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Abstract

The implementation of user charters in Spain's 53 State-run public libraries was reviewed and the 23 (43.3 %) found on institutional websites were analysed and assessed from the perspective of the active public disclosure, as provision laid down in Spain's Transparency Act. Charter compliance with those provisions was evaluated in terms of the six parameters set out in the official tool for measuring transparency in Spanish governmental institutions, the Metodología Oficial para la Evaluación y Seguimiento de la Transparencia [MESTA, official methodology for assessing and monitoring transparency]. Three describe the information itself and how it is published (content, form, data and updates) and the other three its quality (accessibility, clarity and reusability). According to the findings, such libraries seldom use their charters to inform citizens of their services and related commitments. Transparency, responsibility and citizen participation should be strengthened through user charters as sources of information on what libraries do and how, when, and where they do it, aligning their commitments with their capacities.

KEYWORDS: user charters, transparency, active public disclosure, communication, Spanish´s State-run public libraries.

1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out 17 goals with 169 integrated and indivisible targets addressing economic, social and environmental issues. The targets under Goal 16, 'Peace, justice and strong institutions' address effective and transparent institutions and citizen participation. They aim to establish effective, accountable and transparent institutions and ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. These targets are closely related to user charters (also denominated service charters or client, customer or service charters), which favour transparency insofar as they publicise institutions' commitments to meet consumer and user needs and inform about the procedures in place for citizen participation. In addition to the transparency that should be inherent in government, user charters are also accountability instruments, for they cover two key components of that conceit: transparent commitment and assessment (Egia Ribero 2017). For citizens 'a user charter enhances the sensation of greater management transparency by publicising and disseminating content' (Fernández Ronquillo 2016, 51).

The present study aims to provide an overview of user charters from the perspective of active public disclosure as set out in Spanish Act 19/2013 of 9 December on Transparency, Access to Public Information and Good Governance (Ministerio de la Presidencia 2013) through examples drawn from among the country's 53 State-run public libraries. Active public disclosure requires government and the institutions under their aegis to proactively publish and periodically update information that must by law be included on their websites. Information not included on a website is excluded from transparency analysis. The aim is to guarantee the transparent fulfilment of government body duties. That obligation translates into citizens' right to certain information that such bodies must disclose ex officio. The Transparency and Good

Government Board, a body entrusted with enforcing Spain's Transparency Act, created a quantitative and qualitative tool going by the acronym MESTA (AEVAL, CTBG 2016). Designed for but not necessarily limited to government, it may be applied to other public sector institutions, political parties, foundations and other entities where transparency is an issue. It is an open methodology intended both for institutional self- and third-party assessment.

An adapted version of MESTA, presently under development, is designed to assess the extent to which the information actively disclosed on public library websites meets legal transparency requirements based on 20 indicators (listed in the Annex). User charters, included as one of the active public disclosure indicators for measuring transparency in these institutions, are deemed key instruments for disseminating information on public service performance, efficiency and efficacy (Löffler, Parrado and Zmeskal 2007, 18). Indicators have been used in earlier research to establish an overview of transparency in a number of types of libraries and archives (Pacios 2016; Pacios and La Torre Merino 2018; Pacios et. al. 2018; Pacios and Cerdá 2019; Pacios, Torreiro and Moro Cabero 2019; Rey Martín, Rodríguez Parada and Camón Luis 2019; Rey Martín et. al. 2020).

In this study the user charters published by State-run public libraries are assessed further to the six parameters defining publicly disclosed information set out in MESTA, three addressing the information itself and how it is published (content, form, data and updates) and the other three its quality (accessibility, clarity and reusability). The aim is to determine whether those parameters are suitable for assessing the extent to which legal transparency requirements (laid down in the Transparency Act) are met by the information posted on library websites.

2. Literature review

2.1. User charters, an exercise in quality and transparency

User charters have been seen as an opportunity to establish a public sector marketplace under the pretext of citizen empowerment (Tritter 1994, 397). That has implications for public service management and entails implementation-related difficulties, however, a conclusion reached on the grounds of a critical review conducted of such charters in the United Kingdom (1994, 35). Charters first appeared in 1991 during Prime Minister John Major's Administration as a pivotal element for managing the commitment to quality (Falconer and Ross 1999, 339). In a recent study Gimeno Ruiz (2017, 145-150) identified the countries that later adopted the tool, extended internationally with more or less success under a variety of denominations, including service charters, quality charters, commitment charters and public service charters.

Spanish standard UNE 93200:2008 (hereafter UNE-2008) (AENOR 2008, 4) defines user charters as 'written documents through which organisations publicly inform their users of the services provided, their quality commitments and user rights and obligations'. A charter also attests to 'the principles that should govern its operations such as legality, equality, participation, transparency, efficacy and efficiency' (Gómez Torralbo, Moral Fuentes and Torralba Aguilar 2007, 184).

User charters, which became popular in Spain in the late nineteen nineties with the implementation of quality plans by public authorities to guarantee their commitment to society and favour citizen relations, contributed to the improvement in quality of the services provided. Charters and national quality prizes were initially governed by Royal Decree 1259/1999. A User Charter Programme subsequently adopted under Royal Decree 951/2005 (Ministerio de

las Administraciones Públicas 2005, hereafter RD-2005) specifies the significance, scope, content and structure of these charters for national government bodies. It also envisages certification by the Quality Assessment Agency. Although not compulsory, charters have been widely introduced at all levels of government as an ancillary to quality plans. Successive manuals (AEVAL 2010) have facilitated and driven their formulation across government as a whole. Charter assessment does not always yield satisfactory results, however, for lack of clarity in the definition of objectives and their achievement (Montesinos and Brusca 2008, 306) or of relevant indicators in certain areas (Blázquez Manzano and Feu Molina 2011, 123-124). The success of user charters depends largely on citizen awareness of their existence as well as their purpose and utility (Gimeno-Ruiz 2017, 158).

User charters have been associated with transparency since the outset. RD-2005 (Ministerio de las Administraciones Públicas, 2005, 6) by which they are governed defines their purpose to be '…to further transparency through public information and dissemination of the quality delivered to citizens'. They have likewise been deemed a practical exercise in internal transparency that should contribute to improving in-house procedures and raising staff motivation (Ministerio de las Administraciones Públicas 2005, 14). With the adoption of Spain's Transparency Act in 2013, user charters acquired further significance in the management of public activities and the institution of specific 'transparency service charters' was recommended to favour accountability (Egia Ribero 2017, 62).

2.2. User charters in libraries

Libraries, which are by no means indifferent to concerns around quality, have also implemented user charters. In 1994 the British Library and the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales

published a series of standard citizens' charter statements focusing on quality under the name Code of Service (Stephens 1996, 2), by which they are known today.

Professionals from a number of countries have endorsed their formulation and use in the context of library service excellence and quality (Walker 2005; Lee 2006). A Google search for those documents today retrieves many examples in all manner of libraries, attesting to their ongoing utility. Nonetheless, in the very short number of studies conducted on the subject, service charters have not been deemed to constitute one of the administration information items on library websites associated with transparency (Burke 2016, 455).

Since the late nineteen nineties, favourable opinions on their use have been voiced in Spain also by librarians, archivists and documentalists (Cerdá and Rodríguez Barredo 1999; Duplá del Moral 1999; Sánchez Blanco and Vianello Osti 2000; García Maza 2003) in the wake of the introduction of quality management in their respective institutions (Taladriz Más 1994). With the institutionalisation of quality management in Spanish government in the two thousands, all manner of libraries began to formulate and publish their user charters: Castile-La Mancha regional library in 2000 (Álvarez Rodríguez et al. 2008); State-run public libraries in Andalusia in 2005 (Vázquez 2006); Bilbao municipal libraries in 2006 (Arberas Uriondo 2007); university libraries beginning in 2003 as the quality of their services was certified (Balagué 2007; Martín Rodríguez 2007); and the provincial libraries of Albacete, Cuenca and Guadalajara in 2009 (s.a. 2009). The Ministry of Culture and Sport advocates for user charters in a webpage contending they are essential for implementing quality policy and listing examples in a number of subordinate institutions, such as Spain's National Library, whose present charter covers the period 2018-21.

Despite the 20 years that have lapsed since the appearance of the first user charter in those libraries, however, a search on the websites of some of the libraries chosen here yielded no results whatsoever. The existence of charters would appear to have constituted a fad rather than a need to improve service quality. Nonetheless, Google searches retrieved user charters from some municipal libraries, which are smaller than the provincial institutions addressed in this study. That would denote the efforts in some cases to 'enhance libraries' public value, seek citizen legitimisation, raise governmental transparency standards, offer a direct line of communication with citizens and improve efficiency by instituting an ecosystem of citizen collaboration and co-management' (Puertas Bonilla 2016, 27). Existence of charters would consequently be closely related to head librarian engagement.

3. Methodology

The public libraries included in this study were selected on the grounds of their affiliation with Spain's largest library network, measured in terms of nationwide presence, collection size, breadth of user base and services and wealth of bibliographic heritage. The origins pf these libraries date back to the first third of the nineteenth century. At this time they comprise a network of 53 State-owned institutions under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture and Sport. With one exception, their management has been devolved to the autonomous regions. These libraries are therefore centres of particular significance for the country's cultural development and citizens' access to information. In addition, in Toledo, Santander, Murcia and Valladolid they constitute the head library in the regional network (Carrión Gutiéz 2000). Those particulars attest to the interest in exploring the use or otherwise of user charters by such libraries as a transparency indicator.

The 53 State-owned libraries' websites were visited in September 2020 to locate and download their user charters. As State-owned institutions subordinate to the Ministry of Culture, all these libraries have a website modelled on the same format that directs the user to a specific site with all the information on the services and access to many of them, as well as to the user charters analysed here. The search yielded a total of 23 user charters, or 43.3 % of the entire population (n=53). Further to the Spanish Transparency Act, only information available on an institution's website is taken into consideration when determining compliance with transparency requirements. To further verify that the charters identified were the only ones in place, Google was searched with the libraries' names and the term 'user charter'. That yielded one more charter not present on the respective website. The search also detected research papers and similar with references to library charters that are no longer accessible.

All the charters identified were analysed against the active public disclosure parameters laid down in MESTA (Table 1). In this study the user charters published by State-sun public libraries are assessed further to the six parameters defining publicly disclosed information set out in MESTA, three addressing the information itself and how it is published (content, form, data and updates) and the other three its quality (accessibility, clarity and reusability). The aim is to determine whether those parameters are suitable for establishing the extent to which legal transparency requirements are met by the information contained on library websites.

Table 1. MESTA parameters and criteria used to assess active public disclosure on library websites (instructions)

		INSTRUCTIONS - PARAMETERS	
	PARAMETER	**EXPLANATION**	**ASSESSMENT CRITERION**
PUBLICATION OF THE INFORMATION	**1. CONTENT**	The website contains the information (data, text, graph or similar) specified for the indicator.	*Score:* 10 or 0 A score of 10 denotes the presence and a score of 0 absence of the data and information specified.
	2. FORM	Two possibilities: Direct publication: the information appears directly on the website itself in html, jpeg, pdf or any other format or is displayed directly from a link on the site. Indirect publication: the information is accessed with a link to the site where the information is published but not directly to the information itself.	*Score:* 10 or 0 A score of 10 denotes direct publication; 0, indirect publication.
	3. DATE AND UPDATES	Two factors The first refers to whether the information for the indicator specifies an issue or revision date and the second to whether that date is 'close to' the date of the query, defined to mean an issue or revision date no earlier than 3 months prior to the query.	*Score*: 10, 5 or 0 A score of 10 means the information is up to date. In other words, it was issued or updated within 3 months prior to the query or the document is in effect further to the validity dates specified. A score of 5 means the information content is not up to date. In other words, neither the original nor the updated version was published within 3 months prior to the query. A score of 0 means the validity of the information cannot be determined because no issue or revision date is provided.
INFORMAITON QUALITY	**4. ACCESIBILITY**	Number of clicks needed to access the information, i.e., to view it on the screen, counting from the institution's home page.	*Score:* 10 to 0, inclusive A score of 10 denotes three clicks or fewer. Four clicks scores 9; five clicks, 8 and so on down to 12 clicks, which scores 1. In other words, scores decline as the number of clicks rises. More than 12 clicks scores 0.
	5. CLARITY	The information is provided in language readily understandable for the public at large, or where complex language is needed due to the technical nature of the information, help, tutorials, glossaries or explanatory remarks are provided.	*Score*: 10 to 0, inclusive A score of 10 means that the information is readily (optimally) comprehensible, 0 that it is scantly (poorly) understandable. The intermediate scores (9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1) denote levels of clarity between optimal and poor, declining with the degree of clarity.
	6. REUSABILITY	The information is shown as provided in Act 27/2007 of 16 November on Reusability of Public Information and supplementary legislation, or otherwise.	*Score:* 10 or 0 A score of 10 means the information is Act 37/2007-compliant, i.e., can be reused further to established standards; 0 that the medium is not reusable.

The highest score possible for an indicator, in this case the user charter, is 60 points. The analyses and assessments conducted revealed differences and similarities in the information itself and the way it is made available to users accessing libraries' websites.

As assessment revealed that some of the user charters had not been updated, emails were sent to five of the library directors concerned asking about the possible reasons. The only specific explanations provided are described in the results section.

4. Results and discussion

As noted above, 23 of the 53 library websites analysed carried user charters. An assessment of the respective parameters is preceded hereunder by a discussion of the differences observed in their presence and formats on websites, despite their integration in one and the same system.

- In Andalusia, Castile-León, Extremadura and the Canary Islands, the same region-wide charter is used by all the libraries in each, approved by the respective regional Directorate General and published in the region's official journal. In Castile-León, however, the charter for the library at Valladolid varies from the other regional institutions in some respects because it is the head library and bibliographic centre for the regional library network. Region-wide agreement to implement the same charter for all the respective libraries does not, however, translate into uniform availability on libraries' institutional websites, as inferred by the following.
    - o The websites for some libraries with a standard regional charter carry an outdated document or none at all. The Andalusia charter, updated in 2018,

cannot be accessed on the Granada or Jaén libraries' sites whilst Almería and Huelva publish an outdated version.

- In some cases, the standard user charter is outdated and in accessible from some regional libraries' websites. In Castile-León, for instance, the charter dates from 2008 and is not available on the Burgos library's site, from which it may have been removed precisely because it is no longer in effect.

- Some libraries' user charters form part of the charter published by their parent body, the regional Directorate General of Books, Archives and Libraries. As a result, the two libraries at issue in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife, are listed as external Directorate services with charters dated in 2007 and not updated since.

- In two final cases, in Cuenca the user charter page exists but is empty and Gijón's charter was located in a Google search but undated and inaccessible from the library's own website.

The way these libraries' websites are managed varies and may have a decisive impact on the information provided and therefore the present description. The circumstances found were: 1) libraries that manage their sites directly; 2) those reliant on third parties for updating but authorised to determine its content; 3) those that propose content and changes but must secure governing body approval; and 4) those with no control over their website (particularly in the municipal realm).

If a library does not manage its site directly and must follow a protocol to ask to have information uploaded, it may simply omit the data or retard their publication, ultimately failing to publish updated versions of their charters.

4.1. Assessment of information parameters

The assessment of the 23 user charters found, with the scores for the various parameters, is summarised in Table 2 and discussed below.

Table 2. User charters scores by parameter

AUTONOMUS REGION	State_Run PL	YEAR	CONTENT	FORM	DATING AND UPDATING	ACCESSIBILITY	CLARITY	REUSABILITY	TOTAL
Andalusia	Almería	2005	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
	Cádiz	2018	10	10	10	10	10	0	50
	Córdoba	2018	10	10	10	10	10	0	50
	Huelva	2005	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
	Málaga	2018	10	10	10	10	10	0	50
	Seville	2018	10	10	10	10	10	0	50
Canary Islands	Las Palmas	2007	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
	S.C. de Tenerife	2007	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
Cantabria	Santander	2010	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
Castile-La Mancha	Toledo	2018	10	10	10	10	10	0	50
Castile-León	Ávila	2008	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
	León	2008	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
	Palencia	2008	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
	Salamanca	2008	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
	Segovia	2008	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
	Soria	2008	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
	Valladolid	2008	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
	Zamora	2008	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
Extremadura	Badajoz	2017	10	10	10	10	10	0	50
	Cáceres	2017	10	10	10	10	10	0	50
	Mérida	2017	10	10	10	10	10	0	50
Melilla	Melilla	2019?	10	10	5	10	10	0	45
Murcia	Murcia	2018	10	10	10	10	10	0	50

4.1.1. Content

By 'content' is meant the information that must be published further the Transparency Act. Under the parameter 'content', all 23 libraries scored 10, for all have a user charter, although two versions were identified. One consisted in the full text as approved by the Directorate General, with a link to the respective official journal, and the other in a normally briefer description in brochure format intended for the public at large. The number of commitments to citizens ranged from 6 to 36 and the number of compliance verification indicators from 9 to 38. Analysis of participation yielded similar results, for it was more extensive in some than in others. Fernández Molina, Pérez Pulido and Herrera Morrillas (2018) identified the most prominent inter-library differences in user charter content in a paper describing the type of information included and its arrangement.

As a rule, charters are the result of a consensus between librarians and charter formulation specialists, normally public officials. As that consensus is based on the legislation both for libraries and user charters, indicators are often structured around the general criteria in place in the respective government body, bearing in mind the resources at hand to generate 'personalised' indicators and units of measure. As a result, librarians must often strike a compromise with the officials to solve the resource, structural and planning problems posed by indicator measurement.

If the parameter 'content' were to be assessed against compliance with the requirements for user charters laid down in RD-2005 and UNE-2008 (AENOR 2008), scores would vary with the degree of fulfilment. Differences would exist despite the presence of the standard sections in most charters, as shown by the items addressed in the 23 charters analysed (Table 3): library

identity and purpose, services provided, citizen rights, complaint and suggestion procedures, quality commitments and standards, assessment indicators and place of provision, specifying public transit options. The differences were observed to lie essentially in factors such as whether the information is general or personalised, the type of communication mechanisms available and the obligations to be met by users in conjunction with their rights. The analysis also revealed that none of the charters include references to measures to ensure gender equality, favour access to services or improve their provision or of standardised quality, environmental or occupational risk prevention management systems possibly in place.

User charter structure and content further to Section 9, Chapter III of RD 951/2005 of 29 July	%
a) General and compulsory:	
1. Identification of the body or organisation and purpose	90,0%
2. Main services provided	100,0%
3. Citizens' and users' specific rights in connection with services	85,0%
4. Procedures for user collaboration or participation in service improvement	75,0%
5. Succinct and updated list of legal texts governing the main services provided	75,0%
6. Access to system for lodging complaints or suggestions	95,0%
b) Commitments to quality:	
1. Quality standards	100,0%
Expected turnaround for procedural matters and service provision	10,0%
Availability of general or personalised information and communication mechanisms	30,0%
User support: hours, sites and channels	25,0%
2. Gender equality, ease of access to the service and to ways to improve its provision	0,0%
3. Standardised management, environmental and occupational risk management systems in place in the organisation	0,0%
4. Indicators used to assess quality and specifically to monitor fulfilment of commitments	100,0%
c) Remedial measures in the event of non-compliance with publicly assumed commitments commensurate with such commitments	8,60%
d) Supplementary data:	
1. Telephone numbers, digital and postal addresses of all the sites providing services, specifying access channels and public transportation as appropriate	100,0%
2. Postal and digital address and telephone number of the operating unit entrusted with the user charter, including complaints about failure to meet commitments	90,0%
3. Other data of interest on the organisation and its services	85,0%

Table 3. Presence of user content headings or sections laid down in RD-2005 in the charters analysed (in per cent of the total, n=23)

Other items and supplementary information might also be listed, such as in the Toledo library's site. In it, two versions (digital brochure and official journal) of the charter are furnished; past

charters can be accessed from links listed on the page containing the charter (the first, formulated in 2001, has been routinely updated through the one presently in effect, dated 2018-2020); annual AENOR certification is included, along with service statistics, all accessible on the site itself. Such qualitative elements could also be regarded as user charter 'content'. Pinto's (2008) proposal for assessing university libraries' user charters is a very comprehensive model based essentially on RD-2005, although it includes additional elements such as charter certification.

The aforementioned variations in user charter content inform the need to include certain qualitative parameters in their assessment, in addition to the mere existence or otherwise of a charter. Initially, however, assessment should be confined to certain minimal elements to favour charter formulation and availability. If transparency assessment methodology aims to encourage libraries to enhance citizen participation by displaying relevant information, an excess of qualitative factors would appear to be inadvisable.

Moreover, given the wide variability observed in other indicators such as strategic plans (Pacios 2004) or codes of ethics or good practice, their minimum content would be more difficult to establish if the aforementioned approach were adopted. Against that backdrop, greater effort may be said to be needed to define the minimum content for indicators proposed for use with the adapted MESTA tool for measuring library transparency.

4.1.2. Form

All the charters also scored 10 under the parameter 'form'. In all cases they could be accessed from the library's website with no need to link to any other. Some were observed to provide

direct links to the region's official journal publishing the approved text and others to furnish a specific, more user-friendly document.

4.1.3. Dating and updating

Greater diversity was found for 'dating and updating'. All but one charter were assigned a score of 5 for including the date of issue. The sole exception, Melilla's charter, nonetheless carries reference to a Government Council Agreement dated 16 July 2019, inferring that it was formulated in that year or in 2020. The dates cited ranged from 2005 for charters no longer in effect to 2018. Some libraries may have logically removed charters that are no longer valid from their websites.

The criterion set out in MESTA for scoring indicator validity is based on proximity to the date of the query (3 months prior). For documents in effect for a specific period, however, such as charters or strategic plans, those dates would appear to constitute a more suitable measure. RD-2005 stipulates a 3-year maximum validity for user charters. As 10 were found here to be in effect on those grounds, scoring five, and the remaining 13 to be outdated, for a score of zero, overall compliance amounted to 43.7 %. Those data also explain the difference between the scores of 5 and 10 for this item and infer that updating is of greater significance than dating in documents with conditional validity. From that perspective, greater weight would have to be accorded to the former than the latter.

Only two head librarians explained the reasons for the failure to update user charters. One noted that it was related to the discrepancy of criteria between librarians and the officials or political officers participating in library decision-making on the indicators to be used to measure

performance. Another adduced the library's move to new premises. Such relocation often entails substantial change in service provision with a direct impact on indicators and their measurement. Furthermore, given the dates of issue of the charters (2007, 2008, 2010) not subsequently renewed in the 3-year timeframe mandated, the economic crisis cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor, in light of the strict austerity imposed on Spanish public libraries between 2010 and 2016 (Arroyo Vázquez, Hernández Sánchez and Gómez Hernández 2019).

Updating a user charter entails updating service commitments to citizens, which receive budgetary allocations. The removal of commitments no longer in vogue would consequently carry adverse funding implications that might thwart incentives to update. Periods of economic crisis are particularly sensitive to such circumstances.

Political as well as economic circumstances, such as the failure to regard the services provided by public libraries as necessary, may also play a role. In such cases, knowing that updates may be detrimental to the library, their management may not propose charter revisions until political change is in sight. Discrepancies between politicians and librarians can often be attributed to such considerations.

4.1.4. Accessibility

'Accessibility' was found to be good in all cases because it took no more than three clicks to view the respective charters. All were consequently assigned a score of 10. Accessibility was unaffected by differences in the position of the charter on the site. The headings identified included: 1) the section on general information ('About the library', 'About us'…); 2) the section on services; and 3) the section on service regulations and rules governing their use.

Ideally, charters should appear on the home page, for they constitute an optimal service catalogue.

4.1.5. Clarity

All the charters were deemed to be understandable for the public at large and therefore to merit a score of 10. No technical library argot was identified without the respective explanation. The acronym OPAC, for instance, was followed by clarification of its meaning. Nonetheless, this is deemed to be a parameter about which library users' opinions might usefully be sought.

4.1.6. Reusability

As all the charters all scored 0 under the parameter content 'reusability'. Although pdf was the format found to be unanimously used, eight were also available in html. The former, a widespread format for such types of documents, is among the most popular on the Datos.gob.es website, the platform that organises and manages Spain's national catalogue of open data. In studies on transparency pdf is often criticised because it cannot normally be machine-processed (García Melián 2014), therefore its rating is 0.

The final MESTA scores for user charters varied across only narrowly, from 55 to 60, despite the differences observed, even though some were no longer valid, a circumstance that should impact the final score. A library with no user charter should score 0, one with a charter no longer valid 45 and one compliant with all criteria, 50.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This overview of public library user charters reveals that many libraries either fail to publish or revise their charters in due time. Only 10 of the 53 (18.8 %) institutions' websites carried duly updated versions. In light of those numbers, Álvarez et al.'s (2008) conclusion that Spain's State-run public libraries do not use such charters as a channel for communicating with users or a means for publicising the services provided and receiving the respective feedback is as valid today as it was 12 years ago.

The failure of some libraries to update their user charters is surprising. The due dates for revision were nonetheless to concur with years of national budget constraints prompted by the economic crisis. As the demand for services continued to grow in those years, the combination of factors impacted certain services, such as lending (Hernández Sánchez and Arroyo Vázquez 2014). That would infer that Spanish libraries may have had other priorities and the available resources did not suffice to meet quality commitments previously assumed.

Although the six MESTA parameters are deemed a valid basis for assessing the extent to which libraries' user charters meet legal transparency requirements, two, 'content' and 'updating', are subject to limitations that should be addressed. In terms of the former, further progress must be made to establish the minimum content to be included. Under 'updating', document validity should be a consideration, with the presence of charters on a library's website only warranted if successively updated. In addition, all the charters, from the first to the latest, should be listed. The adaptation of the MESTA tool for application to libraries, presently under development, is a minimum, open and provisional model which, given time and experience with implementation, could accommodate additional or different items under the information

parameters deemed necessary for suitable assessment. Given the situation observed, the existence on library websites of a series of indicators associated with transparency-related active public disclosure is a very positive sign (Pacios et al. 2018). The want of a transparency culture in Spain may discourage the change in attitudes requisite to the introduction of practices guaranteeing citizens' right to information as a basis for knowledgeable participation (Molina Rodríguez-Navas, Simelio Solà and Corcoy Rius 2017, 828).

From the citizen's perspective, user charters are a mechanism for strengthening transparency, responsibility and participation. They contribute to accountability in effective and transparent institutions, an Agenda 2030 aim. The systems for lodging complaints and suggestions set out in user charters enable citizens to voice their opinions, driving expectation management. Citizens' ability to express themselves is particularly significant in economic crises when quality may be directly impacted by the trend to outsource library services, for which some authors (Juárez Urquijo 2019, 3) predict ongoing growth. The crisis expected in the wake of covid-19 and the resulting cutbacks would favour that pattern. In the event, libraries will have a suitable tool for countering criticism levelled against any service shortcomings.

Acknowledgments

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TRANSPARENCY INDICATORS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES	
1	**PURPOSE OF THE SERVICE AND OBJECTIVES PURSUED**
1.1	Definition of mission
1.2	Strategic plan
2	**GOVERNING BODIES AND OPERATING RULES**
2.1	Identity of library's management board members
2.2	Regulations
2.3	Specific regulations on service provision
2.4	Code of ethics, values or good practice
3	**SERVICE OFFERING**
3.1	User charter
4	**THE COLLECTION**
4.1	Collection management policy / programme
5	**STAFF**
5.1	Organisational chart
5.2	Staff directory
6	**RESULTS**
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	**FINANCIAL INFORMATION**
7.1	Budget
7.2	Tenders contracts and bidding
7.3	Subsidies and assistance awarded
8	**PARTNERING / COOPERATION**
8.1	Partner networks, task forces, commissions
8.2	Agreements