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Evaluating national library mission statements in Ibero-America

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Purpose: This study reviewed the websites of 22 national libraries in Ibero-America to determine whether and how effectively they display these organisations' mission statements, as well as any convergence/divergence among the respective texts.

Design/methodology/approach: A review was conducted of the national library websites of ABINIA's 22 members to locate their respective mission statements. The statements identified were analysed and evaluated against the positioning and presence criteria and wording proposed by experts.

Findings: Website content clearly attests to national libraries' eagerness to publicise their mission statements, which are readily accessible in most cases. Their functions are represented to a more or less standard pattern. Most are portrayed as institutions responsible for custodying, enriching, preserving and disseminating their countries' cultural legacy. Other purposes mentioned include the promulgation of and accessibility to the heritage custodied.

Practical implications: The article may prove useful for professional librarians involved in drafting or revising their organisation's mission statement in the wake of changing circumstances or on the occasion of the formulation of a new strategic plan.

Originality/value: Of the very short number of analyses of libraries' mission statements published to date, none discusses national libraries. This is the very first study of national library mission statements in Ibero-America. It forms part of a line of research dealing with national library mission statements defined and available on institutional websites for countries anywhere in the world.

Keywords: mission statement; national libraries; Ibero-America; planning; functions; websites.

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Many libraries have adopted management strategies in which planning is a consolidated practice. Drafting the mission statement is an instrumental stage of that strategy, for the library's mission is its reason for existing, its primary role. Spelling it out in a clear statement enhances internal coherence and the institution's identifiability.

Many strategic management theorists have underscored the importance of defining a corporate, institutional or organisational mission (Thompson and Strickland, 2001). Authors studying library planning have also defined mission statements as an essential strategic element (Corral, 2001; Bonachera, 2010).

Strategic, long-term planning has been deemed necessary since the nineteen sixties (Sewell, 1970) and its implementation recommended (Atkins, 1980) to ensure library effectiveness and efficiency. The need to adapt and respond to the primarily economic and technological change underway since the nineteen eighties prompted these institutions to adopt and apply strategic plans. Routinely found in many of today's libraries (Pacios, 2017), they denote the existence of a clear mission that identifies these institutions and guides their commitments. Given the continuous and 'disruptive' (O'Connor, 2015) change to which they are subject, however, national libraries find it necessary to assess their role with ever shorter horizons. Against that backdrop, techniques such as scenario planning are recommended to confront and anticipate an uncertain future by foreglimpsing both likely and unlikely situations (O'Connor and Sidorko, 2010).

As benchmark institutions that generate professional standards and models to be followed in many respects, national libraries should specify their mission in a statement that serves as an example and model for all other libraries in the respective country. This study aimed to establish whether national libraries in Ibero-America publish explicit mission statements on their websites and evaluate their content and expedience. It forms part of a line of research designed to analyse the mission statements of libraries the world over. Some of the present findings are compared to the results of the first stage, which addressed European institutions (Pacios and Pérez, 2018).

In this article, an initial review of the literature on the definition of mission statements and national libraries' functions is followed by sections dealing with the objectives of the study, the methodology used and the findings. The working methodology was based essentially on appraisals of the mission statements found on the websites published by Ibero-American countries' national libraries. The evaluation criteria applied were drawn from the recommendations on form and content put forward by planning theorists.

Literature review: mission statement and national libraries

The mission statement and drafting guidelines

Drucker's pioneering articles (1974, 2001) have since been supplemented by a number of papers on how entrepreneurial mission statements should be broached from the perspective of business management techniques. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) regard identifying mission as an important element in strategic planning to define the organisation's role in the society it serves, the reason it exists. According to these authors, 'a clear mission statement acts as an "invisible hand" that guides people in the organisation'. Some studies view the mission statement as a tool for enhancing or ensuring the engagement of the organisation's members (Campbell and Nash, 1992), whilst others establish a positive relationship between such statements and measures of its financial performance (Desmidt, Prinzie and Decramer, 2011).

In the first of two studies on the conceit, Khalifa (2011 and 2012) discusses the contradictions and confusion around mission, vision and values. The second analyses a series of statements, some very complex, that are not implemented in practice. The author proposes a definition based on three pillars: 'an unyielding commitment to reflect authenticity of the mission; a significant value or outcome signalling a consequential challenge that is exciting and inspiring to stretch an organization's capacity; and a worthy cause to give meaning to the organization's members so that they invest themselves in creating the chosen value' (Khalifa, 2012, p. 242-243). Powers (2012) reviews the definitions of and recommendations for missions put forward over time, while also stipulating that a mission should be geared to customer needs, stable over a reasonable period of time, simple, broad and multi-useful. He adds that the definition should be formulated as part of strategic planning, the framework for organisational differentiation from the competition and for establishing singularity.

To motivate staff, non-profit organisations' missions should be outward- and forward-looking, credible, simple, clear and straightforward, highly 'original', unique, characterised by a certain intangible, utopian, ambitious and idealistic slant and subject to review every 3 to 5 years (Palón and Tort, 1991).

Similar features have been identified in the literature on library planning. Marco (1996) notes that mission statements should not be drafted in vague terms and should bear in mind both service providers and targets (1994; 2000) recommends brainstorming with library staff to define the organisation's mission as a participatory exercise in the framework of strategic planning.

Despite the host of occasionally conflicting definitions (Khalifa, 2012), the many papers on the subject consistently define the following as imperative elements in mission statements:

- the organisation's purpose and societal role
- the benefits of its activity for users/customers
- the organisation's commitment to its beneficiaries and accountability for compliance
- the organisation's target beneficiaries and the orientation to be adopted to meet the needs of the individuals it intends to serve.

Statements should be long lasting but revisable as required.

Other authors suggest that mission statements should answer three key questions: What user needs are to be met? How should they be met? What user groups are targeted? (Thompson and Strickland, 2001).

The consensus recommendations for statement writing include: a) clarity and comprehensibility; b) brevity; c) conceptual breadth to avoid speedy obsolescence; and d) capacity to inspire and motivate. Despite the consistency of this advice over time, it has not always been applied. Studying a sample of 100 Forbes 500 companies, Sattari, Pitt and Caruana (2011) note that the recommendation for legible and comprehensible wording is largely ignored.

Beyond a general recommendation for brevity and concision, the literature rarely provides guidance on the ideal number or range of words. Hellweg (2010) claims that eight words should suffice to match the 'verb, target, outcome' format. Top Nonprofits (2017) reports a mean of 15 words in the mission statements of 50 international not-for-profit majors, a number deemed ideal to enable people to convey and remember what an organisation does. That is nonetheless not readily reconciled with the need to respond to the aforementioned three questions.

The vast literature on library planning generally contains a reference to an organisation's mission as one of the indispensable elements to be addressed in the process, with a section on the elements to be included. This is visible in the analyses of libraries' strategic plans, where it is highlighted as the most prominent constituent (Buchanan and Cousins, 2012; Stewart, 2017). Fuentes (2002) in particular, in a study on strategic planning in national libraries, recognises the importance of a mission for successful strategic management.

The very few analyses of library missions published tend to focus on public and university institutions. The articles on public libraries' missions put forward guidelines for their definition (American Library Association - Public Library Association (ALA- PLA), 1977), at times from a marketing perspective (Leisner, 1986). British and U.S. public libraries' missions have also been analysed to determine whether their evolution denotes adaptation to new circumstances (Liangzhi, 2006) or to justify their definition in response to views that challenge the need for libraries (Balas, 2007). More recent papers attempt to evaluate the presence of stakeholders (staff, users, non-users) and their needs in statement drafting, suggesting that the final wording should be negotiated (Crawford, 2016).

Some studies on university libraries, in turn, are confined to establishing the guidelines to follow in times of change (Svenningsen and Cherepon, 1998; Austen, 1998), with proposals for accommodating the variations expected with the turn of the century. Others channel attention to hybrid libraries' mission (Von Elm and Trump, 2001). Wadas (2017) discusses the relationship between university libraries' mission and the university served. In an earlier paper, Wilson (1988) connects academic libraries' mission to information science.

Other articles more closely associated with this study, such as Bundy's (2008) on Australian public libraries' mission statements, reveal that they fail to respond to the ideal parameters and recommend that good examples be sought outside that specific realm. In an evaluation of the effectiveness of a series of university library mission statements in New York City, Ferreira dos Santos (2003) identifies a considerable divide between recommended and actual practice. More recent research analyses the words used against the presence of functions associated with university libraries (Perret, 2018).

Although no analyses of national library mission statements were found in the literature, this is actually the second study of mission statements available on national libraries' websites, inasmuch as earlier research on European national libraries is pending publication. This evaluation of such definitions aims to serve as a basis for new missions more closely aligned with the recommendations in place.

National libraries' reason to exist

An organisation's mission focuses on its *raison d'être*. With that in mind, the functions attributed to national libraries are reviewed hereunder. The magnitude of national libraries' collections, the importance of their functions and the influence of national politics, economics and culture on their mission are indisputable. Those very factors hinder a consensus on a single definition applicable to all that also encompasses the differences among them. Hence national libraries' status as a symbol of cultural identity (Fuentes Romero, 2003). Globalisation, new media and the need to organise information differently also clearly impact their functions (De Beer, 2006).

Since 1970, date of the Sixteenth Session of UNESCO's General Conference, such institutions are characterised in terms of the purposes they meet or should meet (Sylvestre, 1987). That definition stresses one essential purpose: the responsibility for acquiring and conserving the country's documentary heritage. UNESCO also identifies other functions routinely performed by these organisations, which it nonetheless does not deem requisite to national library status.

The reports on national libraries commissioned by International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (hereafter, IFLA) from Sylvestre in 1987, Line in 1989 and Cornish in 1991, compiled and analysed by Fuentes (2003), focus primarily on the competences with which they are vested, both as regards the purposes actually met and those deemed to behove national libraries. A more recent review by Stephens (2016) of the functions actually met by national libraries in the twenty-first century, based on an online survey of 12 national libraries, shows that they have adapted and extended their reach. In addition to corroborating the plurality of forms of such institutions, the outcome of country size, cultural history and economic development, that article inventories best practice.

The definition set out by the IFLA in the national library section of its website (IFLA 2016) follows along the same lines. From its international perspective it evaluates

libraries' possible functions in keeping with socio-economic scenarios, bearing in mind that they may assume different responsibilities in developed and developing countries.

A comparison of the functions listed by Sylvestre, Cornish, IFLA and Stephens shows that the IFLA adopts a more universal approach, Cornish stresses national libraries' role in the country's library network and Sylvestre emphasises their status as a bibliographic reference. Stephens identifies the most innovative functions associated with national libraries and a wider spectrum of tasks and users. That review also reveals substantial differences in national libraries' missions and target audiences, even though the survey conducted to establish the details showed that nearly all cite (>90 %) culture, research and education as elements of their respective institutional missions. These distinctions are obvious in some cases, such as the Quebec National Library and Archives, a key cultural centre that combines the public library and citizen information services ensuing from the convergence of the two functions (Berthiaume and Ryan, 2014). Similar circumstances are found in some Ibero-American countries such as Peru (Von Bischoffshausen, 2006) and Guatemala, where the national institution also plays a lead role as a public library. An unquestionable consensus has nonetheless been reached on the essential functions that ensure fulfilment of their purpose as reference points in documentary matters and as public service institutions: collection, preservation and conservation of national publications, bibliographic and reference services, national library network leadership and representation on the international stage.

Focusing on national libraries in Ibero-America, very scantily addressed in the literature, the most recent paper located highlights the individuality stemming from the particulars of their collections and identifies the acquisition of the country's entire national production as their most prominent function (Moreno de Alba and Ramírez Leyva, 1995). In 2004 the Asociación de Estados Iberoamericanos para el Desarrollo de las Bibliotecas Nacionales de Iberoamérica (Association of Ibero-American States for the Development of National Libraries, hereafter ABINIA) defined the national library in terms not essentially different from the foregoing. Further to that definition, they must compile the documentary heritage produced in or related to the country for the traditional purposes of classification, preservation and accessibility. But in addition they must provide services to other libraries across the country and develop, coordinate and maintain mechanisms for national cooperation among national library services to guarantee citizens and the rest of the world access to the collections custodied. National libraries are deemed as autonomous entities to ensure the independence and authority needed to most effectively comply with their responsibilities (ABINIA, 2004).

Other studies on Ibero-American national libraries, such Schadlich's (1991) on Chile, discuss their role as national cultural hubs lending valuable support to the country's intellectuals and helping establish the grounds for political and administrative organisations. Many were initially chartered as public libraries and even today fulfil that important purpose in the cities where they sited.

National libraries in Ibero-America are diverse, given the differences in their political, economic and social situations, which condition their functional priorities (Acosta

Mateos, 2004). Some, but not all, are regulated by law. Legislation governing Spain's National Library, for instance, vests it with independence and establishes the importance of its functions while requiring the State to allocate sufficient resources to enable it to defray its operating and development expenses. The variable legal status of national libraries in Ibero-America includes ministerial administrative units under the aegis of cultural secretariats (Guatemala, Paraguay, Dominican Republic), divisions of national cultural institutes (Nicaragua, Puerto Rico), university-dependent organisations (Mexico), foundations or parts thereof (Bolivia, Brazil), autonomous institutions created under national law (Venezuela) or autonomous bodies with distinct legal status (Argentina). That diversity led in 2001 to the formulation in ABINIA of a draft national library act to further institutional reform and updating where necessary (ABINIA, 2004), patterned on the IFLA's (1997) *Guidelines for Legislation for National Library Services*.

These institutions also cooperate closely. One example is the construction and consolidation of the Espacio Cultural Iberoamericano [Ibero-American cultural space] and its primary tool the Biblioteca Digital del Patrimonio Iberoamericano [a digital library for the Ibero-American heritage (BDPI)]. Driven by ABINIA and endorsed by Spain's Secretariat General for Ibero-America (SEGIB), this project will publish a new portal to be designed and created by the Spanish National Library (BNE). It will provide access to the digital resources held by all the participating libraries from a single site and with its sole existence encourage libraries to digitise their collections.

National libraries across Ibero-America have long cooperated. The cultural globalisation initiated in the late twentieth century has contributed to raising awareness of the bibliographic heritage with the institution of projects geared to preserving, conserving and disseminating national collections (Fernández and Budnik, 2001). ABINIA's Strategic Plan 2017-2022, approved in the twenty-eighth assembly held in October 2017 in Mexico, is another example of such ongoing collaboration. The plan's roadmap consists in four strategic lines of action: furtherance of cultural identity, knowledge management, library empowerment and modernisation and heritage management.

Objectives and methodology

The study pursued the following objectives:

- to determine whether Ibero-American national libraries publish a mission statement on their websites and where affirmative, to evaluate accessibility in terms of location and the name of the respective link
- to ascertain whether such statements abide by planning expert recommendations through analysis and evaluation of its wording
- to establish convergence/divergence between libraries on the grounds of the prominence of site keywords as an indication of the priority functions identified in their statements.

The sample was confined to 22 Ibero-American national libraries that comprise a culturally similar space, share a cultural *acquis*, have common objectives and needs and engage in collaborative projects. Substantial differences are also in place, however, as some are located in more highly developed countries. More specifically, the sample covered the mission statements of national libraries in countries participating in ABINIA, an association founded in Mexico City on 14 December 1989. This initiative of Spain's national library aims to encourage mutual knowledge, the exchange of information and experiences and members' growth and development through policy, technical standards, cooperation programmes and mutual assistance (Caro, 1994). Member library directors and deputy directors meet yearly to define priorities, review the objectives in place and put forward proposals for new projects in need of association funding. The twenty-eighth meeting, held in October 2017 in Mexico, adopted the Strategic Plan 2017-2022.

The methodology for this study included the following stages.

- A review of the 22 Ibero-American libraries' websites completed in March 2018 resulted in the location of 19 mission statements (86.3 %). The link names, number of words, existence or otherwise of an English language version, keywords and an evaluation of the content and wording are listed in the Appendix. Mission statements could not be found for three libraries (13.6 %), two because their websites were not located (Zabala's (2005) indications of their existence to the contrary). To rule out the possibility of search error in the third, Costa Rica, an inquiry was sent to the library. Although its mission statement was included in the reply, as it is not accessible from the library's website it was excluded from the study.

- The 19 mission statements found on library websites were analysed to the following criteria:
 - a) Transparency and visibility: position on the website and ease of accessibility for all members, customers and the public at large.
 - b) Content respecting their functions and how they are fulfilled, as well as their beneficiaries, with a view to establishing convergence and divergence among national libraries, evaluated in terms of whether the statement answered the three key questions set out in the recommendations for drafting mission statements discussed in the review of the literature (Palom y Tort, 1991; Corral, 1994; Marco, 1996; Thompson and Strickland, 2001; Khalifa, 2012 and Powers, 2012): What user needs are to be met? (expressed through the functions attributed to national libraries in each mission statement). How should they be met? What user groups are targeted? (with each question scoring 1 or 0 depending on whether or not it was answered, for a maximum possible overall score of 3 and a minimum of 0).
 - c) Statement compliance with the recommendations on form identified in the review of the literature (Palom y Tort, 1991; Khalifa, 2012 and Powers, 2012), namely: clarity and comprehensibility; brevity; sufficient conceptual breadth to elude early obsolescence; and capacity to inspire and motivate (with each item scoring 1 or 0 depending on whether the recommendation was met or otherwise, for a maximum possible overall score of 4 and a minimum of 0).

The websites for Puerto Rico's and Honduras's national libraries could not be accessed and whilst their mission statements were located on the other sites listed in the Appendix, they were excluded from the analysis. A revised version of this study undertaken in October 2018 revealed that neither library had yet published a website. The Costa Rican library's website, also visited on the occasion, was still lacking a mission statement on that date.

- Evaluation and interpretation of the findings

Although some degree of subjectivity is inherent in text analyses, the data collected were deemed to suffice for the classification proposed and to evaluate the suitability of the statements studied.

Results and discussion

Location, analysis and evaluation of the mission statements served as a basis for the conclusions discussed below.

Mission statement position on the institutional website and identification

As in other types of organisations (Bart, 2001), the position on the institutional website deemed by libraries to be most suitable for the mission statement was unequivocal. In all cases it was included in a section accessed from a link announcing information on the institution and containing data on its organisation, staff and applicable legislation. Spain's national library positioned it in a section entitled 'Transparency', accessed from the home page or a tab entitled 'Introduction'. In most cases, the text was displayed directly on the website, the exception being Panama's national library, which included it together with other data in a PDF file linked to a section entitled 'Collection development policy'.

Most of the libraries used an obvious title: 'Mission'. With a few exceptions, that section covered mission, vision and objectives or at least the former two. These three closely related and complementary conceits are usually drafted in the same stage of strategic plan design, for together they represent the institution and its culture. Nearly all libraries' mission statements were clearly identified with a subtitle or bold type.

Less commonly, the mission was included in a section dealing with other matters, such as in Brazil ('Competence and activities'), Portugal ('Mission and activities'), Cuba ('History and mission') and Dominican Republic ('Mission, vision and functions').

Statements were most frequently (33.3 %) accessed from a link entitled 'About us'. Analysing the position of the statement on ARL (Association of College and Research Libraries) library websites, Kuchi (2006) identified a weak point in most, i.e., access from an indirect link, a practice the author recommended revisiting to improve communication. An update on that study (Salisbury and Griffis, 2014) conducted to determine whether the position had changed showed that accessibility to library mission statements improved

with improvements in their websites, attesting to these institutions' eagerness to disseminate such information.

Equivalent link names used included 'About (or on) the library' (Argentina, Brazil, Portugal), 'Introduction' (Cuba) and others promising general information such as 'Institution' (Paraguay and Peru). Where regarded as an indication of transparency, the statement was accessed from a link so labelled (Spain and Mexico).

On the grounds of the title and the link used to provide access to the statement, visibility was deemed good in all library websites, a finding consistent with earlier reports on Brazilian and Portuguese libraries (Melo and Quiroa, 2007). The statement was normally positioned at the head of the page and exceptionally (Colombia and Venezuela, for instance) at the foot. The exception was the Panamanian institution, which positioned it under the title 'Collection development policy', where it was difficult to locate.

Further to the transparency assessment and monitoring methodology applied to Spanish public institutions, known in Spain by its acronym MESTA (Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas y la Calidad de los Servicios (AEVAL), 2016), the number of clicks is another accessibility criterion. In this study, in 61.1 % the statement was accessed with only one click, in 27.7 % with two and in 5.5 % with three; a further 5.5 % required no clicks, as the statement was displayed directly on the home page. Exceptionally, Uruguay's statement was not accessible from any of the links and could only be found by using the search engine.

By way of summary, only two mission statements, Panama's and Uruguay's, could be deemed difficult to access/locate, each for a different reason, as noted above.

Functions included in the mission statement

Traditionally, national libraries have been defined in terms of their public service functions. Given that the reason for their existence lies primarily in their priority functions, these should logically be mentioned in their mission statements to describe their activities, services and singularity.

A series of words or terms found in the statements were selected as identifiers of priority functions, tasks and service targets (see Appendix). As in other mission statement analyses (Keeling, 2013), the functions and their frequencies identified with these keywords were displayed in a tag cloud (Figure 1).

(Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) or to information and knowledge (Chile, Ecuador) were other prominent tasks. The term memory was found in connection with these functions in Colombia (collective memory), Argentina (memory in print) and Panama (national memory). Spain's national library, in turn, referred to 'information use and reuse' instead of to access, further to a provision of Spanish Act 19/2013 on Transparency that requires public institutions to provide the information generated in a reusable format.

Several libraries drew a connection between the dissemination of information and the degree of societal development. Raising educational levels and driving cultural, intellectual and ultimately social development was explicitly mentioned in seven Ibero-American national libraries' mission statements (Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Paraguay, El Salvador and Venezuela). Such references were logical given that those providing public library services are deemed to be involved in their countries' cultural transformation. This educational role was the area where the difference was widest between Ibero-American and European libraries. In the latter, where it was mentioned primarily by the institutions that also served as university libraries, it was not evoked by a single one as an engine for development (Pacios and Pérez, 2018).

Terms referring to the acquisition of the materials that should form part of library collections were likewise alluded to in most countries' institutions, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Portugal, El Salvador and Venezuela. That also distinguished them from European libraries, where such references were significant but not prevalent (Pacios and Pérez, 2018).

The organisation of the materials custodied, an imperative for availability, was another function routinely mentioned. Organising, recording, cataloguing and classifying were terms used by the Argentinian, Brazilian, Dominican, Panamanian, Portuguese, Salvadoran and Venezuelan libraries.

Support for research occupied a prominent place in European library mission statements, but not in the ones analysed here, with only the Bolivian, Salvadoran, Mexican, Peruvian and Venezuelan national libraries citing that task.

Other functions attributable to national libraries had a practically token presence: library network coordination (Dominican Republic, Panama and Venezuela); the creation of bibliographic guidelines (Mexico and Portugal), a national bibliography or the legal deposit (Mexico and Portugal).

Functions such as international representation or the creation of a collective catalogue, scanty present in European library mission statements, were not mentioned in any of the countries studied here, despite the existence of examples pointing in that direction. Only the Portuguese library used the term 'catalogue' to refer to this on-line service. The Biblioteca Digital del Patrimonio Iberoamericano is an example of international library cooperation in these countries. It encourages all the libraries forming part of ABINIA to

digitise their collections and automate and standardise their catalogues to international descriptive and exchange criteria to support the interoperability required for project roll-out.

Mission statement content

The mission statement is the organisation’s commitment to people, a text through which it publicly lists the needs it aims to meet, how they are to be met and the target beneficiaries of its activity. Full information redounds to a better understanding of the entity’s contribution to society, a factor of vital importance to institutions such as national libraries that depend on public budgets for their funding. As 10 (52.63 %) of the mission statements earned a score of 3 and a further nine (47.37 %) a score of 2, the suitability of their content was deemed to be high. The mission statements are evaluated for content in Table I.

Table I. Evaluation of the content of national libraries’ mission statements

National library	Needs covered	For whom	How	Overall score
Argentina	1	0	1	2
Bolivia	1	0	1	2
Brasil	1	0	1	2
Chile	1	1	1	3
Colombia	1	0	1	2
Cuba	1	0	1	2
Ecuador	1	1	1	3
España	1	1	1	3
Guatemala	1	1	1	3
México	1	0	1	2
Nicaragua	1	0	1	2
Panamá	1	0	1	2
Paraguay	1	1	1	3
Perú	1	1	0	2
Portugal	1	1	1	3
Rep. Dominicana	1	1	1	3
El Salvador	1	1	1	3
Uruguay	1	1	1	3
Venezuela	1	1	1	3
TOTAL	19 100%	11 57.8%	18 94.7%	Mean: 2.5

According to expert recommendations, the first two essential items that should be covered in institutional missions are the needs addressed and how they are to be met. Both were dealt with clearly and explicitly in nearly all 19 statements analysed here. A particular case, the Peruvian statement, is couched in very general terms with scant specification of any of the functions usually attributed to national libraries, such as conservation, preservation, heritage or intellectual production. Its role is consequently difficult to distinguish from that of other specialised information management centres. That is attributable to the inclusion in this library's priorities of the furtherance of reading among the country's citizens, inasmuch as the institution maintains close working relations with public libraries, a cornerstone for cultural development. These features are described in its strategic plan 2018-2020, where 'protection' of bibliographic material may be the sole element typical of a national library's functions. That notwithstanding, its statement answers the first question posed, in connection with the needs met.

The third essential issue that should be set out in organisations' missions, the target beneficiaries, was covered by 11 of the 19 libraries (57.8 %). European national libraries were also observed to omit any reference to the target users. The statements in place in the Argentinian, Bolivian, Brazilian, Colombian, Cuban, Mexican, Nicaraguan and Panamanian libraries lacked any terms that could be construed to mean service beneficiaries: citizen, society, the public, user, researcher...

One possible explanation for that omission may be that the definition of service users is regarded as obvious. Libraries take for granted that both their statements and their activity target their countries' citizens. As a result of that absence, however, missions are incomplete, for the failure to address such an important issue estranges the institution from its ultimate users, with the concomitant forfeiture of the opportunity to connect to the society it targets.

That much desired connection is also thwarted when users are referred to in general and impersonal terms such as 'population', as observed in the Ecuadoran and Guatemalan statements, or 'the public' in the Portuguese text. Spain's national library, in turn, targets 'society' and only Chile's applies the more specific 'users', which nonetheless excludes those who, while not using the services, also benefit from an undertaking designed to redound to the community.

'Citizens', the term used in the Paraguayan, Peruvian, Uruguayan and Venezuelan library mission statements, is more pertinent for it refers directly to the end beneficiaries of a library responsible for custodying the intellectual heritage of which they form part. The Dominican and Salvadoran statements use the respective national appellative, establishing a closer bond.

Formal aspects of mission statement wording

The effectiveness of mission statements, which aim most notably to communicate, relies not only on content but also on certain formal features. A clear, brief explanation using

broad and inspiring conceits favours more effective communication of the institution’s social purpose and innovation.

As Table II shows, most of the mission statements were drafted largely as recommended by the same experts cited, with a clear, brief, conceptually broad (possibly reflecting their priorities and long-standing functions) and motivational message.

Table II. Formal evaluation of national libraries’ mission statements

National library	Clarity	Brevity	Motivation	Breadth	Overall score
Argentina	1	1	1	1	4
Bolivia	1	1	1	1	4
Brasil	1	1	1	1	4
Chile	1	1	1	1	4
Colombia	1	1	1	1	4
Cuba	1	1	0	1	3
Ecuador	1	1	0	1	3
España	1	1	1	1	4
Guatemala	1	1	1	1	4
México	1	1	0	1	3
Nicaragua	1	1	1	1	4
Panamá	1	1	1	1	4
Paraguay	1	1	0	1	3
Perú	1	1	0	1	3
Portugal	1	0	1	1	3
Rep. Dominicana	1	1	1	1	4
El Salvador	1	1	1	1	4
Uruguay	1	1	1	1	4
Venezuela	1	1	1	1	4
TOTAL	19 100 %	18 94.7 %	14 73.6 %	19 100 %	Mean: 3.6

Brevity in particular characterised all but the Portuguese national library’s statement, which with 271 words was the only one analysed here to exceed 90. The Brazilian, Colombian, Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, Peruvian, Salvadoran and Uruguayan (42.1 %) libraries published statements ranging from 17 to 48 words, whilst the Chilean, Cuban, Dominican, Ecuadoran, Mexican, Panamanian, Paraguayan, Spanish and Venezuelan libraries’ missions were expressed in 51 to 89 words (Figure 2). Those values attest, firstly, to a clear preference for brevity and secondly to a narrower variability than

observed in the European statements, which ranged from the Estonian library’s 18 words to Germany’s 911 (Pacios and Pérez, 2018)

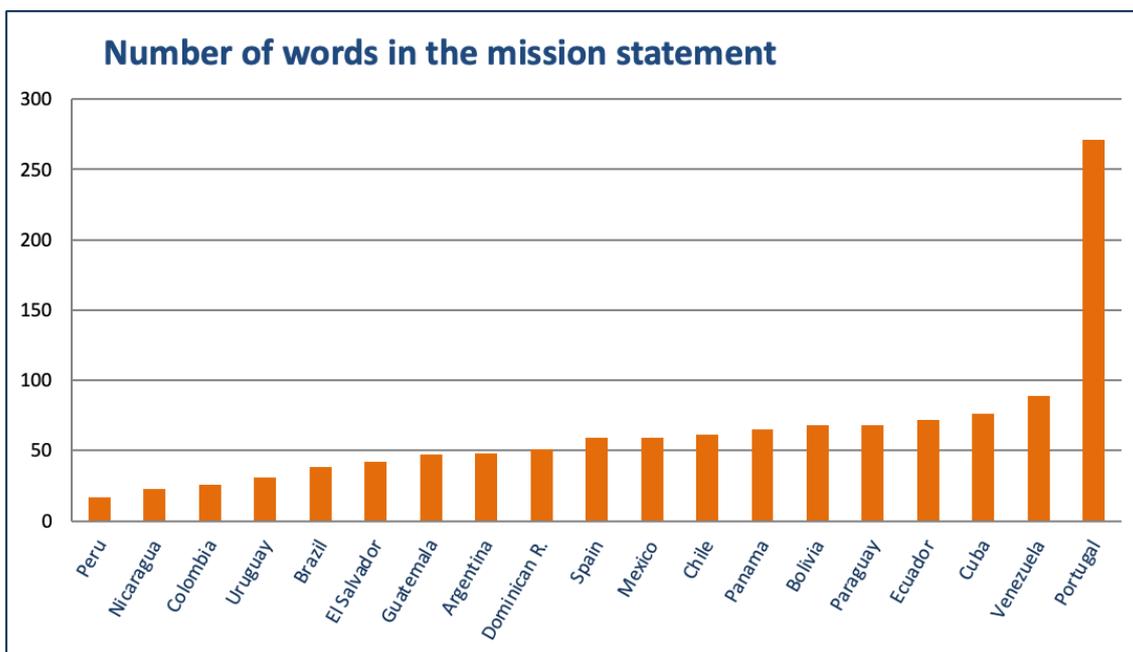


Figure 2. Number of words (in Spanish) comprising Ibero-American national library mission statements

Given that the mean for the statements evaluated most highly for form and content was 54 words, that number may be used as a guide for drafting such messages. Brevity breeds greater clarity: these libraries’ mission statements condense the information into one or two paragraphs focusing on the essential. The Mexican library was the only one to use bullet points, a format for listing the institution’s most representative functions which, while practical and functional, precludes motivational wording.

The motivational and inspirational factor, likewise pivotal to mission statements, was absent in those of only five countries’ national libraries: Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Peru. The term ‘memory’, for instance, is prominent in the tag cloud. Reference to memory in the context of preservation appeared in several of the statements analysed. It was found in the Argentinian (memory in print); Bolivian, Chilean and Colombian (collective memory); Paraguayan and Venezuelan (national memory); Brazilian (bibliographic memory); Guatemalan (documentary memory); and Nicaraguan (historic memory) libraries’ statements. A broad conceit, it elicits the bibliographic heritage but also the world of ideas, transcending the strictly tangible. Other expressions such as ‘cultural identity’ (El Salvador) or ‘societal benefit’ (Spain) may also contain a motivational element that engages citizens in libraries’ endeavour.

Conclusions

Although many theoretical papers have been published on what a mission statement is, what it should contain (*raison d'être*, priority function, core activity, activity targeted...) and how it should be written, no scientific method has been forthcoming in this regard. Most national libraries choose to exemplify the primary purpose pursued by the institution and its staff by citing their priority functions. Given that many functions are invariable over time and imperative for a national library, not all the recommendations on form and content can be readily applied, among others because some are incompatible with or contradict others. Originality, for instance, may run counter to the fulfilment of traditional and necessary functions such as conservation or preservation. Theory itself is contradictory in some respects, recommending both durability and continual updating, for instance. Such divergence is obvious in the literature and practice geared on the one hand to corporate and on the other to not-for-profit organisations' statements. Although priorities differ in the business and public service worlds in terms of geographic scope and type and size of the target population, the criteria and features addressed in this evaluation of mission statements are valid for all types of organisations. The criteria applied are consistent (non-contradictory) and the same as or concur with those proposed by authors researching in different knowledge areas. When formulated to those criteria, mission statements will identify the circumstances and commitments that justify the organisation's (in this case the library's) existence, creating bonds that will contribute to user loyalty.

Nineteen of the 22 national libraries' websites reviewed contained mission statements. The analysis of that sizeable sample afforded a general overview of the mission of Ibero-American libraries from which the following conclusions were drawn.

A total of 81.8 % of Ibero-American national libraries have drafted statements which are published on their websites. Given their association with strategic planning, such texts should provide an articulate definition of libraries' vision, values, objectives and strategic behaviour (Kelsh, 2005). Nonetheless, although the presence of mission statements is widespread among national libraries, the foregoing contention cannot be proven in most. Only Spain's, Mexico's and Peru's websites feature strategic plans that were in effect when the search for statements was conducted. The Dominican library's plan expired in 2017 and the Cuban institution's was inaccessible from its link. Whilst the other libraries cannot be said to have no plan on the grounds of its absence from their websites, that circumstance does indicate that if they have one, they do not use it as a tool to publicise their future strategy. The study of European libraries yielded similar findings.

Mission statement visibility is high. The denomination most commonly used ('Mission', sometimes together with 'Vision' and under the 'About us/the library' sections) and its position on websites proves that these texts are meant to be seen to heighten public awareness of the institution and its social value. Accessibility is also high across the board, inasmuch as the statements are accessed with just one click in most of the sites, with three needed in one case only.

A substantial number of mission statements describe the most prominent features of their function, answering the key questions that should be addressed in such texts. The formal recommendations made by the experts for drafting mission statements are generally applied, with only a few failing to include broad, motivational ideas. Such recommendations are not merely aesthetic, for they ensure a fuller and more effective communication experience (Vallace, 2004).

Ibero-American national libraries describe their functions to a more or less standard pattern. That does not prevent their mission statements from expressing individuality, however, in their attempt to meet the specific needs of the population of a given country. Most are portrayed as institutions responsible for custodying, enriching, preserving, conserving and disseminating their countries' cultural legacy. These functions are in keeping with the tasks deemed by experts and significant institutions to be incumbent upon national libraries in their public service role. A number of libraries assume an active part in developing the societies served: dissemination of the cultural wealth custodied by national libraries is deemed to support and serve as a basis for citizens' educational and cultural progress. Libraries consequently make a substantial contribution to societies with shortcomings in that respect.

Such positive factors are overshadowed, however, by the publication of incomplete statements in which no mention is made of recipients. Nearly half (42.2 %) of the libraries omit references to the beneficiaries of their endeavour. The outcome is a sterile, insufficient statement unable to connect to its target audience.

Given that missions define institutions' essential purpose and explain their contribution to society, a flawed statement cannot be wholly effective either as a helm for the library or as its letter of introduction to the public at large. Basic information on national libraries, of which the mission statement forms an indispensable part, should be provided on their websites in English. As the point where the entire staff and their tasks, functions, activities and training converge, the mission is also instrumental to internal coherence.

The conclusion drawn from the present evaluation is that whilst national libraries recognise the need to make their societal contribution known and assume the demand for effective management, that paradoxically does not always translate into well constructed and hence effective mission statements. Some of the statements analysed here are less than optimal examples for other libraries. As noted in earlier studies (Bundy, 2008), libraries should model their statements on benchmarks, even if identified in other types of organisations, including companies. Nonetheless, any such approach must be adapted to these institutions, bearing in mind that their priority functions are governed by their socioeconomic context.

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Appendix – Iberoamerican National Libraries. Location, analysis and evaluation of localized mission statements (accessed: 5/3/2018)

Library and URL (embedded)	Name of the link on the web and URL	No. of words	Words relating to functions and tasks	Content evaluation	Redaction evaluation
Biblioteca Nacional de Argentina	Información general/ Acerca de la bn/ Visión, Misión, Objetivos	48	Grow; Conserve; Custody; Disseminate; Cultural heritage; Memory; Preserve; Record.	2	4
Biblioteca y Archivos Nacionales de Bolivia	Inicio (Mision, visión)	68	Conserve; Custody; Development; Disseminate; Research; Memory; Country; Heritage; Collect.	2	4
Biblioteca Nacional de Brasil (in English, Spanish and Portuguese)	Acerca BN/ Competencias y actividades (Misión)	38	Access; Memory (2); Preserve; Intellectual Production; Collect; Record.	2	4
Biblioteca Nacional de Chile	Quienes somos/ Misión	61	Access; Disseminate; Bibliographic materials; Memory; Preserve; Collect; Users.	3	4
Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia (in English and Spanish)	Quienes somos / Mision y Visión	26	Access; Memory; Heritage; Preserve; Retrieve.	2	4

Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica	It was not located on the website. An email was sent on 3/3/2018 that was answered by its director.				
Biblioteca Nacional de Cuba	La biblioteca/ Conócenos/Historia y Misión	76	Acquire; Conserve; Heritage.	2	3
Biblioteca Nacional de Ecuador	In main web page	72	Access; Community; Development; Disseminate; Heritage; Population; Preserve; Collect.	3	3
Biblioteca Nacional de España (in English and Spanish)	Inicio/ Transparencia	59	Preserve; Convey; Bibliographic Heritage; Documental Heritage; Cultural legacy; Treasure; Access; Use; Reuse; Conserve; Generate; Society.	3	4
Biblioteca Nacional de Guatemala	Misión y Visión	47	Collect; Memory (4); Heritage; Population; Make available; Preserve; User; Quality service.	3	4
Biblioteca Nacional de Honduras	No website. In Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros (Argentina)				
Biblioteca Nacional de México	Transparencia/ Misión, Visión y objetivos	59	Acquire; National bibliography; Custody; Legal deposit; Promote guidelines; Integrate; Research; Preserve; Documentary resources.	2	3

Biblioteca Nacional de Nicaragua	Quiénes somos	23	Conserve; Memory (2); Bibliographic Production; Promotion; Rescue.	2	4
Biblioteca Nacional de Panamá	Quiénes somos / Política de desarrollo de colecciones	65	Bibliographic <i>adquis</i> ; Disseminate; Memory; Organize; Library network.	2	4
Biblioteca Nacional de Paraguay	Institucional / Misión	68	Access; Citizen; Development; Enrich; Heritage; Preserve.	3	3
Biblioteca Nacional de Perú	Institución / Quienes somos	17	Access; Citizen; Development; Research; Enjoyment.	2	3
Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (in English and Portuguese)	Sobre a BNP/ Missão e atividades	271	National Bibliography; Classification; Collaboration; Conservation; Legal deposit; Disseminate; Exhibitions; Documentary heritage; Public; Collect; Process; Preserve.	3	3
Biblioteca Nacional de Puerto Rico	No website. The following mission appears on the Facebook page of the library.				
Biblioteca Nacional de la Republica Dominicana	Conócenos / Misión visión y funciones	51	Access; Acquire; Development; National Identity; Organize; Intellectual production; Library Network.	3	4

Biblioteca Nacional de El Salvador	Quienes somos/ Vision y misión	42	Development; Disseminate; Cultural Identity; Organize; Bibliographic Heritage; Salvadoran; Collect; Research.	3	4
Biblioteca Nacional de Uruguay	It was located through the search engine of the website: http://www.bibna.gub.u y/innovaportal/v/972/4/mecweb/mision-y-vision?search=yes	31	Access; Citizen; Bibliographic legacy; Documentary legacy; Preserve.	3	4
Biblioteca Nacional de Venezuela	Nosotros / Misión y Visión	89	Access; Bibliographic <i>adquis</i> ; Development; Disseminate; Training; Knowledge generation; Research; Memory; Organize; Population; Preserve; Collect; Library network.	3	4