Assessment of transparency in national public libraries

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Abstract

This paper describes the transparency rating for 53 national public libraries' websites delivered by TransPa_BA software, a tool was inspired by Spain's *Metodología de Evaluación y Seguimiento de la Transparencia* [transparency assessment and monitoring method, MESTA]. A total of 20 indicators are proposed to measure active disclosure by public libraries in keeping with the provisions of Spanish Act 19/2013 of 9 December on Transparency, Access to Public Information and Good Governance (hereafter LTAIPBG). The indicators and their respective parameters (content, form, accessibility, reusability, dating and updating) constitute guidelines for libraries seeking to enhance transparency and accountability, reporting their activities and performance in key areas to society in general and their stakeholders in particular. Although the findings reveal some good practices, scant transparency-related information is provided for the indicators analysed as a whole. More specifically, the results reveal the presence of information associated with collaboration and cooperation, service operating regulations, mission statement, contact data for library professionals and statistics. Much of the information is scattered across the websites under different categories. The improvements suggested therefore refer not only to public disclosure, but also to how information is arranged, for neither visibility nor accessibility is optimal. This study will hopefully encourage collective learning and contribute to the gradual inclusion of more transparent information and the exclusion of any redundant elements present on these institutions' websites.

1. Introduction

From the outset, one of the most prominent characteristics of public libraries has been their ability to adapt to new circumstances. In light of societal demands, both international organisations engaging in the area and the specialised literature tend to view them as efficient and transparent institutions. Their operating procedures have gradually migrated from hierarchical models to open, inclusive and transparent processes, as attested to at the *IX Congreso Nacional de Bibliotecas Públicas* [ninth edition of Spain's national congress on public libraries]. López-Macarro (2019, 42), referring to one of the values of the European Anti-Poverty Network, clearly stated that transparency 'entails informing society of the action taken, the underlying logic, the criteria applied, the results achieved, the financial resources invested and their origin and allocation in keeping with the institution's mission'.

Libraries' engagement with transparency can be viewed from a number of perspectives. One would be their support for enhancing transparency in democracy, as expressed in manifestos and other official documents. Both the IFLA *Manifesto on Transparency, Good Governance and Freedom from Corruption* (IFLA 2008) and its *Código de ética de los bibliotecarios y profesionales de la información*

en España [professional code of ethics for librarians and other information workers in Spain] (IFLA, 2013), for instance, stress libraries' contribution to building transparent governments and a well-informed citizenry.

That same idea can be found in Sustainable Development Goal 16, which conceives libraries as allies in driving open government and heightening institutional awareness of accountability culture (IFLA 2020). Research shows that libraries have contributed to implementing the open government model by encouraging citizen participation. Burke *et al.* (2014) reviewed a number of projects with such implications. One involved citizen empowerment in the King County Library System where the public library, in conjunction with other institutions, afforded citizens the opportunity to learn about and raise suggestions on the potential use of railways.

In addition to describing such experiences, the most recent professional literature broadens the definition of transparency to include accessibility to data or information on the institution itself, further to legislation governing the right to public information as exemplified in the papers cited below.

In Spain, Act 19/2013 of 9 December on Transparency, Access to Public Information and Good Governance (ESPAÑA 2013) requires national, regional and local public authorities to publicise all information on their activity needed to ensure operational transparency and control. That requirement is construed in the act to mean proactive public disclosure in which the institutions post all administrative and financial details to their transparency portals or websites. The information subject to active disclosure defined in Chapter II of the act includes institutional, organisational and planning data, as well as economic, budgetary, statistical and all legally significant information (Sections 6, 7 and 8).

As publicly funded institutions under the aegis of governments of one jurisdiction or another, Spanish public libraries are bound by the provisions of the act. As noted by Pacios *et al.* (2020, 58) 'its compulsory or voluntary application will indisputably add value to the institutions concerned'.

When that legislation was enacted, national public librarians stressed that it could well constitute an opportunity to render their institutions more open and accessible. García-Arribas (2015, 44-45) deemed that publicly describing

plans and assessing goals was the most suitable approach to making public libraries more transparent.

Although the professional literature assessing library transparency is fairly spotty, it has not been indifferent to the assessment of their operation. Research on the matter shows that libraries have gradually expanded performance and operational reporting (Pacios 2003).

Papers such as Johnson's (2012), while focusing on school libraries, premise that libraries should disclose certain information relevant to their operation (budget, statistics…) and engage in 'open-door culture' to inspire trust in their users.

Although not profusely, the matter has also been broached in Spanish professional literature. Whereas the earliest studies on transparency are confined to documents attesting to the decisions adopted by library management (Carmena-Escribano 1993) or user charters viewed as the institution's commitment to society (García-Maza 2003), subsequent research has followed the course charted by international trends, associating transparency with accountability (Pacios, *et al.* 2020, 59).

Specific studies on the assessment of public libraries' transparency include one by Burke (2016), who analysed the content of a random selection of US public libraries' websites from 2012 to 2015. The aim was to identify document typologies or operation-related assessment categories: institutional information, annual reports, budgets, strategic plans, studies, meeting minutes, procedures. That article cited a significant rise in the amount of administrative information found on websites from 2012 to 2015 and revealed that the type of administrative information most frequently posted addressed library operationality, whilst data on funding, budget, reports and strategic planning were furnished by very few institutions. Above and beyond its findings, part of the interest roused by Burke's paper was its description of an assessment method based on the premise that websites are transparency tools.

Further to LTAIPBG requirements, libraries are urged to post documents and duly contextualised data to be able to judge their operating practice and procedures. Indicators associated with transparency are listed or tabled in all the studies published on university (Pacios 2016; Rey-Martín, *et al.* 2019) or

public (Pacios, *et al.* 2018) libraries under the aegis of public authorities bound by LTAIPBG provisions. Specifically, the present research on public libraries, adopting an approach similar to Burke's, analysed transparency in 53 national libraries on the grounds of the information provided on their websites. It was based on a series of ad hoc indicators defined to analyse the items in LTAIPBG Chapter II on public disclosure. It found Spanish public libraries to make scant routine use of their websites as transparency showcases. The shortcomings identified in that regard included the paucity of the information furnished by SPLs on their websites. For instance, documents on policy or the collection management programme are seldom if ever present and certain types of documents are surprisingly absent altogether, such as those describing user rights and duties, the organisational chart or competitive bidding agreements (Pacios, *et al.* 2018, 45-46).

Those findings revealed that with very few exceptions, transparency is a scarce commodity. The concomitant need for enhancement should be supported by research on the matter.

2. Objective, material and method

This paper describes the results of a study in which TransPa_Ba software was applied to national public libraries' websites to determine their transparency indices. That tool, inspired by the MESTA (*Metodología de Evaluación y Seguimiento de la Transparencia* [transparency assessment and monitoring method]) model (Pacios, *et al.* 2020), defines 20 public disclosure indicators adapted to public libraries, drawing from the requirements set out in the Transparency Act (ESPAÑA 2013). As the aim is to improve such institutions' transparency, the information afforded by the indicators is deemed to be relevant to their activity and operation as well as to monitoring their performance.

The universe consisted in the country's 53 nationally owned libraries, managed by its 17 autonomous regions or the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla. Each of Spain's 50 provinces hosts at least one. They were chosen for their similarity, although a few, such as in Toledo, Valladolid and Murcia, also head the respective regional library network. They are 'in most cases, the most prominent library in the cities where they are located and centres of particular

importance for the country's cultural development and citizens' access to information', according to the Ministry of Culture and Sport's website. The publicly disclosed information associated with transparency was assessed by accessing each library's website from the Ministry's own, under the section *Panorámica de las 53 bibliotecas públicas del Estado* [overview of 53 national public libraries]   http://mapabpe.mcu.es/mapabpe.cmd?command=GetMapa. Exceptionally, the Vitoria-Gasteiz Public Library was accessed with the Google web browser, for the Ministry's site listed no URL for that regional institution. The URLs for the websites analysed are listed in the **Annex**.

The information was assessed in terms of the 20 indicators clustered under eight categories as proposed in TransPa_BA (Pacios, *et al.* 2020). Library websites were searched for the indicators in February and March 2021. Each indicator was assigned a specific weight in a total score of 100. Weighting was based on the mean value found for each indicator in the survey conducted among head librarians (response rate=47.1 %; n=53) from December 2019 to February 2020. The survey asked respondents to specify the importance attached to each category and the suitability of each indicator on a scale of 0 to 5. The 20 indicators, grouped under the eight category headings, are listed in **Table 1**, along with the respective weighting factors.

	PUBLIC LIBRARY			
	Presentation of active public disclosure on the library website			0.01%
	ACTIVE PUBLIC DISCLOSURE INDICATORS	INDICA DORS	AREA	
1	**PURPOSE OF THE SERVICE AND OBJECTIVES PURSUED**			
1.1	Definition of mission	6.90%		
1.2	Strategic plan	6.47%		
	TOTAL AREA 1		13.38%	
2	**GOVERNING BODIES AND OPERATING RULES**			
2.1	Identity of library's or archive´s management board members	2.48%		
2.2	Regulations	3.29%		
2.3	Specific regulations on service provision	3.66%		
2.4	Code of ethics, values or good practice	3.09%		
	TOTAL AREA 2		12.52%	
3	**SERVICE OFFERING**			
3.1	User charter	13.92%		
	TOTAL AREA 3		13.92%	
4	**THE COLLECTION**			
4.1	Collection management policy or programme	13.04%		
	TOTAL AREA 4		13.04%	
5	**STAFF**			
5.1	Organisational chart	5.66%		
5.2	Staff directory	6.03%		
	TOTAL AREA 5		11.69%	
6	**RESULTS**			
6.1	Management indicators (scoreboard)	2.38%		
6.2	User satisfaction surveys	2.70%		
6.3	Annual report or report of activities	2.67%		
6.4	Distinctions, prizes, certifications	2.21%		
6.5	Statistics	2.67%		
	TOTAL AREA 6		12.63%	
7	**FINANCIAL INFORMATION**			
7.1	Budget implemented	4.05%		
7.2	Tenders, contracts and bidding	3.53%		
7.3	Subsidies and assistance awarded	3.43%		
	TOTAL AREA 7		11.00%	
8	**PARTNERING / COOPERATION**			
8.1	Partnering networks, task forces, commissions	6.20%		
8.2	Agreements	5.62%		
	TOTAL AREA 8		11.82%	
	TOTAL AREAS	100.00%	99.99%	
	TOTAL ACTIVE PUBLIC DISCLOSURE			100.00%

Table 1. *Weights assigned to public library disclosure indicators in TransPa_BA*

Six parameters were reviewed to assess transparency-related information: content, form, reusability, accessibility, dating and updating. The scores for each ranged from 0 to 10 except in dating and updating, where the scale ran from 0 to 5. The maximum score for a given indicator was consequently 50 points. In addition to the parameters, a further variable was assessed: 'location', alluding to the place on the site carrying the information, on which

its visibility largely depends. Ten points were awarded when the site contained a specific section on transparency.

A fuller description of the application of four of the six aforementioned parameters is given below.

- **Content.** This parameter, associated with the document per se, understood to consist in 'all information regardless of medium (physical or digital) and format (graphic, audio or video), therefore includes the most disaggregated (itemised) or "rawest" data' (Act 18/2015 of 9 July on reuse of public sector information). Although no minimum requirements on content were defined for the indicators, in some cases their presence or absence was determined on the grounds of the existence of specific elements:

    o For the mission statement, that specific label, rather than library objective or function.
    o For the staff directory, at least one person's name and contact information.
    o For the operational indicators, uninterrupted presence with access to results (via vehicles such as scorecards indicative of the quality of service guaranteed to citizens) and monitoring-confirmed routine use by the library.
    o For the networks, task forces or commissions in which the organisation participates, logos or icons proving its association with the respective entities.

- **Form.** Since none of the libraries was found to have a transparency website, this parameter was assessed on the grounds of their respective home pages. Form refers to the location of the information and the access pathway: it was deemed direct when it or a link to the content is found on the home page. An example of the former would be the inclusion of a direct link to the Official Journal where any legislation cited was published, saving users any further searching. In contrast, content was regarded as indirect when the link opens the home page of the respective website that must then be searched to locate the specific information sought.

Links to basic statistics or data on libraries outside the sites specifically established by the library for that purpose were not included in the analysis. That would be the case, for instance, of links included on certain provincial libraries' sites to access the regional government's transparency or open data site but not specifically identified as the source of such information. Such practices made locating statistics for a given library an extremely difficult when not impossible task.

- **Reusability.** Only two scores were defined, 0 or 10, with no intermediate values dependent upon ease of reuse, given the wide range of constantly evolving opinions and weighting scales put forward in that regard since the Berners-Lee (2006) proposal was first published. A score of 10 was awarded for structured formats (xls, csv, xml) whose use requires no extra techniques or effort. Acrobat pdf format was not deemed reusable in light of the criticism levelled at the tool in connection with transparency (García-Melián 2014), despite its extensive use on the Datos.gob.es site, the platform that organises and handles Spain's national catalogue of open data. Although pdf was deemed a valid format for public disclosure, its inconvenient editing constitutes an obstacle to reuse. As Camacho (2016) noted, 'pdfs should be furnished in conjunction with reusable formats: xml, csv, xls, doc...'

This parameter might well be thought to be applicable only to the indicators adopting the form of quantitative data, such as statistics for instance. Given, however, the reuse that might be made of all the documents at issue and bearing in mind that some (strategic plans, citizen charters, reports, policy statements) are the object of analysis, it was retained for all.

- **Updating.** Although the cut-off year defined was 2019, this parameter is not applicable to all the available information, for not all the indicators proposed, such as user charters or strategic plans, need to be updated yearly. In such cases the expiration date of the document was the grounds for verifying whether it was in effect. The same criterion was applied to all libraries: if the information

was updated in 2019 or later, the score was 10 and 0 otherwise. Strategic plans and user charters scored 10 when they were in effect.

Be it stressed here that TransPa_BA is a tool designed for use by library and archive managers concerned about transparency and seeking to improve their practice in that regard. It will be made available to them as software on: https//www.uc3m.es/investigacion/transpa_ba. Although on this occasion sites were analysed by third parties, such assessments should ideally be conducted in-house. Parameters such as updating can only be suitably judged by library staff, for outside users lack certain types of possibly relevant information to do so accurately. Library staff know whether a given type of information needs updating or otherwise and consequently whether that parameter can be attribute the highest score, even when the latest update preceded the cut-off year established for the assessment underway. Third parties performing the assessment would lack that background knowledge. That is a drawback to the tool if the assessment is conducted from outside the institution, for the scale of a library's transparency might otherwise be underestimated.

3. Results and good practice

3.1 Results

The fieldwork itself, consisting in an exhaustive review of each and every one of the 53 libraries' websites to locate the aforementioned indicators, revealed that with transparency information and data scattered across scores of links, searching is an arduous task. Such fragmentation was found in all the library websites reviewed.

Certain factors also attested to greater interest in some libraries than others in exhibiting and affording access to transparency-related information. Normally, for instance, the libraries in a given region share the same model of website with similar sections and links and scant variations in the structure of the information found under each. Nonetheless, where structure and design are so similar, differences attest to the existence of library management discretion in the type of content made available to users. In this study, variations were observed most prominently in the way statistics were provided and accessed. The advantage of using the same model is that documents common to all the

regional libraries, such as user charters in Andalusia or the library rules in Castile-Leon, can be shared. The drawback to that practice, however, is that information sharing, where extensive, may lead to the failure to break data down to the library scale. In the region of Madrid, for instance, the information provided does not suffice to locate statistics on the Manuel Alvar Library (under the *En cifras* [facts and figures] section).

The information collected through March 2021 also showed changes introduced by some libraries in their sites. The Las Palmas and Tenerife Libraries, for instance, uploaded new sites while the former platforms, which contained more transparency-related information than the updated version, were still active and valid through October 2020. Others have either migrated or are in the process of migrating to the Ministry of Culture and Sport's model (https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/).

The results for the parameters addressed are discussed below in the following order: location, content, form, reusability, dating and updating. With the exception of accessibility, which, measured in the number of clicks to reach the document, is good in 92.98% of the indicators:

3.1.1. Location

As noted, none of the libraries' sites contains a link titled 'Transparency' where all the TransPa_BA indicators concerned could have been published. The parameters had consequently to be accessed and assessed from links on the home page. The information on transparency is widely scattered and not readily located on most libraries' websites. Some indicators are often found under a link denominated About us, Information, or Who we are. The sole exception is the Guadalajara Library's site, which includes a section titled 'Transparency' on the page listing usage and operating rules (https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/guadalajara/conocenos/normas-de-uso.html), with links to the Ministry's and the respective Regional Department's websites containing library statistics.

3.1.2. Content

Of the 20 TransPa_BA indicators for public libraries, 14 were located in at least one of the 53 target institutions' sites. The six indicators not found on any of the sites were library management commission membership; collection management programme or policy; organisational chart; competitive bidding agreements; subsidies and aid received; and agreements (with third parties). **Table 2** lists the ones that were detected, from highest to lowest frequency of appearance.

INDICATORS	TOTAL (n = 285)	%
8.1 Partnering networks, task forces, commissions	51	96.23%
2.3 Specific regulations on service provision	50	94.34%
1.1 Definition of mission	39	73.58%
5.2 Staff directory	30	56.60%
6.5 Statistics	29	54.72%
2.2 Regulations	22	41.51%
7.1 Budget implemented	22	41.51%
3.1 User charter	21	39.62%
2.4 Code of ethics, values or good practice	7	13.21%
1.2 Strategic plan	4	7.55%
6.3 Annual report or report of activities	4	7.55%
6.2 User satisfaction surveys	3	5.66%
6.1 Management indicators (scoreboard)	2	3.77%
6.4 Distinctions, prizes, certifications	1	1.89%

Table 2. *Indicators located*

According to those findings, the indicators most frequently located were clustered in the following four of the eight categories defined in TransPa_BA.

- **8. Partnering/cooperation**, where the highest frequency was recorded for indicator 8.1, 'Partner networks, task forces, commissions', present in 51 or 96.23 % of the libraries. Nearly all carry an icon indicative of the network/s with which the library engages.

- **2. Governing bodies and operating rules**, the category covering indicator 2.3 'Specific regulations on service operation', found in 50 or 94.34 % of the libraries. Most carry a document on usage rules or indicate the conditions of use service-by-service.

- **1. Purpose of the service and objectives pursued.** This category contains the libraries' mission statements, present in 39 sites

(73.58 % of the total 53). In contrast, strategic plans are present on only four sites, only two of which are currently valid.

- **5. Staff.** The staff directory is provided on 30 libraries' sites (56.60 %). The information given varies widely, from a full listing of the names and telephone numbers or e-addresses of the entire staff to contact data for the library director only. The La Rioja and Toledo Libraries are good examples of very complete listings.

The categories most scantly or unrepresented include the following.

- **4. The collection**, covering indicator 4.1 'Collection management policy / programme', for which not a single example was found. Surprisingly, this was one of the categories that scored most highly and with the least scatter in the 2019-20 survey (Pacios *et al.,* 2021), denoting the importance attached to the indicator by library professionals. Its absence from all the libraries' sites therefore seems odd.
- **7. Financial information**, with three indicators, two of which were absent altogether, whilst 7.1 'Budget' was only scantly present, and even then in most cases via a link to the data published by the Ministry.
- **6. Results**, with five indicators, all scarcely represented with the exception of statistics, for which 29 libraries (54.72 %) provide links.

 A comparison of these libraries' present standing in terms of transparency with the sole other study on the subject, conducted in 2017 (Pacios, *et al.* 2018), showed that it has varied very little. Whilst the presence of some indicators such as mission statement, regulations (=usage rules), results, satisfaction surveys, budget and partnering has risen slightly, others have remained unchanged in the interim.

Given the low frequency of indicators relevant to ascertaining a library's aims, procedures and accomplishments (strategic plan, annual report, collection management policy or programme) libraries are confronted with a weighty challenge and have substantial room for improvement in terms of

transparency, particularly in categories such as financial information and results.

3.1.3. Form

Libraries provide more information related to direct (information referenced on and accessed from a link on the home page that directly opens the page containing the content sought; for instance, the link provided for the library's regulations opens the page of the Official Journal where they were published) than indirect indicators. A total of 183 direct, compared to 103 indirect, indicators were identified. In the latter case, the link opens the website where the information is published, which must then be searched to find the content at issue. An example would be where the library's site links to the Ministry's page that publishes statistics for the 53 national libraries, which must then be explored to find the data for any given library. Substantial differences were identified between institutions' sites in this regard: whilst some link directly to the page with their own data, others take users to the general page containing information on all 53 institutions, where they must first select the library at issue to access the data sought.

In some cases the information for the library analysed is so poorly positioned and scantly visible that citizens are hard put to locate it. By way of example, the public libraries of Castile-Leon carry an icon on their sites (a scantly visible letter 'B' in the upper right corner) that opens the Castile-Leon library network's page. A link at the bottom of that page entitled 'statistical data' then opens a third page with a link to the regional government of Castile-Leon's annual report, which contains data on libraries, archives and museums in reusable xls format. The complexity of the pathway from a given library's site to the statistical data sought is obvious. A further complication observed was that none of the libraries in the region with a link entitled 'library facts and figures' that opens a page listing their own statistics links to the aforementioned regional site. They do link to the Ministry's site, however, where those facts and figures are broken down library-by-library.

3.1.4. Reusability

The present findings revealed a virtual absence of clearly reusable formats in most of the institutions studied, ironically, for all engage primarily in information management. Ch. II, Section 5.4 of the LTBGAIP reads: 'The information subject to transparency obligations shall be published on the respective electronic portals or websites in a manner that is clear, structured and understandable for those concerned, and preferably in reusable formats'.

The two most common formats found here were html (199) and pdf (67), with some libraries furnishing information in both (19). The absence of statistics in reusable xls format is surprising, although the availability of spreadsheets on request cannot be ruled out.

3.1.5. Dating

All information and documents published should be dated to enable citizens to position them in time. Of the 285 indicators located on all the websites, 128 (44.91 %) were dated, with the items on mission statements, user charters, strategic plans, regulations and statistics accounting for a substantial share of the latter. No date whatsoever was provided for 157 (55.09 %). This weak point was observed in most of the libraries, particularly in connection with the regulations on service usage.

3.1.6. Updating

Further to the findings on the revision of information since the cut-off year (2019), only 57 (20.00 %) of the 285 documents reviewed were up to date. Statistics ranked first in this regard, followed by user charters. Discontinuities in the availability of information were observed in some indicators. User charters, for instance, have been removed or have not been updated by a number of libraries.

3.1.7. Public disclosure transparency index

As noted earlier, this study did not purpose to rank the institutions studied, but rather to contribute to their transparency. Nonetheless, the index or score over a total of 100 points defined by TransPa_BA software for each website can be used to list the libraries analysed from most to least transparent further

to the indicators deployed. The total score found for each parameter in each library is given in **Table 3**. The indices are generally low due essentially to the 0 score attributed to some parameters such as reusability or updating. In connection with the latter, the possibility of error when a given indicator does not require updating for the reasons alluded to in section 2 above must not be overlooked. The transparency indices shown must consequently be deemed approximate values that may serve to guide libraries seeking to improve the information furnished for the indicators.

NATIONAL PUBLIC LIBRARY	1.1 Definition of mission	1.2 Strategic plan	2.1 Identity of library's or archive's management board members	2.2 Regulations	2.3 Specific regulations on service provision	2.4 Code of ethics, values or good practice	3.1 User Charter	4.1 Collection /Document management policy or programme	5.1 Organisational chart	5.2 Staff directory	6.1 Management indicators (scoreboard)	6.2 User satisfaction surveys	6.3 Annual report or report of activities	6.4 Distinctions, prizes, certifications	6.5 Statistics	7.1 Budget implemented	7.2 Tenders, contracts and bidding	7.3 Subsidies and assistance awarded	8.1 Partnering networks, task forces, commissions	8.2 Agreements	Total Active Public Disclosure
Toledo	●	●		●	●	●	●			●	●	●		●	●	●			●		47.82
Valladolid	●			●	●		●			●			●		●	●			●		31.49
Cáceres	●			●	●		●			●					●	●			●		31.22
Zamora	●				●		●			●					●	●			●		27.49
Soria	●				●		●			●					●	●			●		26.82
Tarragona	●	●		●	●	●					●	●	●		●				●		26.57
Badajoz	●			●	●		●								●	●			●		26.13
Mérida	●				●	●	●								●				●		26.06
Salamanca	●				●		●			●					●	●			●		25.70
Ávila	●			●	●		●			●					●	●			●		25.59
Cádiz	●				●		●			●									●		24.10
Córdoba	●				●		●			●									●		23.91
Palencia	●			●	●		●			●									●		23.76
Málaga	●				●		●			●									●		23.55
Sevilla	●				●		●			●									●		23.55
Almeria	●				●		●			●									●		22.71
Cantabria	●				●		●								●	●			●		22.53
León	●				●		●			●									●		22.12
Girona	●	●		●	●	●						●			●				●		21.90
Murcia	●			●	●		●												●		21.51
Lleida	●	●		●	●	●									●				●		20.89
Maó	●				●					●			●		●	●			●		20.77
Segovia	●				●		●												●		20.74
Guadalajara	●			●	●					●					●	●			●		20.46
Cuenca	●			●	●					●					●	●			●		20.19
Huelva	●				●		●												●		19.71
Teruel	●			●	●	●									●	●			●		19.57
Santiago	●				●					●			●		●	●			●		18.30
A Coruña	●				●					●					●	●			●		17.81
Melilla	●			●			●														17.56
Lugo	●				●					●					●	●			●		17.53
Pontevedra	●				●					●					●	●			●		17.53
Albacete	●			●	●					●					●				●		16.86
Gijón	●			●	●										●	●			●		16.48
Ourense	●				●					●					●	●			●		16.42
Burgos	●			●	●					●									●		13.99
Huesca	●			●	●	●													●		13.96
Castellón	●				●										●	●			●		13.78
Granada					●					●					●	●			●		13.55
Logroño				●	●					●					●				●		11.46
Alicante					●										●	●			●		10.88
Ciudad Real	●				●														●		10.42
Oviedo				●	●										●				●		8.84
Jaén					●					●									●		8.29
Palma Ma.					●					●									●		8.29
Ceuta					●					●									●		7.55
Zaragoza				●	●														●		6.97
Madrid					●														●		4.67
Orihuela					●														●		4.67
Valencia					●														●		4.67
Las Palmas																			●		2.48
Tenerife																			●		2.48
Vitoria					●																1.46

Table 3. *Transparency index values for national public libraries*

Overall, the public disclosure/transparency indices calculated infer that with rare exceptions the information furnished by national public libraries is sparse and unsuitably arranged. Two criteria might be used to determine the 'most transparent' institutions: number of indicators provided or total scores for the respective parameters. The Toledo Library proved to be the most transparent in both regards, with information for 13 of the 20 indicators and the highest score (47.82 points) of the 53 studied. It was followed by Tarragona in terms of number of indicators, with 10, although that library's total score came to a mere 26.57 points. Valladolid ranked third in terms of number of indicators but exhibited the second-highest total score, at 31.49 points. As Cáceres Library's eight indicators were assessed highly, it was attributed a total score of 31.22, very close to the Valladolid institution's figure. The inference is that no less important than furnishing the information specified in the indicators (content) is data compliance with the criteria defined by the parameters (form, reusability, dating, updating). Both factors are assessed with TransPa_BA.

The overview afforded by the data in **Table 3** provides each library with insight into its transparency status. That information can then be used to support its decision on whether to improve by furnishing its stakeholders with the data missing at the institution or by allowing them access to any existing information, and its utility based on parameter assessment.

Consolidated assessments of institutional transparency, such as the transparency reviews of universities conducted since 2011 (Barrio, *et al.* 2012), have recorded substantial progress, with a substantial rise in the number of institutions classified as transparent. Whilst none was so deemed in the 2011 report, 67 complied with transparency criteria in the 2019 edition (Barrio, *et al.* 2021, 17-18). Those numbers denote the beneficial effect of reporting on university transparency. This study aspires to a similar aim by contributing to greater transparency in national public libraries.

3.2. Good practice

Transparency indicator location and assessment with TransPa_BA served as support for identifying libraries' good public disclosure/transparency practice that might be useful for benchmarking. The most prominent examples are described below.

- **Mission.** Although no specifications were established for statement content in the present exercise, one of the requirements or essential characteristics of mission statements recommended by some specialists is originality (Palón and Tort 1991). The Guadalajara Library's statement may be highlighted as a good example in that regard.

- **Strategic plans.** Many public libraries have incorporated plan formulation into their routine operation (Pacios 2017). No evidence of that was found in the ones studied here, however, judging from the information provided on their websites. Such plans were found for only two libraries, the Toledo and Tarragona institutions, both of which expired in 2022. Libraries should acknowledge the relevance of strategic planning to compliance with institutional and societal commitments, along with its effect on their public image as efficiently run, trustworthy organisations (Voutssás-Lara 2017, 8).

- **User charters.** These documents, established to further transparency in public institutions (ESPAÑA, 2005), are deemed to be one of the major public expressions of transparent public service performance, efficiency and efficacy (Löffler, *et al.* 2007, p. 18). The Toledo Library is exemplary and merits recognition in this regard, for it has constantly updated and monitored its user charter over time.

- **Reports.** These documents summarise the institution's most prominent achievements and activities, constituting a very useful vehicle through which users can find information on library operation and activities. They are also a helpful decision-making tool (Carmena 1993). In addition, as these texts also often contain some of the indicators defined (statistics, budget, key indicators, cooperation), the information provided is very complete. Such reporting should be routine practice in these institutions. The Maó, Tarragona and Valladolid reports, all dating from 2018, may be cited as representative examples.

- **Distinctions.** Several of the libraries analysed may have been awarded distinctions, although mention was located of only one. The Toledo Library's site reproduces the Regional Department of the Treasury and Public Administration's resolution distinguishing

the library in 2018 with the seventh edition of its Prize for Quality Public Service in Castile-Leon, awarded for the institution's commitment to its user charter. As distinctions denote and corroborate institutional value, libraries would be well advised to highlight any received.

- **Statistics.** Good examples are found in libraries (such as in Ávila, Badajoz, Cáceres, Cantabria, Castellón, Cuenca, Gijón, Guadalajara, Maó, Salamanca, Teruel, Zamora) with their own page containing updated data while also linking to the Ministry's site to expand on the information published there on facilities, services, use of resources, visits/users, collections, lending, automation, cultural activities, expenditure and investment, staff and projects. Some libraries in the regions of Galicia, Andalusia and Castile-La Mancha, link not only to the Ministry but also to statistics for the respective region, while in addition including a page in their own site with key facts and figures. Example is Toledo.

- **Partnering and cooperation.** Although most of the libraries reproduce at least one logo or icon identifying the networks with which they engage (the regional library network, 'e-biblio', 'pregunte: las bibliotecas responden'), only a few have a link, normally titled 'partnering', with information on the projects in which they participated or are participating. The Huelva and Lleida Libraries provide significant examples. Although partnering with local or regional companies, retailers, institutions or NGOs is rarely cited, that practice has been shown to afford the library visibility and prestige in its area of influence (Granell-Dalmau 2015, 100), as illustrated by the Casteldefells Library.

The aforementioned good practices, identified in this study and recommended as exemplary, will hopefully inspire the libraries where they are not in place to consider implementing such routines to enhance their transparency.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Public libraries should capitalise on the potential of their websites not only to offer users the most convenient channel for accessing their services but also as a showcase from which to report the results of their endeavours to society.

They should view transparency as a commitment to 'their stakeholders to contribute to strengthen the institution, ensure its sustainability and generate societal trust' (Barrio, *et al.* 2019, 48).

Although the present findings show that the libraries analysed have begun to use their sites to enhance transparency, much has still to be done. The example set by Toledo Library may be a lodestar for the institutions providing the scantiest information on indicators defined, encouraging them to fill in the gaps with specific content specific to them with a view to upgrading their transparency scores. It may also serve institutions changing their sites as a guide for the new content that should be made accessible.

With rare exceptions, the financial information furnished is clearly insufficient. Inasmuch as the libraries analysed are publicly funded, accountability to society should be a constant in all they do. Financial data could be readily furnished by simply linking to the page on the Ministry site carrying that information, which some libraries routinely do, as noted earlier.

The inclusion of indicators such as the strategic plan, the collection management programme, the user charter and the annual report is important, among others because those documents describe the library's present course and past achievements, indications of its performance.

Nor should the parameters defining the information required to meet transparency standards (form, reusability, dating and updating) be overlooked, for location and format are as important as content per se. Such parameters indisputably redound to greater information visibility and usability. Broadly speaking, dating and reusability were the two parameters most weakly addressed by all the libraries analysed.

The ultimate aim of the suggestions made hereunder is to enable libraries to enhance their transparency by reporting their activities and key results to society in general and their stakeholders (users, employees, suppliers, cultural and community associations) in particular (Ríos-Hilario and De Sousa-Guerreiro 2015, 73). They are also intended to inform collective learning as these institutions gradually post transparency-related information on their websites. This review likewise afforded an opportunity to test TransPa_BA software so as to expand on or delete indicators and parameters or the related

information to suitably identify libraries' most prominent activities and results, their actual situation. That will contribute to the establishment of a series of common categories and indicators for the display of transparency-related information by libraries as public institutions accountable to society. At the same time, it will confirm their commitment to the SDGs (sustainable development goals), in particular Goal 16: 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all an build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels', whose target 16.6 is to 'Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels'.

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6. Annex

URLs for the national public library websites assessed

National Public Library	URL web
A Coruña	https://bibliotecas.xunta.gal/coruna/
Albacete	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/albacete
Alicante	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/alicante/index.jsp
Almería	http://www.bibliotecasdeandalucia.es/web/biblioteca-del-estado-publica-provincial-de-almeria
Ávila	https://bibliotecas.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/BibliotecaAvila/es/Plantilla100/1284347540032/_/_/_
Badajoz	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/badajoz
Burgos	https://bibliotecas.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/BibliotecaBurgos/es/Plantilla100/1284353929655/_/_/_
Cáceres	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/caceres/
Cádiz	http://www.bibliotecasdeandalucia.es/web/biblioteca-del-estado-publica-provincial-de-cadiz
Castellón	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/castellon/index.jsp
Ceuta	https://www.ceuta.es/ceuta/informacion-biblioteca/informacion-biblioteca
Ciudad Real	http://reddebibliotecas.jccm.es/intrabibl/index.php/inicio-bpe-cr
Córdoba	http://www.bibliotecasdeandalucia.es/web/biblioteca-del-estado-publica-provincial-de-cordoba/
Cuenca	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/cuenca/index.jsp
Gijón	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/gijon
Girona	https://bibliotecagirona.gencat.cat/ca/inici
Granada	http://www.bibliotecasdeandalucia.es/web/biblioteca-del-estado-publica-provincial-de-granada
Guadalajara	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/guadalajara/
Huelva	http://www.bibliotecasdeandalucia.es/web/biblioteca-del-estado-publica-provincial-de-huelva
Huesca	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/b-huesca
Jaén	http://www.bibliotecasdeandalucia.es/web/biblioteca-del-estado-publica-provincial-de-jaen
Las Palmas de Gran Canaria	https://www.bibliotecadecanarias.org/las-palmas
León	https://bibliotecas.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/BibliotecaLeon/es/Plantilla100/1284347467567/_/_/_
Lleida	https://bibliotecalleida.gencat.cat/ca/inici
Logroño	http://www.blr.larioja.org/
Lugo	https://bibliotecas.xunta.gal/lugo/
Madrid	http://www.madrid.org/cs/Satellite?cid=1343065588822&language=es&pagename=PortalLector%2FPage%2FPLEC_contenidoFinalNavegable
Maó	http://www.bibliomao.es/
Málaga	http://www.bibliotecasdeandalucia.es/web/biblioteca-del-estado-publica-provincial-de-malaga
Melilla	https://www.melilla.es/melillaPortal/contenedor.jsp?seccion=s_floc_d4_v1.jsp&codbusqueda=207&language=es&codResi=1&codMenuPN=601&codMenuSN=5&codMenu=159&layout=contenedor.jsp
Mérida	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/merida/
Murcia	https://bibliotecaregional.carm.es/
Ourense	https://bibliotecas.xunta.gal/ourense/
Orihuela	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/orihuela
Oviedo	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/oviedo/index.jsp
Palencia	https://bibliotecas.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/BibliotecaPalencia/es/Plantilla100/1284355840201/_/_/_
Palma de Malorca	https://www.bibliotecapalma.com/index.php/ca/
Pontevedra	https://bibliotecas.xunta.gal/pontevedra/
Salamanca	https://bibliotecas.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/BibliotecaSalamanca/es/Plantilla100/1284353878191/_/_/_
Santa Cruz de Tenerife	https://www.bibliotecadecanarias.org/santa-cruz-de-tenerife
Santander	https://bcc.cantabria.es/
Santiago de Compostela	https://bibliotecas.xunta.gal/santiago/
Segovia	https://bibliotecas.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/BibliotecaSegovia/es/Plantilla100/1284347869361/_/_/_
Sevilla	http://www.bibliotecasdeandalucia.es/web/biblioteca-del-estado-publica-provincial-de-sevilla
Soria	https://bibliotecas.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/BibliotecaSoria/es/Plantilla100/1284347458759/_/_/_
Tarragona	https://bibliotecatarragona.gencat.cat/ca/inici
Teruel	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/bpteruel
Toledo	https://biblioclm.castillalamancha.es/
Valencia	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/valencia_val/index.jsp
Valladolid	https://bibliotecas.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/BibliotecaCastillaYLeon/es/Plantilla100/1284316773345/_/_/_
Vitoria-Gasteiz	https://web.araba.eus/es/cultura/casa-cultura-ignacio-Aldecoa
Zamora	https://bibliotecas.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/BibliotecaZamora/es/Plantilla100/1284348193872/_/_/_
Zaragoza	https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/bpz