# Public library computerization in Israel – status

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## Abstract

In the 21st century, public libraries have been undergoing many changes in the services they provide and in how they are perceived by the public.  Technological innovations have had a profound impact on reading habits and on data consumption by end users. The tremendous development in electronic means of organizing and retrieving data and the introduction of commercial internet have allowed public libraries to transfer data, computerize management of the book collection and offer open access catalogues to the public.

This study examines the desired mix of innovation and traditional services offered by public libraries. The question then arises as to what is the best way of integrating technology with the traditional library services to create a sustainable and effective change.  I suggest that, in order to meet both the demands of traditional readership as well as those of younger users, library services should be adapted to meet the various literacy levels of the consumers and should adopt the latest technological tools and implement them into the library services according to the users' needs.

Implementing the latest technologies into library services is one of the cornerstones of the Library 2.0 model which includes social media in the services it offers and enables users to be partners in creating its content.  Public libraries may harness their most important assets: location, manpower and infrastructure to become learning centers and act as a bridge in reducing the widening digital gaps in the community.

The goal of the current study is to examine the level of computerization in Israeli public libraries. Is there any awareness of the Web 2.0 technologies and do public libraries incorporate them in the services they offer? The study also examines whether public libraries in Israel have adopted the Library 2.0 model which is user-centered and allows users to be partners in creating content.

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I also present the views of library directors on these issues. Directors of public libraries throughout Israel participated in this study.

In the first, quantitative stage, an internet survey was sent to public library directors in Israel. The second, qualitative stage involved thematic analysis of in-depth semi structured interviews conducted with twelve female directors of public libraries.

The research questions examined which library management systems are used in public libraries in Israel, the level of satisfaction with these systems and the changes that have occurred in this field since the last survey conducted in 2002. I also examined: how public libraries in Israel use home webpages; what technologies are used in the library; the level of awareness that library directors have about web 2.0 technologies in libraries; their views on implementation of web technologies in the libraries; which web 2.0 technologies have been adopted in public libraries in Israel and what purposes they serve; what are the positions of library directors about digital lending services; do the directors consider their institution to be a library 2.0; what is their vision for public libraries in Israel in the 21$^{st}$ century.

The study findings present the level of computerization in public libraries and how library directors relate to Library 2.0. The findings show that there is a high level of computerization, as seen in library home pages on the internet that offer online access to the library catalog, links to social media, YouTube, Facebook and digital lending services. Some of the library websites may be accessed from mobile phones. The findings show that 78% of the participating libraries have at least one technological tool, with Facebook being the most popular. Directors are aware of new network technologies, however only some of them believe that they should be implemented as part of the library services. All the directors agreed that there are difficulties involved in implementing the technologies because of personnel and budgetary constraints. There is a unanimous consensus that print books will not disappear in the coming years and that the library will continue to be a cultural center with the text as its focus. However, the layout of libraries will change and some of the bookshelves will disappear, to be replaced by spacious, esthetic, and functional open spaces.

The study conclusions are that public libraries in Israel in 2018 are undergoing a welcome process of design which welcomes users and that they have advanced levels of computerization. For the process to succeed, it is important to draw up policy and regulated work methods for structuring the internet presence of public libraries.  I also suggest a national branding campaign for public libraries to promote the diverse range of free services they provide.  This is because large sectors of the public are unaware of the libraries' activities and therefore do not use them. This is not due to a  lack of need for these services, rather due to a lack of awareness.

In conclusion, legislative changes, the implementation of new technologies and the acceptance of the concept of the 'the Library as Place' have succeeded in making libraries into a place that provides advanced and up-to-date services.  Fears that the technological developments would make public libraries obsolete have been unfounded.  The libraries were smart enough to enjoy the benefits of these developments and to integrate novel technologies that attract a new, young audience to the library.

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