

# **The Condition and Functioning of Regional Library Branches in Israel: An Evaluative Study**

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## **Abstract:**

The term "regional library" encompasses the idea of operating a network of libraries in each local authority.

This idea has been put into practice in a great many countries throughout the world. Among the more developed and successful of them are the USA, Denmark, Australia and Great Britain. The State of Israel established its network of regional libraries based chiefly on the Danish and British models.

A study of the need for the establishment of regional libraries was first conducted in the 1960's, and three regional libraries were accordingly established in three different locations in the country.

The idea of establishing branches of the regional libraries in each settlement was validated with the acceptance of the "Law of Public Libraries", which was approved in 1975, and which obligates every local authority to set up branches in all the settlements in its jurisdiction.

Although branches were set up in the older, more established settlements (before the inception of the "regional library"), as a natural result of private initiative and the needs of the local population at the time, the regional libraries began to flourish in the 1970's and 1980's when branches began to

be established in the moshavim (smallholders' settlements), and were joined by the libraries in the kibbutzim (collective settlements), creating a network of regional libraries.

The subject of these branches functioning, in the light of changes in technology has yet to be researched.

### **Research Objectives**

The purpose of the study is to examine the place of the settlement library and its functioning within the regional library system in Israel, in the light of the technological and social changes, now at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Research Assumption**

1. The condition of regional library branches is not good as that of the central regional library in terms of the following:
  - a. Size of its area.
  - b. Size of the collection.
  - c. Open hours.
  - d. Introduction of new technologies.
2. The populations of small settlements prefer to receive library services in their settlements, rather than going all the way to the central regional library for service.
3. There are differences in functioning among branches, which stem from the local authority's means of support to the branches, or from the local authority's concept of providing service for the citizen.

### **Research Tools**

The tools used in this study were: analysis of data, which was collected in official surveys of the Department of Libraries in the Ministry of Culture,

Science and Sports, as well as data from the Central Bureau of Statistics and from observation in libraries.

Three kinds of questionnaires were sent to a variety of publics: directors of regional libraries, librarians in settlements, users of the branches located in telephone surveys, and potential users of the branches (who do not at present make use of library services).

Interviews were held with staff members of the Department of Libraries in the Ministry of Culture, Science and Sports, and documents were collected from the department's archives.

Interviews were also conducted with librarians from the Moshav movement and additional personalities dealing with these matters.

## **Main Findings**

The most common function of a library branch is lending books for recreational reading.

The branch libraries mainly serve the public aged 20 and over.

62% of the interviewees make use of the branches.

30% of those who do not make use of the branches do not do so because they are not in the habit of reading books.

The necessity of branch in a settlement is evaluated in terms of convenience.

Residents using the branch in their settlement express satisfaction with its services.

The collections in the branches are much smaller than in the central regional libraries.

The local branches offer material mostly in the form of books.

Most of the branches are open on average of 3-8 hours weekly.

The branches do not have the technology available to the central regional libraries.

Most of the branches have no Internet service or databases.

No significant differences were found between the support of the local authority and that of the government.

No differences were found in enrichment activities among settlement libraries stemming from matters of funding.

The average annual budget of a moshav library is about half of the annual budget for a kibbutz library.

The average size of the book collection in a kibbutz library is about four times the average size of the collection in a moshav library.

The kibbutz libraries are more active than the moshav libraries.

Most of the librarians in the settlements branches are not professional.

Most of the librarians in the settlement branches work as volunteers.

60% of the regional library directors believe in the validity and necessity of a library in each and every settlement.

## **Conclusions**

1. The condition of branch libraries is not as good as that of central regional libraries in terms of the size of the collection, open hours and use of technology.
2. The findings indicate that there are no differences in the functioning of the various branches which stem from matters of funding.
3. Despite the evidence which shows that there is a place for library branches (because of the fact that many people are using these facilities), it isn't sure that the present model will exist for long time.
4. The general condition of these branches is not good. Most of them are not operated by professional libraries, but rather by volunteers who have not received professional training. Most of the branches have no connection to the Internet, no databases, no audiovisual equipment, or any materials other than books. Only half of the libraries in the sampling examined had any computerization.
5. Convenience is not enough of a reason to operate branches of a regional library.

6. Although most of the directors of the regional libraries believe that there is a place for a branch in every settlement, there is no doubt that others have changed their perception of the necessity for branches in each and every settlement. There are indications in other directions, from establishing a single library for every few settlements to establishing branches only in special cases.

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