Guest editorial

The 13th International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries (LibPMC) was held at Aberystwyth University, Wales, UK, between 23rd and 25th July 2019. Despite these being the hottest days on record in the UK, and the consequent travel chaos, 121 delegates, from 21 countries made it to the beautiful seaside town to attend 49 paper presentations, two amazing keynotes, a lively panel discussion and five interactive workshops. The Conference, previously known as the Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries and Information Services, has a 24-year history of bringing together practitioners, researchers, educators and students interested in all aspects of performance and measurement in libraries. The programme this year offered a diverse range of papers that covered the breadth of developments in the performance, measurement and assessment field, featuring academic libraries, public libraries, archives and special libraries.

After a short Welsh lesson, the Conference opened with a stimulating keynote from Prof. Simon Tanner, who introduced his Balanced Value Impact Model as a way to frame impact assessment by balancing the focus on an organisation's strategies with viewing impact through the lenses of stakeholder values. He also set the tone for the Conference – asking attendees to vote by throwing coloured paper planes at him! The second day of the Conference opened in a similarly interactive way, with members of the Conference Board fielding questions on the good, the bad and the ugly of library performance measurement. The final day opened with our second Keynote, Prof. Dr Konrad Förstner, who gave a "controversial, challenging and thought-provoking" rallying call for libraries to go back to their values, and see how to embody them in the current landscape.

In between these plenaries, delegates chose from a variety of parallel tracks, grouping long and short papers on common themes. I have chosen eight of these papers for inclusion in this special issue, selected to reflect the full range of approaches and breadth of subjects presented at the conference.

Cécile Swiatek reports on the novel work that she and her colleagues at ADBU in France have undertaken comparing the data collected on academic and university libraries by library associations across Europe. This presentation was one of the talking points of the Conference, as ADBU determined a corpus of common KPIs that could be used to evaluate a library's contribution to student success and to research performance. However, the paper also makes it clear that, if the library community wants comparable data across national boundaries, library associations must work together to agree definitions to ensure that the data collected is consistent.

Consistency of data was not a problem for Hart, Nicholls, Amos and Benn and their colleagues in the Matariki Network of Universities. They investigated subscription costs and Article Processing Charges for a common journal package across the seven universities, and found that, while "flipping" to a pay-to-publish model would save money across the consortium as a whole, only low publishing universities would save money. This is an important piece of evidence to inform this current "hot topic" debate in the academic library community.

A "hot topic" in the public library community was explored by Paul – the impact of libraries on the intellectual capital, social integration and education of the communities they serve. Paul presents her doctoral work to develop an instrument to measure this social impact in Polish public libraries. It is heartening to see that, although these are complicated issues, a rigorously developed instrument can make it simple to survey the population and measure such impact.

McCarthy also describes the development of a new framework for user research, although in the case of the University of Oxford's Garden, Libraries and Museums it concerned what their digital audience wanted from their websites. The University commissioned consultants to undertake extensive quantitative and qualitative user research, the results of which were used to produce a set of six "archetypes" that describe the visitor's motivation for using the website and associated "pen portraits" (personas). McCarthy and her team then used this framework as the user needs analysis to guide the redevelopment of the Bodleian Libraries' visitor-focused website.

In contrast to this creation of new data sources, Murphy made use of an existing data set – log files from OCLC's EZProzy software. She cleaned, processed and visualised this data to present the subject of study and status (undergraduate; faculty, etc.) of those using specific e-resources. In her paper she generously provides a "how to" guide so that anyone can follow her lead.

The paper from Porritt, Murphy, Wells and Burns also concerns the use of library resources. They report on an initiative at Teesside University Student and Library Services to give all full-time undergraduate students £100 per academic year to spend on books from their reading lists. Their evaluation of the pilot revealed, as expected, that there was a decline in the borrowing of titles that had been bought by students via the scheme. It also illuminated the issues that students were grappling with around reading for their courses – providing valuable insight into where the Student and Library Service could design interventions and resources to support them.

The two final papers report on performance measurement of new spaces in their libraries. So many space refurbishments are carried out with the promise that they will improve x, y or z that it is heartening to see post-occupancy evaluations actually testing whether this is true. Chao, Borrelli, Neupane and Fennewald investigated how well a new "bring your own device" space at Penn State University library met students' needs. Their findings challenged the preconceptions that the same design would satisfy the needs of students for both social study space and communal study space. This case study shows that the drivers for students choosing social or communal study space are distinct, and therefore require different setting and designs; the new space supported only social study.

Jarocki's case study from San Diego State University also challenged the preconceptions of the impact of a new library space. She investigated whether a classroom remodelled to support active learning produced better results in library instruction sessions than the traditional classroom. Her findings found no significant difference, and that the outcomes for students were positive, whichever classroom they were in. Far from taking this as a "failure" of the new classroom, Jarocki was reassured that librarians can feel confident selecting the classroom that works best for them without sacrificing student learning.

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