For decades the Norwegian National Library Statistics have been rather detailed and reliable, giving a true, but superficial, picture of the situation in Norwegian public libraries. Figures for loans (different kind of media), visits, collections (very detailed) and financial resources make it easy to compare libraries within the country, and in other countries.

It should be mentioned, however, that the data collected from the school libraries has never been of good quality, perhaps even worse after the rather meticulously control performed by the county libraries (later by the municipal libraries) were abandoned some years ago.

The Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority, established in 2003 as ‘ABM-utvikling’ (ABM) collects the official library statistics (and museum statistics as well) and present them in a user-friendly way. Library statistics are included in the Statistics Norway ‘Statistisk sentralbyrå’ (SSB).

As the new ABM authority also was a merger of the former Norwegian Directorate for Public Libraries and the former National Office for Research Documentation, Academic and Special Libraries, one of the first tasks they took on was to work on a closer relationship between the libraries that previously had belonged to different national authorities and thus reported respectively to Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs and Ministry of Education and Research. Indicators and statistics for academic-, research and special libraries had in the past been very different from public- and school library statistics, and in the later years the indicators for these institutions had been adjusted to meet the set of quality standards that the state authorities’ require from their mother institutions, which also include up-to-date library service.

As the library services in general, for all kind of libraries, have changed very much since the 1990s, new indicators showing all the libraries’ resources and modern services in a better way had to be added as soon as possible.

User-studies, surveys and observations had manifested that many users, especially young adults/students etc, visit both public and academic libraries simultaneously, and that they do this to a larger extent than recognized by the libraries themselves. This is one of many reasons for implementing, as far as possible, the same indicators for both public libraries and academic or special libraries, and it will also give a better and more complete picture of all library resources available for the inhabitants, and show all public spending on libraries.

In 2003, the new ABM started a slow, but steady work in order to introduce the same indicators for both academic, research, special and public libraries. ABM discussed types of indicators with an appointed advisory group, representing both types of libraries.
Implementation of new indicators in Public libraries' statistics has for several reasons been rather slow. One reason is the major change in the national system for collecting data from all local government activity.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT/MUNICIPALITY-STATE-REPORTING (KOSTRA)**

The initiative from ‘ABM’ in 2003 coincided with a vigorous pull, from 2002 on, from the Statistics Norway, SSB, and the State Ministry of Local Government and Regional development, in order to improve thoroughly the data reported (both in speed and not least in quality) from the local administrations. The new system was called KOSTRA (Kommune-stat-rapportering), Local government/Municipality-State-Reporting. A lot of governmental resources was allocated to this work in order to have solid data for evaluation of the local government activity – with a set of different purposes: one for the state to get a updated and detailed knowledge of how the local authority fulfil their tasks and to what cost and with what outcome – an other is to provide very solid data for the municipalities for benchmarking.

To increase these efforts ‘The efficiency improvement networks’, formed in 2003, consisting of 2/3 of Norwegian municipalities, focused on benchmarking. The municipalities mapped and analysed productivity, availability, measured quality (professional quality) and user evaluations of services. Thus the municipalities evaluated their own improvement areas, planned and carried out measures within schools, nursing and care, social services, child care, etc. – in fact they covered the sectors that spent most of the municipal financial resources.

Both administrative staff and politicians in the municipalities very quickly took a new and keen interest in data and statistics as a basis for priorities, organisation and other initiatives.

The libraries under municipal and county authorities are also included in KOSTRA, where the emphasis is much more focused on costs than the libraries are used to. And: Public libraries, being obviously more accurate and consistent when it comes to mapping and data-collection than many other sectors of the local services, have some times experienced municipal ‘benchmarking’ on somewhat unreliable basis. However, the KOSTRA-system has improved steadily and fast. The data-collection is very efficient and timeliness is regarded as extremely important. The first raw-data from the previous year are collected in February, and (preliminary) published in March. Then revised figures are published in June. The municipalities have great confidence in this system. Fresh data have triggered the local authorities' interest in the facts and figures, they feel they have a tool for improving the effectiveness and for evaluating the outcome of the money spent.

KOSTRA work out recommendations for how to calculate and map even the most difficult items, and little by little the municipalities will report comparable financial data in most fields. One example: For decades it has been impossible
to compare cost/value of buildings, premises, sports installations, grounds, etc. including costs for operating them, from one municipality to another. As costs connected to premises may cover from 10 -30% of the public libraries' gross budget, it is important also for library managers to identify these costs before comparing with others. From 2007 on these costs may be identified in the national statistics.

ABM AND THE OFFICIAL LIBRARY STATISTICS

ABM's work on indicators and improvement of library statistics goes on. The newest draft version of indicators is from 2007. Adjustments in Public Library Statistics have been discussed with an advisory group. Some changes are introduced for 2007: size of the libraries user area, and the number of active borrowers (per year). For 2008 several new data will be introduced, similar to those collected from Academic and Research Libraries. They are mostly on digital collections, and the use of them, downloads, etc. and use of databases and content on the library's website.

To further the process of identifying and get experience with suitable indicators, ABM has asked for 10 + 10 interested libraries to take part in two working groups, one for public libraries and one for academic and research. The task is: 'Benchmarking by the use of result- and management/development indicators'. They shall work on tools for evaluation and quality management, and try these in practical use in the participants' own institutions. The indicators should be suited for both benchmarking and internal use in one institution. Benchmarking with similar libraries should be carried out.

One of the real challenges will be to find useful indicators that cover the goal or service-declaration for mother institutions or the municipalities' diverse service declarations.

To map user satisfaction is a challenge for public libraries, who serve more than half the population, and surveys, questionnaires etc. will usually cover a random and very small selection of users. Here library users often appear to be too pleased, for whatever service they get. They should complain more!

STATISTICS CAN'T TELL THE WHOLE TRUTH

In Norway, as in the other Scandinavian countries, there is a growing interest in analysis and evaluation in order to understand trends in library use and to improve library management and services. The national library statistics have definite limitations when one want to investigate phenomena more thoroughly, and in recent
years there have been several research- and other studies adding valuable supplementary information to the general statistics.

In my library, Bergen Public Library (250,000 inhabitants, the second largest Norwegian city) the librarians take great interest in performance measurement of all kinds; and initiate or take part in several studies to increase our knowledge and understanding in order to improve the services and make it more efficient.

VISITORS AND BORROWERS – WHO ARE THEY?

Who are asking for the libraries services, and who are the non-users? These are crucial questions for every library. Visitors can be counted, but gender and age are difficult to register. Borrowers, however, can be counted and their loans analysed up and down. Are visitors and borrowers mostly the same persons? Difficult to tell – but a fresh study in the 5 largest public libraries in Norway indicates that they may be, with some clear exceptions.

For the last few years in Norway there have been about 5 library-visitors per inhabitant, but there are great regional disparities. In 2005 to 2007 the number of visitors sank – while the use of internet in private homes increased immensely.

There are significant differences between smaller public library and larger ones. Smaller ones seems to have a high percentage of children, up to 60% of their total number of borrowers, many grown ups and fewer young people.

In the larger libraries the picture is more like Bergen Public Library: The city has 250,000 inhabitants and 30,000 university students and very good University and university college libraries. At the public library we have since mid 1990s counted borrowers distributed by age groups (Figure 1). We distinguish between ‘registered borrowers’; that is: those who have once got a library-card, and ‘active borrowers’. In Bergen over 80% of the inhabitants are registered borrowers, and over 30% of the inhabitants have used their library card last year. Among young people (11–17 years) more than 90% are registered borrowers, and half of them are active per year. More girls than boys borrow. Young people, age 15–30, are the most frequent borrowers in Bergen, as in other larger cities in Norway too.

For the one third of the daily amount of visitors who also borrow material, we have a lot of information on their loans via the automated library systems

Three years ago Bergen public library participated in a project ‘FRITT VALG’ (Free choice) (the 4 largest public libraries in Norway, and 3 from smaller, rural areas) to find out more about the preferences of young people aged 11–17, regarding library use: (Do they borrow novels, videos, cartoons, video, are they preferring books for adults or for children … etc.? How many young people use the library? Is use decreasing or increasing as they grow older? What are the differences between boys and girls regarding what kind of material they borrow? Are there differences in use between cities and rural areas?)
Active Borrowers 11–17 Year-olds

Figures from 96 municipal libraries (2004) representing near 30% of Norway's population, show that 52% in this age group are 'active borrowers'. The boys use is decreasing as they grow older, girls use increase. 11–17 years-old are frequent borrowers; they are 14% of the total amount of active borrowers, but only 9% of the inhabitants in the same areas. In these 96 libraries 32.2% of the total amount of inhabitants are active borrowers.

Figure 1: Borrowers by age

A FRESH STUDY OF USER BEHAVIOUR IN FIVE LARGE PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NORWAY'S FIVE LARGEST CITIES.

We know how many visitors we have, but we do not know exactly what they are doing while they are in the library. With support/grants from the state authorities, ABM, another project, comprising the 5 largest public libraries in Norway, aimed to find out what people really do when visiting the library. Methodically this is a quite difficult project, based on observation on customers’ behaviour.

This study was inspired by a Danish one from 2004. User-activity in 30 smaller public libraries was observed. Later on – in 2006 – Århus Public Library (the city next to the capital in size) conducted a similar observation, mostly to have input for planning their new main library. The Norwegian study added two questions to
the observation: one on the users’ age, the other on their mother tongue. The observations were carried through in October/November 2007. The outcome seemed to be rather reliable, and showed concurrence with our statistics for loans and returns, etc. (Figure 2)

And what are users doing in addition to borrowing/returning material – compared to those who do not borrow/return? (Figure 3)

The final report was launched this spring.

There are a lot of similarities between the results reported from Århus and the Norwegian main libraries. And there are interesting differences between the group of 30 smaller libraries and the larger one in Denmark – and probably the same pattern goes for Norway, too?

From the statistics we know that Norwegian larger public libraries have many visitors, and many young ones, but much lower lending figures than other Scandinavian or even Northern-European countries. (Figure 4)

Virtual libraries, collections and services are – when it comes to statistics – still rather new and challenging fields for our profession. Visits, users, user behaviour, navigation, ‘collections’, services, promotion, etc. should be followed even more carefully than the traditional services. This is an important task just now.

On the other hand we have the renewed and keen interest in ‘Libraries as places’. We ought to pay more attention to how and why people like to use the physical library. New studies should be performed in a variety of libraries, and the outcome should be compared and analysed. This is another important task just now.
What are the users doing at the library? Key figures. From a study in 5 Norwegian large public libraries (2007)

Figure 2: Activities in libraries
Activities in the library, distributed on those who borrow or return material and those who do not. From a study in 5 Norwegian large public libraries (2007)

Figure 3: Activities linked to borrowing

Average library use per year/user’s age.
Based on usergroups from a study in 5 Norwegian large public libraries (2007)

Figure 4: Visits linked to age