.g. number of titles catalogued, number of loans, number of reference questions answered)

3.46

performance

effectiveness of the provision of services by the library and the efficiency of the allocation and use of resources in providing services

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.36]

3.47

performance indicator

numerical, symbolic or verbal expression, derived from library statistics and data used to characterize the performance of a library

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.37]

3.48

population to be served

number of individuals for whom the library is set up to provide its services and materials

Note 1 to entry: For public libraries, this will normally be the population of the legal service area (authority); for libraries of an institution of higher education, this will normally be the total of academic and professional staff plus students.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.25]

3.49

potential user

person belonging to a library's population to be served

Note 1 to entry: This definition includes both users and non-users of the library's services.

3.50

process

set of interrelated or interacting activities which transforms inputs into outputs (e.g. cataloguing, lending, reference service)

3.51

public library

general library that is open to the public and that serves the whole population of a local or regional community and is usually financed, in whole or in part, from public funds

Note 1 to entry: A public library is defined as open to the public, even if its services are primarily intended for a special part of the population to be served, such as children, visually impaired persons, or hospital patients. Its basic services are free of charge or available for a subsidized fee. This definition includes services provided to schools by a public library organization and services provided to public libraries in a region by a regional organization.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.1.10]

3.52

qualitative data

data describing, but not measuring the attributes or properties of an object, in particular the reasons for human actions

Note 1 to entry: The attributes can be categorized into classes that may be assigned numeric values.

3.53

quality

degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements

Note 1 to entry: The term “quality” can be used with adjectives such as poor, good or excellent.

Note 2 to entry: “Inherent”, as opposed to “assigned”, means existing in something, especially as a permanent characteristic.

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2005, definition 3.1.1]

3.54

quantitative data

data in numerical form expressing a certain quantity, amount or range, amenable to statistical manipulation

Note 1 to entry: Quantitative data are usually expressed in measurement units, e.g. number of loans, percentage of interviewees visiting the library.

3.55

questionnaire

a set of questions for a survey or a structured or semi-structured interview

Note 1 to entry: The questions may be closed (answerable by checking one of several predetermined answers) or open (requiring participants to answer in their own words).

3.56

reference question

information contact that involves the knowledge or use of one or more information sources (such as printed and non-printed materials, machine-readable databases, the library’s own and other institutions’ catalogues) by library staff

Note 1 to entry: May also involve recommendations, interpretation, or instruction in the use of such sources.

Note 2 to entry: One reference question may address several issues.

Note 3 to entry: The question can be delivered personally or by means of telephone, regular mail, fax or electronic media (via email, the library website or other networked communications mechanisms).

Note 4 to entry: It is essential that libraries do not include informational (directional and administrative) questions, e.g. for locating staff or facilities, regarding opening times or about handling equipment such as printers or computer terminals.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.26]

3.57

reference service

provision of information and assistance, in response to requests, by an information and documentation organization

[SOURCE: ISO 5127:2001, definition 5.5.06]

3.58

registered user

person or organization registered with a library in order to use its collection and/or services within or away from the library

Note 1 to entry: Users may be registered upon their request or automatically when enrolling in the institution.

Note 2 to entry: The registration should be monitored at regular intervals, minimum every 3 years, so that inactive users can be removed from the register.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.28]

3.59

reliability

degree to which a measure repeatedly and consistently produces the same result

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.44]

3.60

return on investment

ROI

relationship between the total economic benefit of the library and the total resources invested in the library

Note 1 to entry: Return on investment is usually calculated for the fiscal year, dividing the estimated economic benefit by the total expenditure on the library.

Note 2 to entry: ROI can be calculated for the whole library, or for a specific library service.

3.61

school library

library attached to all types of schools below the third (tertiary) level of education whose primary function is to serve the pupils and teachers of such a school

Note 1 to entry: A school library may also serve the general public.

Note 2 to entry: This includes libraries and resource collections in all educational institutions below the third level, which may be described as “Colleges”, “Colleges of Further Education”, “Vocational Institutes”, etc.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.1.11]

3.62

self-assessment

process of critically reviewing the quality of one's own skills, knowledge, or confidence

Note 1 to entry: The reviewing is normally done through a paper-based or online questionnaire where some or all of the questions require respondents to rate themselves on a scale.

3.63

self-recording

users' record of their behaviour and/or attitudes in information seeking and information use over a period of time, usually in the form of a diary

Note 1 to entry: The record can be used for identifying library impact.

Note 2 to entry: The diary can be structured, giving a guideline to what should be observed, or unstructured, leaving the choice of subjects to the writer.

3.64

social impact

influence of a library's existence and services on the population in the surrounding community or on society in general

3.65

social return on investment

SROI

method for measuring extra-financial value (i.e. environmental and social value not currently reflected in conventional financial accounts)

3.66

special library

independent library covering one discipline or particular field of knowledge or a special regional interest

Note 1 to entry: The term special library includes libraries primarily serving a specific category of users, or primarily devoted to a specific form of document, or libraries sponsored by an organization to serve its own work-related objectives.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.1.12 modified; note 2 to entry has been deleted]

3.67

survey

method of data collection using written questionnaires for gathering information from the whole or a sample of a defined population

Note 1 to entry: The survey can be conducted face to face, via handouts, telephone, email, or Internet.

3.68

target population

groups of actual and potential users appropriate to an individual library as the object of a specific service or as the primary users of specific materials

[SOURCE: ISO 11620:—, definition 3.47]

3.69

target population with special needs

part of a library's population to be served with needs that require special library services

Note 1 to entry: The special needs can be caused by physical and health impairment, economic disadvantages (e.g. long-term unemployment), cultural differences (e.g. non-native speakers, new arrivals), educational background, or other needs that require special library services.

Note 2 to entry: Children, young people and seniors without additional needs are not included.

Note 3 to entry: A library may have more than one target population with special needs.

Note 4 to entry: An individual may belong to more than one such target population.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.35]

3.70

user

recipient of library services

Note 1 to entry: The recipient may be a person or an institution, including libraries.

Note 2 to entry: Library services include electronic services, physical services and visiting the library premises.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.36]

3.71

user place

place provided for users for reading or studying, whether with or without seating or equipment

Note 1 to entry: Includes places in carrels, in seminar and study rooms, and in the audiovisual and children's departments of the library, and informal seating in lounges, group areas, etc.

Note 2 to entry: Excludes places in halls, lecture and auditory theatres intended for audiences of special events. Also excludes floor space and cushions on which users may sit.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.4.11]

3.72

user satisfaction survey

survey administered to a sample of a library's users to find out how they rate the quality of their library experiences, and any suggestions for improvement

Note 1 to entry: The survey may be conducted face to face, via handouts, telephone, email, or Internet.

Note 2 to entry: The survey can contain questions about user status, how often and how they normally use the resources and services the library provides.

Note 3 to entry: In a longitudinal study, the same or a similar survey instrument is administered more than once, after a suitable interval of time has elapsed, to measure changes in patterns of usage, perceptions, attitudes, etc.

3.73

user training

training programme set up with a specified lesson plan, which aims at specific learning outcomes for the use of library and other information services

Note 1 to entry: User training can be offered as a tour of the library, as library tuition, or as a web-based service for users.

Note 2 to entry: The duration of lessons is irrelevant.

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.37]

3.74

validity

extent to which the results of a research process represent what was intended

[SOURCE: ISO 20252:2006, definition 2.62]

3.75

value

importance that stakeholders (funding institutions, politicians, the public, users, staff) attach to libraries and which is related to the perception of actual or potential benefit

Note 1 to entry: Monetary value can be included.

3.76

virtual visit

one continuous cycle of user activities on the library website by users from outside the library's IP address space (usually from outside the library premises), regardless of the number of pages or elements viewed

Note 1 to entry: A virtual visit typically starts when a user accesses the library website after visiting an external page, and ends if no activity has been recorded for a defined period of time (recommended maximum is 30 min). Another access after a longer interval initiates a new visit.

Note 2 to entry: A virtual visitor should at least be identified by a unique cookie and/or by a unique combination of the user's IP address and browser string (user agent). Known web spiders and harvesters should be excluded.

Note 3 to entry: Adapted from ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.39.

3.77

visit

person (individual) entering the library premises

[SOURCE: ISO 2789:2013, definition 2.2.40]

4 Definition and description of library impact

4.1 General

Libraries are generally able to provide at least basic data about the input into their services (funding, staff, collections, space, equipment) and the output of those services (loans, visits, downloads, reference transactions, etc.). Such statistics are collected more or less regularly. The definitions and collecting procedures are described in ISO 2789 (International library statistics).

In addition to quantitative counts, libraries have also developed measures for assessing the quality of their services and the cost-efficiency of library performance. Such quality indicators or performance indicators are described in ISO 11620 (Library performance indicators).

In recent years, there has been a growing demand for non-profit organisations to show proof of their value for individuals, for their parent organisations and for society. For libraries, such value has traditionally been accepted as self-evident. However, users are becoming increasingly independent in their information seeking practices, and information seems to be free on the web, so that the benefits gained from library services are questioned not only by funding institutions but also by the public. Libraries have responded to this demand and have developed and tested methods for identifying and proving their benefits to users and society.

4.2 Definition of library impact

In the sense of this International Standard, impact is defined as the influence of libraries and their services on individuals and/or on society. “Outcome” in the sense of this International Standard is not synonymous with “impact”, but is defined as effect of the output related to the library’s planning. See the following terms and definitions which are concerned by this:

- **input:** contribution of resources in support of a library (e.g. funding, staff, collections, space, equipment) (3.28);
- **process:** set of interrelated or interacting activities which transforms inputs into outputs (e.g. cataloguing, lending, reference service) (3.50);
- **output:** products of library processes (e.g. titles catalogued, loans, downloads from the electronic collection, reference questions answered) (3.45);
- **outcome:** direct, pre-defined effect of the output related to goals and objectives of the library’s planning (e.g. number of users, user satisfaction levels) (3.44);
- **impact:** difference or change in an individual or group resulting from the contact with library services (3.25);
- **value:** importance that stakeholders (funding institutions, politicians, the public, users, staff) attach to libraries and which is related to the perception of actual or potential benefit (3.75).

The input is converted into output by means of processes. The output can have direct, pre-defined effects (outcomes). Output and outcomes can lead to impact and finally to value.

4.3 Aspects of library impact

Generally the impact of a library’s existence and of its services will be seen as positive and a benefit. There is also the possibility of negative impact: a bad experience during a library visit can result in a negative attitude to library use.

Aspects of library impact are:

- the impact can be *immediate* (finding useful information) or *long-term* (increase in information literacy);

- the impact can be *far-reaching* (changing people's lives) or *limited* (e.g. small changes in information seeking skills);
- the impact can be *intended* or *unintended*. Intended impact has been planned by the library according to its mission and goals. Unintended impact (e.g. visitors experiencing the possibility of social contacts in the library) can nevertheless further a positive attitude to library use;
- *actual* benefits for a user differ from the *potential* benefits, e.g. the preciousness of a library's existence for issues such as local culture or children's literacy. Potential benefits include the value of cultural heritage collections, which have been preserved by a library, for future generations.

Depending on their previous experience and competences library activities and services can have different impact on different groups or individuals.

4.4 Effects of library impact

4.4.1 General

Impact of libraries can be roughly divided into the following areas:

- a) impact on individuals;
- b) impact on the library's institution or community;
- c) social impact.

In all three cases, the impact can concern changes in individuals, groups, institutions or society, but can also generate economic value.

4.4.2 Impact on individuals

Impact on individuals generally means the influence of library contacts and library services on individual persons, but it can also concern whole groups (e.g. a school class or the population of non-native speakers in a community).

This influence can have the following effects:

- a) changes in skills and competences;
- b) changes in attitudes and behaviour;
- c) higher success in research, study, or career;
- d) individual well-being.

4.4.2.1 Changes in skills and competences

Changes in users' skills and competences can concern basic skills such as finding a book in open stacks or searching in online catalogues or databases. Such skills could be furthered by a single library visit, e.g. by using an Internet-connected computer workstation in a public library or by attending a training lesson in online catalogue use. Even in a single library visit, users can discover the value of the library's help and training services and can become aware of the library's remote services that they can use from their working-place or private home.

Frequent use of library services can result in an increase of information literacy: the competence of formulating a search query, choosing adequate resources for the search, knowing ways for finding and procuring desired items, and above all being able to judge whether an information resource, e.g. a website, is relevant and reliable.

4.4.2.2 Changes in attitudes and behaviour

Contacts with libraries and their services can result in higher self-confidence and independence in information seeking and information use, and in increased motivation for learning.

Other examples for changes in behaviour and attitudes are:

- Being familiar with library collections can change users' reading practices and their choice of leisure reading.
- Influenced by the contact with library services users can learn to consult a wider range of information resources or to deal with subjects from an interdisciplinary point of view.
- As a result of library events tailored for specific groups, new user groups could be attracted to libraries.
- As a result of collaboration with the library's staff, faculty members might come to see library use as an integral part of their courses.

4.4.2.3 Higher success in research, study, and career

Library services can further the success of users in research, study and learning, or in their profession. In all these areas, the following effects are possible:

- time saved in information seeking;
- improvement of research skills and critical thinking;
- selection of relevant information for a question by targeted searching;
- up-to-dateness in a user's research topic;
- better career chances by improved information literacy.

Most examples for showing library impact on individual success have been found in the academic sector. Academic success can be shown by the following (Poll, Payne, 2006):

- shorter duration of studies;
- high grades in examinations;
- student retention;
- high employment rate after examinations;
- the quality of publications (high impact factor, publishing in peer-reviewed journals).

4.4.2.4 Impact on individual well-being

Both traditional and new web-based library services can add to the well-being of individual persons, e.g. by information about health, hobbies, family problems, or travels, but it is especially the physical library, the library as place that conduces to a sense of being and feeling well. The following aspects have been mentioned as important for users' well-being:

- the safety of the place;
- the quiet atmosphere for concentrated learning and research;
- the comfortable surroundings;
- the options for contacts and communication;

- the possibility of group activities, whether working together, sharing information and ideas, playing games or viewing films;
- the feeling of equality for all visitors, the sense of belonging.

4.4.3 Impact on the library's institution or community

By influencing individuals or groups, the scope of the library's impact can widen to include the library's institution or community (e.g. a university, a municipality, a district). These impacts can include the following:

- higher institutional prestige and rankings;
- greater and more positive visibility of the library to the institution or community;
- increased institutional funding, research grants, donors;
- attracting top researchers, academic staff, students;
- attracting other research entities, businesses, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), new population.

4.4.4 Social impact

Social impact of libraries in the sense of this International Standard is the influence of a library's existence and its services on the population in the surrounding community or on society in general. The main areas of such influence are:

- a) Social life
 - 1) *Social inclusion*: Libraries help to include marginalised groups or persons with special needs and support them in developing a sense of equity and access.
 - 2) *Social cohesion*: Libraries strengthen the connections between people and groups and support intercultural and intergenerational understanding.
- b) Participation in information and education
 - 1) *Free access to information*: By giving access to political, social, scientific, economic, government and cultural information, locally and worldwide, libraries guarantee that people can participate and make informed choices in political and social life.
 - 2) *Free Internet access*: This is an important benefit for those who cannot afford to pay for it.
 - 3) *Education and life-long learning*: Libraries play a key role for the participation of all people in education and life-long learning. A special issue of public libraries is children's literacy.
- c) Local culture and identity

Libraries promote local culture and history via exhibitions and other events, provide information about the local community and function as central meeting places in a community. Thus, they foster civic pride and community identity.
- d) Cultural diversity

In a culturally diverse society, libraries enable the different groups to maintain their cultural heritage and thus foster diversity.
- e) Community development

Libraries provide a focal point for a wide range of community activities and programmes which support the development of the community or of society in general. Examples are environmental awareness, health awareness, transport safety, or personal well-being.

f) Individual well-being

The library's influence on the personal well-being of the surrounding population might appear less important to funding institutions or politicians. However, it can be highly relevant for a community that the library is experienced as a safe, quiet and comfortable place, not only for reading and studying, but also for meeting people or joining events. The sense of belonging somewhere can further integration and thus contribute to social peace.

g) Preservation of the cultural heritage

A special case of social impact concerns the potential value of the library for future generations by preserving the documentary cultural heritage.

While an impact on an individual might be produced by one-time library use, social impact will generally show only after a longer time period.

Social impact is often indirect, arising from the cumulative effect of individual impacts on members of the population. For example, library workshops for unemployed people not only have a direct impact on the individuals involved, who are helped to obtain employment, but, over time, have an indirect impact on the wider community, in helping to reduce the unemployment rate. Further, the existence of a library in a specified community has a contingency value for the population, as they know they could use the library at any time.

Social impact is not restricted to libraries serving the general public (generally national and public libraries). For example, academic libraries provide collections and services with a higher level of specialization than public libraries. These services are generally available for research purposes of external users and thus can influence the level of knowledge in the surrounding community.

4.4.5 Economic value

As the positive effects of libraries on the individual user and on society are in most cases intangible, libraries have also tried to show the monetary benefit of their services. Assessing the economic impact of libraries can have two different meanings:

- a) In most studies, it means measuring the value of library services in terms of money, either by showing a return on investment (ROI) or a cost-benefit ratio.
- b) In other cases, libraries have tried to show the direct positive influence on the economic life of the community, the region or even on the national economy.

Showing a monetary value of their services is especially helpful for libraries when competing for funding with other cultural or recreational institutions. Assessing the economic value of library services constitutes a part of cultural economics, where culture is recognized as economic factor.

4.5 Impact planning

Strategic planning of libraries starts from identifying and formulating the library's mission and the long-term goals and short-term objectives. The main questions are:

- What is the library meant to achieve?
- What population has it been set up to serve?
- What institution or community does the library primarily serve?

Such planning should include:

- decisions on what outcomes the library aims to achieve, namely the effects of the output as related to goals and objectives;
- a clear definition of the impact the library ought to have on its population and on society.

Most libraries are part of an institution – a community, a school, a commercial firm, or a university – and the library's mission and goals should be adjusted to those of its parent institution. The impact of library services should therefore support the institutional goals and the strategic aims of the institution.

Impact planning should consider:

- that impact is not always predictable;
- that it will often only become visible over time;
- that impact can be higher if a gain in skills and competences or a change in behaviour seems advantageous to the user (e.g. before an examination);
- that changes in individuals are more likely if they are based on previous skills and competences;
- that a positive experience of library contacts predisposes users for learning through library services.

4.6 Challenges in assessing impact

4.6.1 General

Trying to identify the impact of libraries on individuals, groups and society is a much more complex and demanding process than collecting input and output data or assessing the quality of the library's performance. The main difficulties for assessing impact can be summarized thus:

- a) The impact is for the most part intangible and difficult to quantify.
- b) The library's influence is generally not the only and possibly not the strongest one.
- c) Impact of the same library service can vary in different user populations and in different cultural and economic surroundings.
- d) Long-term effects cannot be ascertained if the users are not available for follow-up.
- e) Qualitative data will necessarily be subjective rather than objective.
- f) Library staff may not be familiar with the methods used for impact assessment or have the skills to use them.
- g) The expenditure of time and effort can be considerable.

4.6.2 Methodological issues

4.6.2.1 Intangibility of the impact

Contacts with library services (e.g. a training lesson, a reference transaction) can have direct, tangible effects. A user can acquire a new skill, e.g. using truncation in a catalogue or database search. In most cases what this International Standard defines as impact does not refer to simple skills, but to more general changes in an individual, a group or community: increase in knowledge, changes in attitudes, values and/or behaviour. These changes are for the most part indirect and intangible and therefore difficult to identify and to quantify.

4.6.2.2 Diverse influence on users

The influences on individuals are complex. It will generally not be possible to separate library impact from other influences and to prove that changes are due to the use of library services. Users can obtain information and competences from friends or teachers, from using media outside the library or searching the Internet. As it is often not possible to find positive proof of the library having caused a specified change in people, surrogate measures have to be used that can at least identify a partial influence of the library.

4.6.2.3 Impact varies in different groups and surroundings

A contact with library services can have differing effects on different user groups. When attending library training on the use of databases, undergraduate students might learn how to access and use electronic information resources, while postgraduates will acquire knowledge about the subject-specific databases that are used in their particular disciplines. The learning effect depends largely on users realizing the library's usefulness for their needs and on training being delivered at the time of need.

Conceptions of what is useful for learning and studying, profession or private life and of what can be seen as benefit for a community or for society can vary considerably in different regions. This will influence the perception of library value and therewith the results of impact assessment and will affect the comparability of such results.

4.6.2.4 Long-term impact difficult to ascertain

A short-term impact, e.g. a new skill, can generally be observed fairly easily, but it usually takes some time before the impact of a library's activities becomes clear.

Long-term effects cannot be identified if the persons concerned are no longer available for tests or surveys. This is often the case, as a library's users can change quickly. Another problem will be that people often cannot remember and differentiate their experiences over time.

4.6.2.5 Subjectivity of qualitative data

The most-used methods in impact assessment are qualitative: surveys, interviews, focus groups, or anecdotal data collected from people's stories. The data collected by such methods will necessarily be subjective rather than objective; they show the "perceived value" to the respondents, their feelings and perceptions.

4.6.3 Assessment skills

Libraries have traditionally used quantitative methods (statistics, performance measures) with "hard" verifiable data. Results taken from interviews or relying on anecdotes might not be seen as reliable or conclusive enough to be presented to funding institutions or the public. In addition, libraries may lack the expertise for using qualitative methods.

Another objection against impact assessment is the workload that is involved in the measurement. While output data are often available from the library's automated system or servers, impact data have to be collected in complex processes. This problem can be reduced by limiting the impact assessment to critical issues, e.g. services that are most relevant for the library's main goals.

4.7 Implementation of impact assessment projects

Projects for assessing impact of library services and resources can be initiated by various stakeholders with differing interests:

- a) the individual library (interested in management issues and in promoting its role);
- b) groups of libraries (interested in benchmarking and in promoting the role of libraries);

- c) the library's institution or community (interested in the library's contribution to their goals);
- d) political or other administrative bodies that are responsible for library policy (interested in positive influence on political goals).

Most impact projects are performed by individual libraries or groups of libraries, though often instigated by the respective institutions or communities. Group projects may have a better chance of obtaining third-party financing, e.g. from foundations or political programmes.

A library impact project can also be conducted as part of a broader evaluation of the library's institution or community. In this case, the library cannot choose its own methods but acts in accordance with the broader plan. Such comprehensive assessment projects are usually conducted or assisted by outside experts.

4.8 Use of impact assessment results

4.8.1 General

The methods and techniques defined and described in this International Standard can be used for the evaluation of library impact as well as for promoting and advocating the value that libraries provide for their population and for society.

4.8.2 Objective of impact assessment

Objectives of impact assessment can be summarized as follows:

- a) to support decision making and resource management in the individual library;
- b) to justify the resources used for library services;
- c) to monitor the findings against results of similar organizations;
- d) to inform national or regional organizations in their support, funding and monitoring roles;
- e) to promote the library's role and importance for their users and for society.

4.8.3 Reporting and presenting assessment results

The results should be reported in a way that informs the decision-making processes and demonstrates how the library fulfils its mission. To gain the full value of the results, adequate methods of representing the data will be essential, aligned with the interests of the different stakeholder groups (see [B.3](#)).

It will be useful to illustrate the findings with narrative texts about what has changed due to library impact, e.g. stories about an increase of reading in a specified population, or about the gain in personal well-being due to a library's health information resources and services. Such anecdotal evidence complements the data and makes a more persuasive case for impact assessment results.

4.8.4 Comparability of assessment results

One purpose of assessing a library's impact is self-diagnosis. If the findings of impact assessments are compared with the library's goals, they can show whether the library achieved its impact planning goals and can support decision-making and resource allocation. Repeated assessments, using the same methodology, allow comparison over time within the same library.

Comparisons across different libraries are much more complicated and should be made in full recognition of the limitations of such comparisons, taking into account the differences in the libraries' tasks, populations, and governance structures. Comparisons between libraries require a good understanding of the methods used and careful interpretation of the findings.

5 Methods for assessing library impact

5.1 General

In the majority of cases the impact of libraries cannot be captured directly, but surrogate measures or indicators have to be used. Evidence of impact can be collected in the following ways (Streatfield, 2002):

- inferred through
 - output data (e.g. attendance at events; levels of service use; results of examinations);
 - library performance indicators;
 - user satisfaction levels;
- solicited (through questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, or other methods for requesting information or opinion);
- observed (through structured observation; informal observation; self-recording; tests).

In many cases, it has proved useful to combine several methods to obtain reliable results, e.g. to back up statistics that indicate changing user behaviour with results from interviews or focus groups.

5.2 Inferred evidence

(See [Clause 6](#) for details.)

The challenge of impact measurement in libraries is to identify data that describe and indicate what difference library resources, services, and expertise make in users' lives. Libraries collect a huge amount of data about their input and output, and many of them also use performance measures and user satisfaction surveys for assessing the actual and the perceived quality of their services.

Generally those data cannot be directly used to show an impact of library use. However, if input and output data are collected systematically and if the library's performance and the satisfaction of its users are checked regularly, the results will allow the identification of activities and services that apparently have had an impact on the users. Such cases of inferred impact should be followed up by methods in [Clauses 7 to 9](#) of this International Standard in order to validate the inference.

5.3 Solicited evidence

(See [Clause 7](#) for details.)

5.3.1 General

"Soliciting" evidence of impact means asking for the users' experience with libraries, the benefits they derived from library services and their general opinion of libraries. The questions are usually addressed to actual users, but may include non-users.

5.3.2 Methods

The methods can be differentiated into written or oral questioning (surveys, interviews, focus groups). Oral questioning is usually less standardized and will yield more subjective opinions and attitudes. Written surveys are more or less standardized and predominantly deliver results that are quantifiable. If a large target population has to be questioned, structured and standardized questionnaires should be preferred in order to cope with the quantity of results and to ensure comparability of the answers.

Users can also be asked for a self-assessment of the skills and competences they have gained by using library services.