

Museum libraries in Spain: A case study at state level

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journals.sagepub.com/home/jis**Silvia Cobo-Serrano** 

National Archaeological Museum, Spain

Rosario Arquero-Avilés

Department of Library and Information Science, Complutense University, Spain

Gonzalo Marco-Cuenca

Department of Documentation Science and History of Science, University of Zaragoza, Spain

Abstract

Special libraries are essential information and documentation centres for university teachers and researchers due to the quality and richness of their collections. In Spain, it is estimated that there are 2456 special libraries, although many are unknown either generally or among information professionals. These include museum libraries, which are important centres with valuable collections of bibliographic heritage for the area of Humanities and Social Sciences. The aim of this research is to gain an understanding of the real state of these information units and promote the social value of museum libraries in Spain. To do this, a survey was sent to the libraries of state-owned and -managed museums under the General Directorate of Fine Arts and Cultural Property (Ministry of Culture and Sports) of the Government of Spain. This general objective will be accompanied by a review of the scientific literature on various aspects of museum libraries at national and international level. After addressing the research methodology, the results obtained will be discussed and will include the following topics: collection management, library services and staff, economic and technological resources and finally, library management. Conclusions include recommendations for museum librarians and reveal that institutional cooperation is a strategic issue to improve both museum libraries visibility and their social recognition as cultural and research centre.

Keywords

Government; museum libraries; Spain; special libraries; state-level institutions

1. Introduction

Special libraries constitute types of centres and information resources that offer ‘an important service for research, support and access to quality information of interest’ (p. 7) [1]. Reflections on their services [2], library areas and strategic issues are also discussed [3]. In fact, a recent academic research analysed management strategic issues for national museum libraries to identify challenges, opportunities and priorities that must be anticipated [3].

Seeing that museum libraries are linked to specialised subjects; their professionals and the Work Commissions of the state cooperation bodies work closely to ‘promote these libraries and highlight the enormous heritage they house and the services they offer’ (p. 7) [1].

Spain is officially estimated to have 2456 special libraries, of which 9.04% are classified as museum libraries [4]. According to the Special Libraries Cooperation Technical Committee, museum libraries are a specific type of special libraries ‘whose collections are related to the mission of the archive or museum they serve and are at the service of both workers of the centre and researchers in that area’ (p. 5) [5].

Corresponding author:

Silvia Cobo-Serrano, National Archaeological Museum, Serrano, 13, 28001 Madrid, Spain.

Emails: silvia.cobo@cultura.gob.es; s.cobo@ucm.es

Despite these official figures, these types of libraries have less impact and social recognition in Spain and they are sometimes even invisible within our profession. This situation of invisibility and ignorance of the existence of the museum librarian has been going on for decades in our professional sector. Therefore, the approval by Royal Decree of the Regulation for the Regime of the Archaeological Museums of the State in 1901 was decisive for library staff, since it included three articles (Articles 26, 27 and 28) that made reference to the particular use of the bibliographic collections by the Museum and by the public (external users) as well as to the library organisation system [6].

According to Hernández-Hernández [7], the beginning of relevant changes for museum librarians could date back to the 1980s, as the idea was to improve the precarious reality of these libraries and overcome their fundamental obstacle, which is the lack of qualified personnel. At the end of that decade, a Directory of Documentation Centres and Special Libraries was prepared to provide data to be analysed and compared with contemporary works that performed a situation analysis of museum libraries in the United States. The analysis parameters used among others were as follows: training of library staff, opening hours, library accessibility, services provided, available resources and specialised subjects.

Hernández-Hernández [7] sees it necessary to improve the status of the librarian in the museum. This perception is shared by Prego-de-Lis [8] who stated that researchers and librarians increasingly reject the idea of the museum library as an auxiliary unit of the museum, and favour its inclusion as an additional department in the flow chart of the museum institution. Prego-de-Lis adds that specialised research requires a library or documentation centre that provides and manages the information, meaning that it should have adequate facilities, library staff and technical and financial resources. This conception of the library as an essential department of the museum is also shared by Green-Bierbaum [9] who said that 'the library supports the museum at all points and in all phases of its mission; the goal and objectives of the library reflect the mission and goals of the museum'.

Therefore, the museum's library can be understood as a 'highly specialised information dissemination centre to develop quality information services, which not only affects the development of the centre's own activity but can also transcend society, more specifically the scientific and academic community' (p. 233) [8]. To emerge and to improve their visibility, digitisation could be considered as a 'converging activity, where information about object and context is brought together' (p. 19) [10]. Bury states that 'fewer museum libraries and archives have grappled with the more challenging problems of born digital art-rich websites' (p. 483) [11].

Hence, the idea is to make the invisible visible by reaching a diagnosis of the situation, that is, to promote the social value of museum libraries in Spain. Along these lines, it is necessary to have an understanding of the current state of publicly owned and publicly managed museum libraries in Spain based on a microanalysis of selected library centres. This general objective will guide this research, which will be accompanied by a review of the scientific literature on museum libraries in Spain in the following section. The methodology as well as an analysis and discussion of the results obtained are then presented and will include collection management, library services and staff, economic and technological resources and finally, library management. Conclusions include recommendations for collective progress and proposals for cooperation.

2. Museum libraries in Spain

The visibility of museum libraries requires not only dedication by their professionals. The subject matters of the museum and the type of public administration on which they depend for their management and ownership (state, regional, local) are also determining factors for the dissemination of its collections and services.

Considered as the golden triangle of art, the Prado Museum, Reina Sofía National Art Centre Museum and the Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum libraries stand out for the quality and volume of their collections, given their high specialisation. Cánovas-del-Castillo and Docampo [12] describe the spaces of the libraries, as well as the adaptations of the museums to the spaces and services inherent to libraries, and take a brief tour of the history of libraries to understand how the collections were formed.

Previously, Cánovas-del-Castillo [13] examined the library of the Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum. He investigated the origin of the collection, the formation of library spaces or aspects related to computerisation. Likewise, a study of the new library of the Prado Museum was conducted to discover the new spaces and analyse the statistics of its collection, services provided by the library and future short-term projects [14].

Specialising in the figure of Pablo Picasso and other contemporary artists, the Picasso Museum library was opened in Málaga in 2004 [15]. The spaces are divided into a historical archive, the reading room (open access collections), a bibliographic information point and audiovisual room. The collection of the Picasso Museum library consists of 'monographs, exhibition catalogues, periodicals, detailed catalogues, auction catalogues, doctoral theses, press dossiers and audiovisual material, among others' (p. 122) [15].

Located in Mérida (Spain), the library of the National Museum of Roman Art emerged ‘as a necessity for the operation of the institution itself, the museum, and is closely linked to both documentation and research’ (p. 2) [16]. After detecting some shortcomings related to the management of collections, acquisitions and technical processes, Alonso-López pointed out that the elaboration of a ‘plan for the modernisation and provision of museum libraries’ (p. 6) [16] envisaged the promotion of the library of the National Museum of Roman Art, especially with the implementation of the library management system. This favoured MARC cataloguing, shared cataloguing and the online visibility of the bibliographic catalogue with the use of the OPAC module.

From the perspective of library management in museums, López-de-Prado [17] analyses the origins of museum libraries in Spain, studies the definitions of museum library in the specialised bibliography and notes that ‘the mission, goals and library objectives will be closely linked to the those of the museum’ (p. 17) [17].

Dependant on ‘public service and non-profit organisations’ (p. 17) [17], museum libraries have serious shortcomings and lack of personnel to which we should add scarce professional recognition and an absence of social projection. In this context, López-de-Prado [17] is responsible for analysing the definitions of mission, goals, objectives, functions, activities, collections and users based on the specialised bibliography to subsequently perform a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis (SWOT) in museum libraries at the beginning of the twenty-first century in Spain.

Museum libraries house an important and unknown bibliographic heritage whose value is included in Law 16/1985 on Spanish Historical Heritage. This law establishes that

libraries and publicly-owned bibliographic collections and literary, historical, scientific or artistic works of a unitary or serial nature, handwritten or printed, of which there is no record of the existence of at least three copies in libraries or public services are part of the Bibliographic Heritage [18].

According to Docampo-Capilla [19], the dissemination of these heritage collections is complex and digitalisation projects are increasingly highlighted as an efficient means to provide access to heritage and preserve collections. An example of this is the Virtual Library of Bibliographic Heritage, which is managed by the Subdirector General for Library Coordination. This information resource allows people to access digital collections of ‘articles, printed books, historical photographs, cartographic materials, musical scores and others that are stored in memory institutions (archives, libraries and museums) and are part of the Spanish Bibliographic Heritage’ [20].

Another resource of great interest for the dissemination of heritage collections in museum libraries in Spain is the Collective Catalogue of Bibliographic Heritage, which includes the description and location of collections that ‘due to their age, uniqueness or richness, are part of the Spanish Bibliographic Heritage’ [21].

Acquisition is another determining factor for the management of highly specialised bibliographic collections in museum libraries. Based on the experience of the Prado Museum library, the recent economic crisis in Spain caused librarians to consider ‘the search for alternatives aimed at maintaining as much as possible the growth of the bibliographic collection and at a minimum cost, to continue its constant updating and thus to avoid the appearance of major gaps’ (p. 15) [22]. To determine the acquisition strategy, the author found it necessary to evaluate the collection based on an internal study of the bibliographic collection (thematic coverage and how up-to-date it was), the use of the collection by readers and a user satisfaction study. This allowed an action plan to be established for acquisitions, whose policy focused on ‘purchasing only the materials that will have a certain use, that is, those that are essential for the study of art between the Middle Ages and the first decades of the twentieth century’ (p. 20) [22].

The increase in exchange and donation is also frequently used to complement the purchase of bibliographic materials, and the interlibrary loan and the document acquisition services are used on a more regular basis. Elípe-Pérez [22] proposes the application of consortium or cooperative strategies among museum libraries, such as shared acquisition, to efficiently allocate scarce economic resources and avoid duplication of materials between libraries in the same network.

Library cooperation in museums has increased in recent decades. BIMUS (state museum library network) was created in 2005 to promote and improve the situation of museum libraries, and the creation of collective catalogues was the most visible result in 2009 [23]. According to Alonso-Sáez, ‘we are working to consolidate BIMUS as the reference Museum Library Network in the country’ (p. 41) [23].

On the one hand, BIMUS cooperative projects address the digitisation of museum library collections for the incorporation of digital content in the Virtual Libraries of Bibliographic Heritage and Historical Press. On the other hand, BIMUS aims to be integrated into Web 2.0.

Currently, BIMUS is made up of the following museum libraries in Spain (Table 1).

Some of the actions undertaken by the library network were aimed at improving staff training, automating services, improving bibliographic records, disseminating content and carrying out cultural extensions.

Table 1. BIMUS network libraries.

General Directorate of Fine Arts and Cultural Property (Ministry of Culture and Sports)	
National Museum and Research Centre of Altamira	Santillana del Mar, Cantabria
National Archaeological Museum	Madrid
Cerralbo Museum	Madrid
Museum of the Americas	Madrid
Costume Museum (Ethnological Heritage Research Centre, CIPE)	Madrid
National Anthropology Museum	Madrid
National Museum of Decorative Arts	Madrid
National Museum of Romanticism	Madrid
Sorolla Museum	Madrid
National Museum of Roman Art	Mérida
National Museum of Subaquatic Archaeology	Cartagena, Murcia
El Greco Museum	Toledo
Sefardí Museum	Toledo
National Museum of Ceramics and Decorative Arts 'González Martí'	Valencia
Casa de Cervantes Museum	Valladolid
National Sculpture Museum	Valladolid
National Institute of Scenic Arts and Music	
National Theatre Museum	Almagro, Ciudad Real
Other museums	
Lázaro Galdiano Museum	Madrid
Reina Sofía National Art Centre Museum	Madrid
Prado Museum	Madrid

Cooperation in state museum libraries in Spain is also being used in dissemination processes. New communication spaces must be created to broaden the scope of dissemination, although the different ownership and management units of museums can hamper this communication work.

BIMUS, a cooperation network for state-owned and state-run museum libraries, is a benchmark that uses 2.0 tools, social networks and cooperative blogs [24]. One of the most important projects among librarians is MUSAS. It involves a distribution list that was 'created by and for professionals working in libraries and Museum Documentation Centres' [25]. MUSAS is the most popular communication forum among museum librarians of the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America.

3. Research objectives

Special libraries constitute the main research centres due to the richness of their thematic collections, which are practically non-existent in other information and documentation units. These libraries provide quality services to teachers and researchers; their collections are unique and their professionals are highly qualified. However, they are usually invisible and not very well known.

Therefore, the objective of this research shed some light on the current state of the libraries of the 16 museums dependant on the General Subdirectorate of State Museums in direct relationship with strategic goal 1 of the Second Strategic Plan of the Library Cooperation Council (2016–2018) in what refers to 'promoting and fostering libraries in society' and, more specifically, to general objective 1.1, to 'promote the value of libraries in society as a whole' (p. 12) [26].

As specific objectives, this research aims to

- Increase the visibility of special libraries, in particular, museum libraries;
- Conduct a microanalysis of selected library centres;
- Value the collections, services and mission of museum libraries;
- Analyse library management;
- Increase scientific production in the field of special libraries.

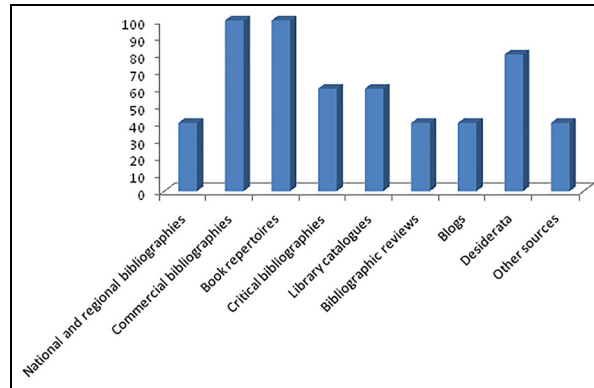


Chart 1. Sources for the selection of documents.

4. Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the research, a national online survey was conducted, requesting the collaboration of librarians working in libraries dependant on the General Directorate of Fine Arts and Cultural Property (Ministry of Culture and Sports, Spain). The questionnaire was sent in the last quarter of 2018 and provided updated statistical data to be obtained to determine the actual status of state museum libraries in Spain. The research methodology can be divided into the following stages:

First stage: contact

- Consult the BIMUS directory to locate the institutional web pages of the 16 libraries of museums dependant on the General Directorate of Fine Arts and Cultural Property;
- Analysis of the web pages and search for library contact details.

Second stage: definition and preparation of the questionnaire

- Formulation of the presentation protocol;
- Definition of the number of sections and questions;
- Definition of the type of response: dichotomous, single select and multiple choice.

Third stage: remittance of the questionnaire to museum librarians

- Invitation email through a survey management platform that included a link for completing the questionnaire.

Fourth stage: analysis of survey results based on the following topics

- Collection management;
- Library services and staff;
- Economic and technological resources;
- Library management.

5. Data analysis and discussion

5.1. Collection management

Having an updated and complete collection is one of the main premises that characterise the management of special libraries to meet the information needs of their users who are ‘highly trained and have highly specialised information requirements’ (p. 380) [27]. This requires the selection of the materials, the first link in the collection management chain to be carried out properly to guarantee the quality and relevance of the documents acquired in the libraries. The information units participating in this research indicated the sources used for selecting the materials (see Chart 1). As it is a multiple-answer question, all participating libraries selected at least two answers. The use of commercial bibliographies (100%), book repertoires (100%) and desiderata (80%) is highly relevant, as it highlights the important role of users in these information units and their valued opinion by library management bodies. Critical bibliographies and library catalogues represent 60% of other sources selected for increasing collections. To a lesser extent, national bibliographies,

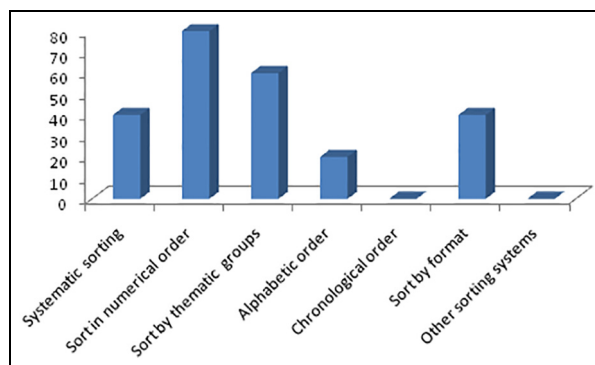


Chart 2. Collection sorting systems.

bibliographic reviews and blogs are also used as sources of consultation for the selection and subsequent acquisition of library collections.

When participants were specifically asked about the document acquisition system, the three response options were selected in high percentages. In this multiple-answer question, all libraries indicated purchases (100%) and donations (100%) as the main means of acquisition for the increase in collections. Both systems are complemented with exchange (80%) that is mainly used to obtain depleted materials (outside the commercial circuit) and to reduce the duplication of copies (which increases the physical space for the growth of the collection).

Another question related to the management of the collection referred to the way in which materials were ordered in the library (see Chart 2). Most libraries participating in the survey present their collections in numerical order or *currens* number (80%) and by thematic groups (60%). The systematic management (40%) of the collections, carried out in accordance with the classification system used by the library, is less used in special libraries compared with public libraries with the implementation of the Universal Decimal Classification. Sorting based on material format (40%) and alphabetical order (20%) is also uncommon.

Results showed that the size of the collection varied significantly according to the collection document type. In general terms, monographs and periodicals exceed 10,000 volumes. These constitute the main collections of special libraries and are the documents most frequently sought for research by users. However, other materials (audiovisual documents, charts, musical documents, etc.) are less than 1000 volumes and represent a fairly small percentage of the entire library collection. It is worth mentioning the National Archaeological Museum Library with almost 150,000 physical volumes because of the richness and size of the collection. This library has extensive collections on Numismatics and Egyptology, which are unrivalled in Spain [28] (see Chart 3).

5.2. Library services and staff

The services offered by the participating libraries focus on the consultation of collections in rooms and on loans, more specifically on three basic modalities: personal loan of materials for use outside the library, intercentre loans between libraries that are part of the Museum Library Network and interlibrary loans for obtaining documents in any national and international library.

In statistical terms, the most frequently offered library services in participating centres are intercentre loan (23%), interlibrary loan (18%), reading room (18%), enquiries and reference (18%), home loan (9%), user training (9%) and selective dissemination of information (SDI) (5%). Other services included in the multiple answer to this question, but not selected, were the virtual reference service, the collective loan and the cultural extension service, which are most frequent in public libraries due to their marked social function (see Chart 4).

These services are offered by an average of 1.8 librarians, which shows a marked lack of human resources to satisfactorily meet the requirements of information centres. Participating libraries have a maximum of three librarians per centre, which has a negative impact on both library staff (overwork and assumption of duties outside their professional profile) and on users (lack of quality in attending to their information needs).

Museum library staff, who mostly have degrees outside the library and information science area and work full-time, have two clearly defined profiles according to the characterisation of the professional profiles of the Spanish Library System [29]: (1) technician responsible for collection and (2) assistant library technician. In the first case, the profile of the technician responsible for the collection is characterised by the definition of collection development policies,

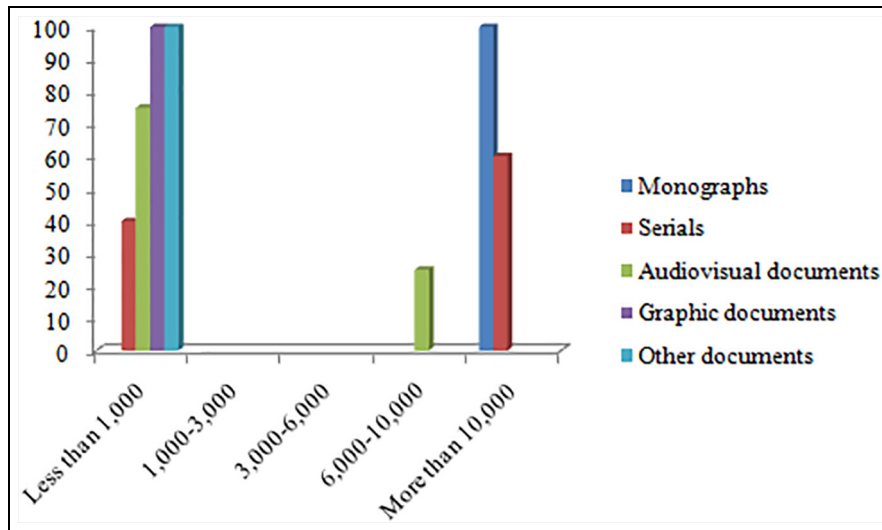


Chart 3. Volume of the collections.

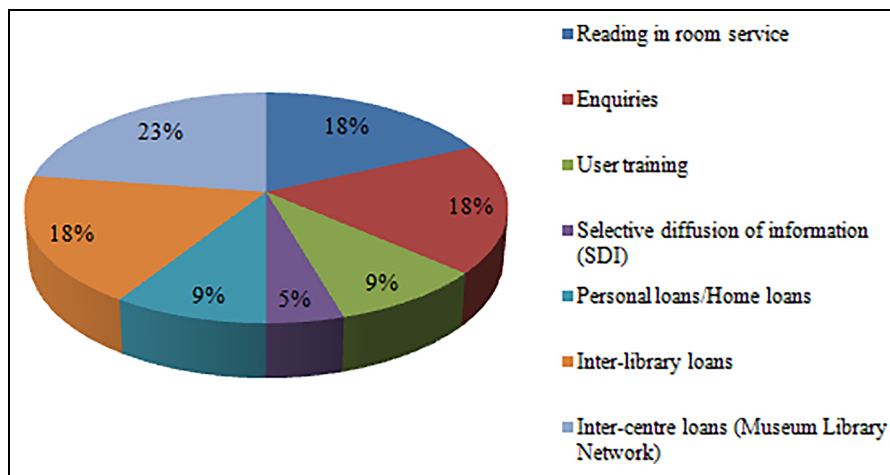


Chart 4. Library services.

procurement management, coordination of technical processes and supervision of the quality of the collections. With regard to the profile of auxiliary library technician, the mission of these professionals is to collaborate in ‘collection management, access to the document or general information and customer service’ (p. 18) (29).

Based on the classification established in Royal Decree 5/2015, which approves the consolidated text of the Law on the Basic Statute of Public Employees [30], participating libraries were asked about the type of staff at the service of government agencies to which their human resources correspond. In total, 55.56% are career functionaries, while 44.44% have a regular work contract (Article 11, which establishes a formalised employment contract, so that the services provided by human resources are paid by government agencies).

5.3. Economic and technological resources

Another fundamental factor in knowing the current status of state museum libraries in Spain is the identification of the economic and technological resources of information centres. The economic management questions included in this research questionnaire were based on the terms and definitions included in the UNE-ISO 2789 standard on international library statistics [31].

Figure 1. BIMUS collective catalogue.

In relation to current expenses, understood as ‘expenses related to the operation of a library’ (p. 25) [31], the average calculated for the bibliographic acquisition is estimated at around 6900 euros, which may vary 6000 and 8000 euros. However, investment expenses are those that ‘result from the acquisition or incorporation of fixed assets’ (p. 24) [31] and in most cases are borne by museum budgets. This type of investment expenses includes the acquisition of furniture, computer systems or new library constructions.

In response to technological resources, participating libraries are part of BIMUS – Museum Library Network – so they share AbsysNet as an integrated library management system. The use of this common management system allows people ‘to consult catalogues of all libraries in the network through a collective catalogue that facilitates the use and visibility of all collections’ [32]. Created from the 2004–2008 State Museum Plan of the General Subdirectorate of State Museums, the origin and evolution of the BIMUS project was addressed by Chumillas-Zamora and Prego-de-Lis [33], whose work contained details of the process followed to create, implement and disseminate the collective catalogue of museum libraries (Figure 1).

The libraries do not have databases specialised in the research subjects of the museums due to the high subscription and maintenance costs of the technological resources. However, they provide users with computers for OPAC consultation (1–6 for public use) and a Wi-Fi network to search for materials in the catalogues and conduct research work.

5.4. Library management

Planning, as a priority function of library management, has been the subject of interest by numerous experts in the area of library and information science. From Bryson’s contributions [34], based on the systematic approach to planning, to the defence by Stuart and Moran [35] of a strategic thinking process for decision-making, library planning is built on the set of measures currently adopted to anticipate the future [36]. The importance of management in libraries and information services is well known by its professionals, since strategic planning establishes ‘the main lines of action that an entity

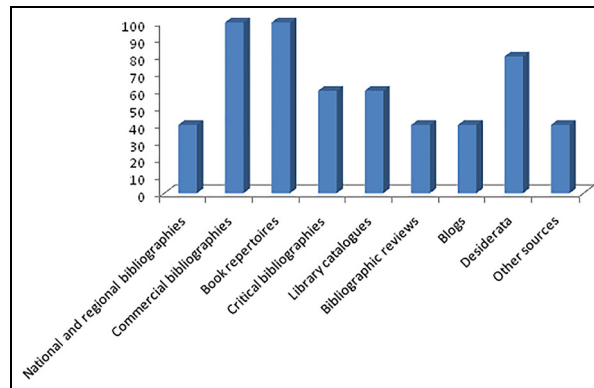


Chart 5. Aspects of strategic planning in museum libraries.

must follow to move towards the foreseeable future, which usually covers the following 3–5 years' (p. 34) [37]. In this context, the strategic plans are only formulated by 20% of the participating libraries, the same percentage represented by the formulation of strategic lines and general objectives of the strategic plan (Chart 5). More frequently, museum libraries formulate the mission (60%) and vision (40%) of their information units, which are usually available on the libraries' websites. Both the mission and the vision constitute two fundamental elements of the strategic plans, since their formulation implies an analysis of the information unit to state its function and future projection.

The planning and evaluation of libraries and information services must be

conceived as closely related functions: planning must lay the foundations for the evaluation, and the conclusions must be derived from the results of the evaluation [...] to submit for review and reorientation the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the unit of information evaluated (p. 33) [37].

When asked about the evaluation techniques most used in their libraries, only two participants pointed to the observation of user habits and the use of their own statistical indicators as evaluation methods. Other possible response options referred to direct evaluation methods, such as sending user satisfaction questionnaires, conducting interviews or using the focus group as a consensus method.

Next, 100% revealed the non-use of ISO 16439 standards [38], regarding procedures to assess the impact of libraries and ISO 11620 [39] for the evaluation of services.

Another important question put forward by library management referred to the elaboration of statistics, indispensable for demonstrating 'the value that the libraries imply for their users and for society in general' (p. 1) [40]. Based on the results, the majority of libraries compile statistics (60%), although the UNE-ISO 2789 standard regarding the international statistics of libraries is not followed at any time. This international standard is aimed at offering 'libraries and information services, a guide for the collection and presentation of statistical data' [31], including definitions and procedures for the calculation of varied resources and services. Participating libraries were invited to show their own indicators used for obtaining statistical data, revealing the highly frequent use of user counts, acquisitions, collection growth, number of OPAC consultations, visits to the library website, number of loans made or copying statistics.

Finally, the last block of management questions referred to the communication and dissemination of libraries. Although 80% of participating centres have not developed a communication plan, emails are the most common form of communication used internally for providing information on services, products and activities between libraries and the museum in which they are integrated.

With regard to external communication, several means are used simultaneously to bring libraries to real and potential users, preferably university teachers and researchers in the thematic areas coinciding with the specialisation of bibliographic collections. In all libraries in the study, emails are the most common form of communication, followed by the library website (80%), social networks of museums (40%) and printed informative materials of a traditional nature: newsletters, leaflets, brochures, etc. (20%).

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The research carries out a microanalysis of the 16 museum libraries under the General Directorate of Fine Arts and Cultural Property (Ministry of Culture and Sports, Spain) to find out the current status of these specialised information and documentation units. The specific objectives of the study included, among others, are (1) making museum libraries

visible, (2) valuing the collections, services and mission of museum libraries and (3) analysing library management. State museum library staff was selected as the study population.

It can be concluded that the creation of library networks is a key factor for the development, dissemination and management of special libraries. This means that cooperation can be used to provide intercentre loans for face-to-face services, which facilitates loans to users.

These libraries are mainly directed towards researchers, in particular, those from the university community: teachers, undergraduate and graduate students (Master and Doctorate programmes).

It is evident that the lack of financial resources for the acquisition of materials and maintenance of collections, facilities and services is one of the main problems. The scarce sources of funding for these libraries (museum budget) require professionals to look for management alternatives, such as cooperative acquisitions for subsequent loans between network libraries.

The creation or grouping together of special libraries is recommended to improve their management and increase their social visibility. The criteria for establishing library associations can be both thematic and based on the type of government agency that owns or manages them.

The lack of library staff may be the cause of the failure of library management and the application of ISO-UNE standards, which are widely developed in university and public libraries in Spain: strategic plans, service letters, communication plans, etc.

Participation in forums, distribution lists, professional conferences, establishment of alliances with research groups or communities of practice for the professional development of special librarians is recommended and improves the visibility of information units.

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ORCID iD

Silvia Cobo-Serrano  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3772-2942>

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