

Application of quantitative and qualitative methods in the study of library activities in Bulgaria

Evgeniya Rusinova

SULSIT- State University of Librarianship and IT, Sofia, Bulgaria

Abstract: The paper presents the main areas of application of quantitative and qualitative methods. It is shown the relationship between the agenda of the library area and the used research approaches. There are presented good practices in specific areas which are serving as a basis for full implementation of the qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluating the library activities.

The library sector in Bulgaria is in a phase of complete transformation. This has a strong influence on the state of the research in the libraries. The priority activities are related with the modernizing of the library buildings, to attract different categories readers (children, pupils, students), the teaching of information literacy, the digitization of library collections. The study of library activities is focused mainly in a few areas: study of the general state of library system through analysis of the used new technologies; study of the professional realization of the graduated students in Library and Information Science university programs; analyzing the results of the programs of information literacy.

In some university lectures at the Sofia University and SULSIT are presented also some aspects of the library research. In the specialized library periodicals are published, even occasionally, the information from surveys about the results of specific activities, conducted events about the attraction of readers, work with children and youth audience, the rate of introduction of new teaching methods and new educational disciplines and others.

In the Bulgarian practice to assess the current state of libraries the most widespread method is the SWOT analysis.

Keywords: library, evaluating, categories of readers, library collections, research methods, library and information education, professional realization

1. Introduction

The research of the library activities took place in the second decade of the century with priority for the Bulgarian library specialists. There is a tradition and a very good basis for using the quantitative and qualitative research methods. The librarian society has a diversified practical experience.

Researches on library reading, individual categories of readers, the interests of individual professional groups, as well as the problems of the different types of libraries, analyzes of readers' searches and the characteristics of library funds have been made since the second half of the 1950s.

For the moment, considerable attention has been paid to the questions of the effectiveness of libraries' participation in various mass events - a week of the book, an open day, a reading marathon, etc. On base of the interest in these forms of activity increases the attention to the attitudes of different public circles to libraries. Attention is also paid to the effectiveness and quality assessment of the library work, but in general here the interest is exhausted by individual publications and university courses, in which are mentioned some of the peculiarities of exploring these two phenomena. There is a relatively rare interest in exploring the library users.

After the prolonged transformation process in the last decade of the XX century and the first of the XXI century, there are now many good examples of successful implementation of quantitative and qualitative methods in the library researches.

2. The Situation

There is an ambivalent situation in the Bulgarian library sphere. On one hand, among the library specialists there is complete consensus about the need of conducting qualitative and quantitative researches. On the other hand, the practice of conducting such researches as a necessary condition for the library planning, for the introduction of innovative technologies and the successful adaptation of the libraries to the challenges of the situation is limited. However, at present, an activity has been observed in the use of various studies to assess the current state of certain library activities related to the transformation of libraries, according to the trends at the beginning of the XXI century.

It could be said that the need for quantitative and qualitative research, and their growing popularity is a result of: a) the practical needs of the libraries facing the challenges of strong competition, scarcity of funds, the outflow of readers, digitization and so on; b) under the influence of advanced international contacts, understanding of some examples of foreign practices and of examples seen in participation in various international library forums and projects, and from the followed course of various international library organizations like IFLA, LIBER and ALA.

The main factors for the development of quantitative and qualitative research are the two universities in Sofia, where library and information sciences are studied, and which also have PhD programs. There are concentrated both the research and the publishing activities. It is no coincidence that most of the observations are centered on students and lecturers, or that they are made within the framework of various programs directly related to the universities' activities.

The second place where the library studies are held are some of the universities (Sofia, Veliko Tarnovo) and the regional (Varna, Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo, Shumen, Stara Zagora) libraries of the country.

Since 2000, there has been a strong, multifaceted interest in the library research. In fact, there is no dissertation devoted to current tasks in the library area, in which there is no specific accent upon the quantitative and / or qualitative analysis. In the same direction is oriented the policy of the universities, which encourage the wide use of quantitative and qualitative methods, when possible, in master's thesis. On these methods and the researches based on them is given a place in some university courses - for example in the course of sociology of reading and in the course of library sociology, the main emphasis is placed on the research methods.

3. Basic library studies

From the Bulgarian practice, several circles of interest, which require the use of quantitative and qualitative methods, can be identified:

- Analysis of the readers' profile;
- Analysis of the reasons for visiting the library;
- Analysis of the attitude to the library;
- Analysis of the success of a particular library;
- Analysis of forms and methods of working with readers;
- Analysis of the effect of the application of distinct technologies;
- Analysis of aspects of library education and library careers;
- The impact of the new technologies on the reading orientation.

There are two expressed preferences in the library research - work with statistics and work with questionnaires. The different types of observation and interviewing as methods are highly underestimated, and the same applies to the content analysis that is not applied in practice at all. Measuring of the efficiency and the quality in the libraries are still in their initial steps (Rusinova, 2016).

As it was already mentioned, the conducting of surveys is encouraged and is widely used in the practice. Most of the surveys are conducted by grad students in their Master's degree, PhD students and some university lecturers (collectively with students). In many cases, however, these studies have the task only of establishing some approximate picture. Usually, the groups of respondents are small, the individuals are selected randomly, the survey does not achieve representativeness.

Very popular as a research method is the SWOT analysis. In a significant degree, it is applied by the individual libraries to assess the possibilities of introducing new forms of work - information literacy, for the establishment of public information centers, in regard to the digitization of the funds from rare and valuable library documents.

4. Examples of good practices

From the many conducted studies, several actually hold on to the technological requirements and can be characterized as application of the quantitative and qualitative methods. Altogether, they represent different aspects of the state of the library sphere, including of the library education.

4.1. First in time and by importance is a complete study of the state of the library system of the country realized by a professor at Sofia University (Harizanova, 2007). It is characterized on a base of analysis of statistics and realized quantitative studies, indicators of the state of libraries, movement of the fund, new receipts, provision of new technologies, partly revealing problems with funding.

4.2. Reading-related aspects are the subject of other studies, such as the Student Audience Survey in 2012 at SULTSIT (Parischkova, 2013). Analyzed are indicators such as reading frequency, reading motives, reading perception level. Some key factors that restrict / obstruct the reading are revealed: lack of time, high book prices, lack of books in libraries, lack of a culture of reading.

4.3. In the library sphere, great importance is attached to the attitude of the society towards the new technologies, to the level of their use. From the study on this subject, attention deserves the survey from November 2013 - January 2014 of the facts that determine the use of the Internet by the population (Rasheva-Yordanova, 2015). It reveals correlations of factors such as age, education and domicile. It shows the difficulties in the work of libraries in small populated places, with people over the age of 55, and with those with low education.

4.4. One of the "bottlenecks" of the library activity is the funding. An empirical study in the region of Shumen (Northeastern Bulgaria) shows the possibilities libraries in small populated places to serve the population successfully and to strengthen their positions among the local community by providing financial funds by projects (Dobreva, 2014). This study is characterized by the almost complete inclusion of the libraries in the region (with the exception of about 8% of them). Through it are determined both the basic attitudes towards the projects - expectations and fears, and the results of the project activity.

4.5. The information competence of the students in library and information sciences, the level of their knowledge and skills are subject of another study, which is part of an international research involving participants from 18 countries (15 European countries) (Todorova, 2016). The Bulgarian part is organized in SULTSIT. The significant result of the study is the highlighting of three circles of problems: learning of primary basic skills for information search; achieving skills for implementation of effective strategies for

information search, mastering citation and referral standards, and gaining knowledge to detect cases of plagiarism.

4.6. The problems of the education of students are subject of other studies. Again in SALSIT has been studied the attitude of professors and students on the topic of interactive education in library and information sciences (Stoikova,2015). It shows both the main positive trends in the educational practice and also some discrepancies between the notions and the assessments of professors and students.

4.7. The first ever study of career development in the library area was conducted by a lecturer at Sofia University (Popova, 2016). It covers three categories of respondents: students, employees and individuals who have held leadership positions in their careers. It is based on questionnaires and on interviews in absentia. It gives a nuanced picture of different positions, a momentary notion for the situation in the library field, as well as a number of starting points for studying the image of the profession (and of the libraries), the difficulties in recruiting personnel, due to certain negative circumstances - low pay, lack of good financing, difficult entry of the new technologies, etc.

a. Conclusions

The indicated as "good practices" studies are a good basis for expanding the use of quantitative and qualitative methods in the library researches. Above all, they demonstrate the capabilities of these methods and the based on them researches. They provide a well-structured empirical material that allows the understanding of the current state of the separate directions of the library activities, the society's attitudes to the libraries, to the new information technologies, the interest towards the book and the reading, etc. Their results allow creation of new university disciplines and programs, to select approaches for work with the public, and to plan long-term strategies. It is also important to show job opportunities as well as significant gaps and negative trends. It can be concluded that the library researches gain popularity and weaken the skepticism in regard to themselves.

References

- Harizanova, O.** (2007). *Bulgarian Libraries and Information Society. Readiness to Become Centres of Knowledge*. UI "St. Kl .Ohridski", Sofia.[in bulgarian].
- Parischkova, L.** (2013). Research of current tendencies of the field of Book and Reading // *Digital Present and Future: Economic, Cultural, Educational, Legal and technological Impacts*. Sofia, 109-117. [in bulgarian].
- Rasheva-Yordanova, K.** (2015). A Study on factors influencing the use of the Internet by the population // *New information technologies in educational process*, Vol. IX, 147 – 162. [in bulgarian].

- Dobrova, R.** (2014). Cultural Policies in Public Libraries: Historical Retrospectives and Modern Transformations. Autoreferate of dissertation. Sofia. [in bulgarian].
- Todorova, T.** (2016). Information Competence of Library and Information Sciences Students at the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (Survey conclusions) // *Knowledge Society and 21st Century Humanism. The 13th International Scientific Conference*. Sofia, 232-238. [in bulgarian].
- Stoykova, D.** (2015). Attitudes of teachers and students from SULSIT towards conducting interactive training // *New information technologies in educational process*, Vol. IX, 39-50. [in bulgarian].
- Popova, E.** (2016). Career development of library staff in the context of the information society. Part 1. Surveys 2012-2015. UI "St. Kl. Ohridski", Sofia.[in bulgarian].
- Rusinova, E.** (2016). Are Modern Library Technologies Possible without Studying the Environment and the Situation? // *Knowledge Society and 21st Century Humanism. The 13th International Scientific Conference*. Sofia, 232-238. [in bulgarian].