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# Evolution of research on prison library: A bibliometric study

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## Abstract

The primary objective of the article is to present the historical evolution and current state of research in the field of prison libraries: what has been published, when, where, how and by whom it was published, the topic covered, etc. The study is based on the results obtained from the bibliographic databases LISA (ProQuest) and LISTA (EBSCO Publishing) up to early 2023. Entries were manually checked for irrelevant publications, and filters and specific tools, such as OpenRefine, followed by a final manual check, were used to remove duplicate entries. The same mechanisms were used for detecting duplicated entries regarding author, country, journal title, topic, etc. The analysis shows a prevailing publication profile of scarce scientific relevance, with a predominance of the description and the speculation rather than empirical statements. To overcome these limitations, it is proposed the use of scientific methods and techniques that enhance the rigour of results; to progress from the simple description of services, programs, activities, collaborations, etc., to an evaluation of them; and to work with other professionals, both from the library sector and from other disciplines.

## Keywords

Prison libraries; Public library system; Library science research; Scientific output; Bibliometrics.

## 1. Introduction

In any discipline, it is important to be aware of the characteristics of the relevant publications as we can draw valuable conclusions from this analysis, which may enable us to uncover emerging trends in article and journal performance and to identify the best future lines of work. These conclusions may include identifying thematic or geographical areas that are yet to be researched adequately or with the necessary scientific rigour, as well as detecting outdated aspects of certain studies, insufficient collaboration with other disciplines that may limit the full overview of a problem, and a lack of publications in quality journals. The evaluation of all these elements enables us to produce a snapshot of the evolution and current state of the scientific output in relation to a discipline, which is extremely useful for researchers in the field.

Methodologically, the most common tools in this type of longitudinal studies are bibliometric tools. Bibliometrics is essentially a quantitative analysis of scientific publications in order to ascertaining some kind of phenomena. Bibliometric methodologies are considered useful as supporting tools, among many features, for analyse trends in scholarly communication, provides a view of level of development and

tracking the evolution of a discipline, including the humanities and the social science, if its specific characteristics are considered (Zuccala, 2016; Hammarfelt, 2016). In this article, we have applied this working methodology to the field of prison libraries, an area about which there is a lack of information on the progression of the research over time, due to its being an issue relatively unknown in the academic world and little valued in the professional sphere. To date, only two works analyse and interpret publications on prison libraries. One of them is the bibliography of David M. Gillespie (Gillespie, 1968), but it is geographically limited to the United States of America. Gillespie analyses, using cards, over 500 works published between 1900 and 1966 to obtain information on “the number of Publications by author, subject-topic coverage, periodicals most frequently cited, number of entries per year, and number of theses per year”. The second work is that of Jane Garner. The author analyses “141 scholarly journal articles published on the topic from 1970 to 2020, focusing on five areas: publication patterns over time, authorship characteristics, subject and geographic focus, publication sources, and languages of publication” (Garner, 2022). The other works are simple bibliographic collections without analysis, whether of international (Locke, Panella, 2001) or national scope (Gillespie, 1970), or subject-specific (Hartz, 1978).

Our research analyses 957 records, from 1901 to 2022, and our selection of documents includes booklets, books, book chapters and thesis. We study closely items such as the sex of the authors, the evolution over time of the number of authors per document, the length of the document, the number of articles per quartile JCR and by SCImago Journal & Country Rank, most cited articles in WoS or Scopus, etc.

The article is divided into three parts: the first section gives a detailed explanation of the methodology used for extracting the data to analyse; the second presents an overview of the results of this analysis from different perspectives (chronological, thematic, linguistic, by author, etc.); and the third and final part draws some conclusions, including proposals for future lines of work that can help to strengthen the weak points that, for various reasons, are hindering high-quality scientific output in the field of prison libraries.

## **2. Methodology**

This study is based on the results obtained from the bibliographic databases *LISA: Library and Information Science Abstracts* (ProQuest), *LISTA: Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts*, *Library Literature & Information Science Index* and *Library Literature & Information Science Retrospective: 1905-1983* (EBSCO Publishing).

The searches were conducted in all the fields indexed in the databases using the various forms of the concept of prison library in English and other languages, including Catalan, Spanish, French and German. For instance, in English, as well as the thesaurus, we used the expression (prison or jail or incarceration or imprisonment or correction facilities) AND (library or libraries). Equivalent forms were used in the other languages. All the entries were retrieved, regardless of the language of the document or the date, up to early 2023. A total of 993 results were obtained and exported to a spreadsheet.

- ProQuest: 490 entries
- EBSCO Publishing: 543 entries.

The import of data from two different databases and a remarkable heterogeneity in the content and completeness of the fields, discouraged the use of specialized bibliometric tools.

The next step involved detecting all irrelevant or duplicated entries. The irrelevant documents were identified manually by reviewing the abstract or the content of the article when required and possible. If no abstract was available, the title and content descriptors were consulted.

Duplicated entries were eliminated using filters and specific tools, such as OpenRefine, followed by a final manual check. The result obtained was 957 different entries.

To identify variant forms of the same concept and unify them with the same term, with respect to the author, country, journal title, topic, etc., we applied the same mechanisms used for detecting duplicated entries in the fields, followed by a final manual check.

Lastly, with respect to the topics, we classified entries into 37 categories. These 37 categories were chosen after analysing various classification tools (CDU online español, 2016; Tesauro, 2005-) and the summary of the main guidelines on prison libraries (Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, 1992; Comalat, Sulé, 2007; Lehmann, Locke, 2005; Library Association, 1997). Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine accurately the topic in the case of 50 documents, 5.2% of the total, as the title was not specific enough, there was no abstract or significant topic, or it was not possible to consult the content. None of these documents was published in the last three decades.

For the purposes of the study, the sex of the authors (female/male binary) was identified using biographical notes in the articles; information in professional and scientific articles; interviews and press articles; obituaries; directories of universities, libraries and other institutions; social media; and heritage and family history databases. However, in 14.1% of the cases, it was not possible to identify the sex of the author.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Chronological distribution

The results show that there was an important increase in publications on prison libraries in the 1970s, jumping from just 20 titles in the preceding decades to 155 publications in the period 1971-1980 (table 1). From that point onwards, the number of publications has continued to rise, but more gradually.

Decade	1901-1910	1911-1920	1921-1930	1931-1940	1941-1950	1951-1960	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001-2010	2011-2020	2021-2022
Nº. of documents	3	1	17	38	18	24	22	155	164	133	175	171	36
annual average	0,3	0,1	1,7	3,8	1,8	2,4	2,2	15,5	16,4	13,3	17,5	17,1	18

Table 1. Number of documents per decade.

Comparing these figures with the total number of publications contained in *LISA* and *LISTA*, it can be observed that the boom in the 1970s was not equivalent to a rise in the size of the databases as a whole (figure 1).

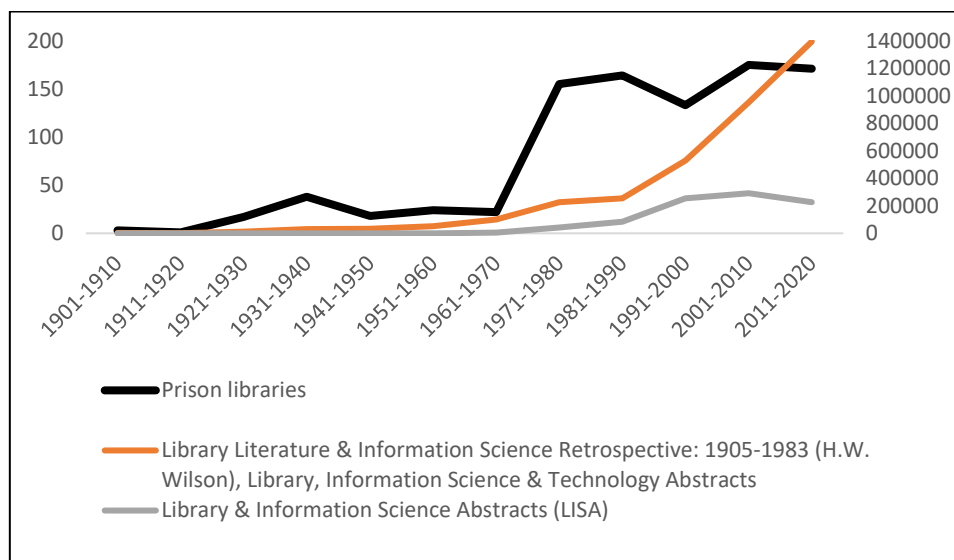


Figure 1. Comparison between the number of documents on prison libraries and the total number of documents in *LISA* and *LISTA*.

One possible interpretation for this particular rise in the 1970s is based on three factors. The first, as highlighted by Garner (2022), is that in 1977 eight articles on prison libraries were published in a single issue of *Library Trends*, which was a major quantitative leap compared to previous decades. Secondly, historically, this increase may be considered a consequence of the widespread social movements that took place in the United States of America throughout the 1960s. Peaceful, student, civil rights movements, etc. changed the way people understood identity, equality, culture and even prison (New left and anti-war movement history and geography, 2015-; Sulé, 2005, 6-7). The importance of the inmates' education was reappraised, and the prison library played a key role that required exploration. The third factor for interpreting the rise in the number of publications on prison libraries in the 1970s refers to the databases used in this study: Proquest and EBSCO. As they are both North American companies, it seems likely that they incorporated the majority of the publications arising from the abovementioned social movements into their collections.

### 3.2. Thematic area

After classifying the documents into 37 main topics, *Cooperation* is the most present with almost twice that the topics *Role of the prison library* or *Cultural programs and activities*, than follow. Table 2 shows the total number of documents per paper (a document may have been classified in more than one topic category):

Topic	N°. of documents	% of total
Cooperation	168	15.0
Role of the prison library	87	7.7

Cultural programs and activities	86	7.7
Description	83	7.4
Reports	80	7.1
Library collection management	59	5.3
Government policies	54	4.8
User studies	45	4.0
Legal libraries	41	3.7
Young people	41	3.7
History	40	3.6
Human resources management	38	3.4
Social programs and activities	33	2.9
Educational programs and activities	32	2.8
Personal experiences	32	2.8
Library services	28	2.5
Legislation	21	1.9
Organization model	19	1.7
Technology	19	1.7
Guidelines, standards and regulations	17	1.5
Professional associations	13	1.2
Evaluation	11	1.0
Reference services	10	0.9
Facilities	10	0.9
Book therapy	9	0.8
Women	6	0.5
Lending service	6	0.5
Training services	6	0.5
Theological programs and activities	5	0.4
Financial resource management	5	0.4
Bibliographic review	5	0.4
General management	4	0.4
Mobile libraries	4	0.4
Awards	2	0.2
Biographies	2	0.2
Prison libraries in fiction and film	1	0.1
Technical services	1	0.1

Table 2. Number of documents per topic.

Secondly, table 3 provides the top ten topics and their ranking in comparison to all the categories over the decades: 1 means first place; 2, second place; and so forth.

Decade	Cooperation	Role of the prison library	Cultural programs and activities	Description	Reports	Library collection management	Government policies	User studies	Legal libraries	Young people
1931-1940	5	3	5	5	3	5	5	5		5
1941-1950	-	2	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	-
1951-1960	4	2	1	2	4	4	4	4	-	-
1961-1970	2	-	2	2	1	2	-	6	-	-
1971-1980	1	3	8	2	4	6	6	5	5	4
1981-1990	1	6	3	3	2	8	3	9	5	9
1991-2000	1	5	1	7	7	7	4	3	3	2
2001-2010	1	7	2	4	8	4	4	4	11	3
2011-2020	1	5	3	6	2	7	11	4	8	6

Table 3. Ranking of topics by decades.

As the table 3 shows, *Cooperation* is the topic of the greatest number of publications and also ranks highest in terms of the most covered topics since 1971. This last statistic should be interpreted in the light of the prevailing organization model in the last few years, which considers prison library as an extension of public libraries (Comalat, Sulé, 2007; Lehmann, Locke, 2005; Library Association, 1997; Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, 1992). Therefore, there is an increasing number of publications that aim to explain experiences of cooperation with public libraries, at either a national or local scale. *Cooperation* also includes experiences with other types of institutions or organizations (universities, schools, associations, etc.), but there are fewer such cases proportionally.

The second topic, *Role of the prison library*, applies to any publications that reflect on what the mission and goals of prison libraries should be. As we can see in the rankings, before the 1970s this topic was the subject of a significant proportion of the publications. It began to decline at just the same time as the predominance of publications on *Cooperation* started. As mentioned above, this is because, during this period, the concept of the role of the prison library as an extension of the public library became consolidated.

The third topic on which most publications have focused is *Cultural programs and activities*. Its evolution in the ranking of the most covered topics is irregular, although since the 1950s, it has ranked among the top three, with the sole exception of the 1970s. The main cultural activity described or analysed is, without question, reading. Other publications discuss painting, music or theatre workshops, but there are fewer of these comparatively. The importance of reading is clearly the result of the fact that literacy is one of the key goals of prison libraries, as the large majority of inmates have low levels of reading comprehension and written expression (Education in prison: a literature review, 2021; Morken, Jones, Helland, 2021).

Finally, the fourth most popular topic, *Description*, includes any documents that confine themselves to describing the library of a penitentiary. In contrast to the documents categorized as *Reports*, the descriptions are often short texts (a few pages) that do not

apply any rigorous analytical methodologies as their objective is simply to explain certain aspects of library management. Their purpose is more explanatory than research. As seen in the rankings table, as a topic, *Description* has steadily decreased in number over the last few decades.

### 3.3. Geographical scope

The regional scope of the documents (table 4) is primarily the United States of America (52.0%), followed by the United Kingdom (14.8%).

Country	N°. of documents	% of total
United States of America	495	51.3%
United Kingdom	142	14.7%
Germany	32	3.3%
France	24	2.5%
Norway	20	2.1%
International	18	1,9%
Poland	17	1.8%
Australia	16	1.7%
Canada	16	1.7%
Nigeria	16	1.7%
Sweden	16	1.7%
Italy	15	1.6%
Finland	11	1.1%
Hungary	10	1.0%
Netherlands	10	1.0%
Spain	10	1.0%

Table 4. Number of documents per country.

As in the case of the chronological distribution, it should be noted that the sources from which the articles were obtained (*LISA* and *LISTA*) are North American and, as such, the figures on the United States of America are probably overstated with respect to the reality of the situation. Whatever the case may be, the country accounts for the predominant number of publications on prison libraries.

While this predominance has continued over the years, it is also true that, in the last few decades, the percentage of publications on the United States of America has fallen as a proportion of the total number of documents. Data from current decade have not been considered at this point.

Decade	1901-1910	1911-1920	1921-1930	1931-1940	1941-1950	1951-1960	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001-2010	2011-2020
United States of America	66.7%	100%	82.4%	86.8%	72.2%	83.3%	72.7%	64.3%	38.3%	48.2%	43.8%	41.2%

Table 5. Percentage of documents focusing at a geographical level on the United States of America, by decade.



In other words, as the years have gone by, there is an increasing number of publications about other countries or regions of the world or, at least, they have become more visible.

Another factor worth highlighting is the low number of studies with an international scope (1.9%). In fact, and in agreement with the results obtained by Garner (2002) for a shorter time period, the vast majority of articles have the same regional scope as the journal that they are published in, with an abundance of publications in local bulletins or journals, which focus on issues at a local level. Table 6 considers percentage of articles with the same geographical scope as the publication in the countries with 10 documents or more.

Country	% of articles with the same geographical scope as the journal
United States of America	92.0%
United Kingdom	64.2%
Germany	73.0%
Denmark	29.6%
France	80.8%
Canada	54.5%
Poland	93.3%
Italy	69.2%
Norway	75.0%
Hungary	100%

Table 6. Percentage of articles with the same geographical scope as the journal in which they are published, by country.

### 3.4. Authorship

Traditionally, the number of authors per article in Humanities and Social Sciences is low (Garfield 1979; Bourke, 1997; Ardanuy 2008). In this study on prison libraries, most of the documents were written by a single person (665; 83.4% of the total number of documents with an identified author, figure 2). Only 90 documents were retrieved with two authors (11.3%) and 27 resources with three authors (3.4%). There are only 15 documents with four or more authors (1.8%). The number of documents shows a clear power law dependence with respect to the number of authors. Articles written by corporate sources accounted for only 11 of the documents (1.1% of the total).

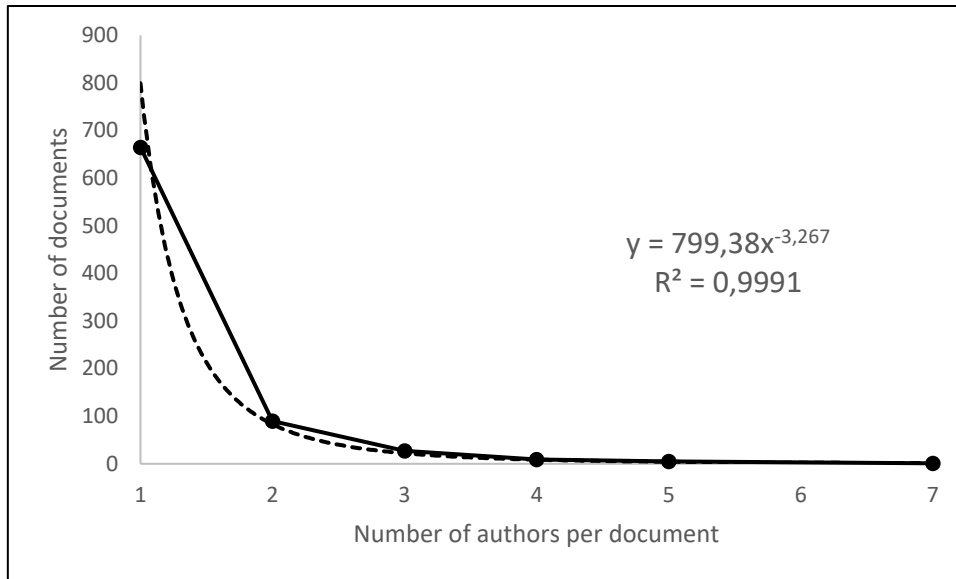


Figure 2. Number of authors per document.

In line with data obtained by Garner (2002), if we look in detail at the evolution of this factor over time (figure 3), we can see that the number of authors per document has risen since 1970, albeit slowly, which can be observed as a general trend in Social Sciences, although at different speeds depending on the area or subarea (Fisher et al. 1998; Cronin et al. 2003; Laband; Tollison 2000; Pontille 2003; Leahey; Reikowsky 2008; Ardanuy 2012; Adams et al. 2014; Henriksen 2016). The rise is particularly notable in this study in the period 1971-1980, when it climbed from an average of 1.05 authors per document to 1.4. From 1980, the upward trend continued, albeit more moderately. There was even a drop in the 1990s, coinciding with a reduction in the output on this topic. The current decade cannot yet be considered.

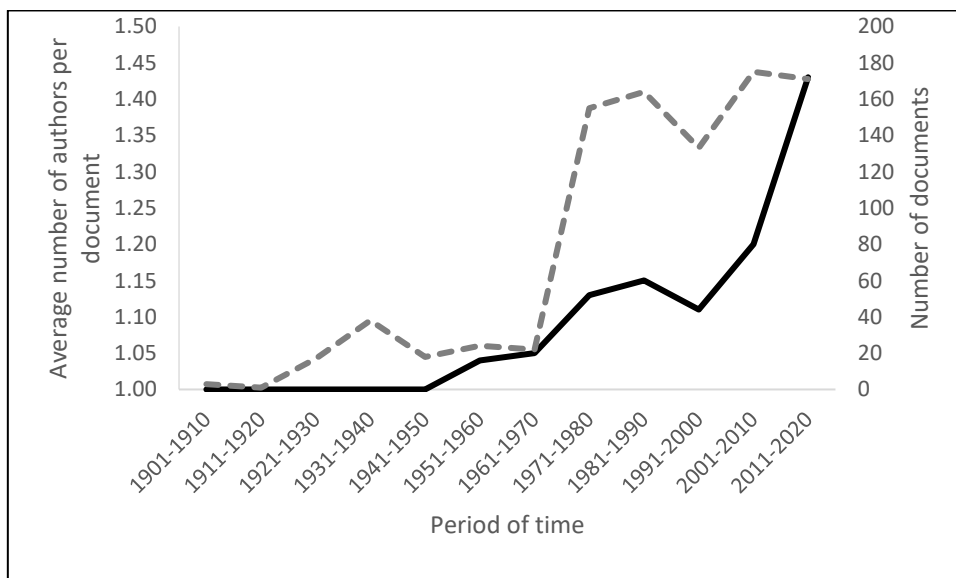


Figure 3. Evolution over time of the number of authors per document.

Collaborations between authors on articles about prison libraries are isolated, with hardly any institutional collaboration, much less international. Consequently, networks are formed by practically isolated nodes and the co-occurrence matrix are very sparse.

Productivity also follows a potential distribution, with a very low number of authors with 4 or more documents.

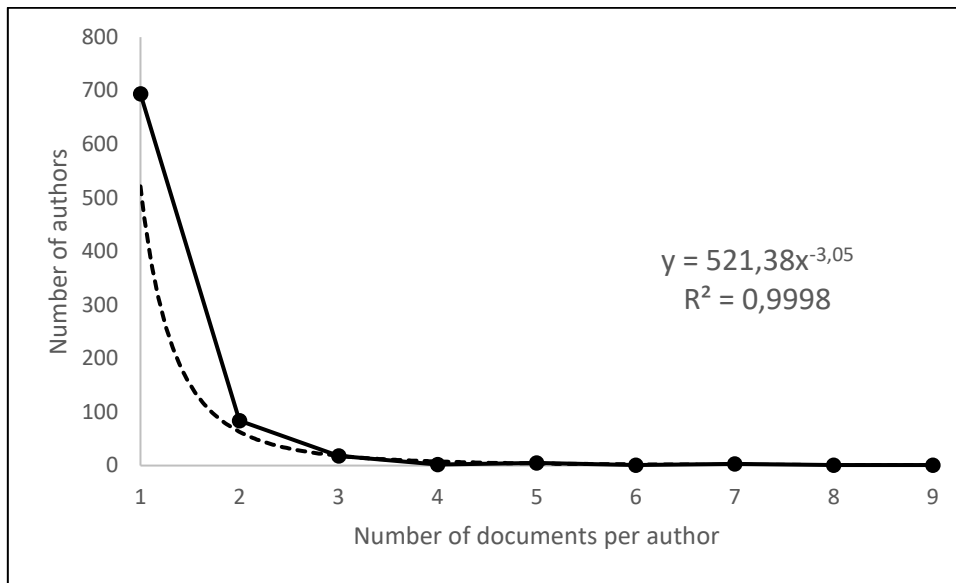


Figure 4. Number of documents per author.

By sex, there is a clear predominance of women (61.7%) over men, with the volume of documents with female authors overtaking those with male authors in the 1970s. This seems to respond to a general greater presence of women librarians (Majanja, Kiplang'at, 2003; Estivill-Rius, 2006; DeLong, 2013; Eva; Lê; Sheriff, 2021).

The most prolific author is Rhea Joyce Rubin (1950- ), who has written 9 documents, followed by Daniel Suvak (1947-), with 8. Rhea Joyce Rubin and Daniel Suvak are the co-author of one of the few guidebooks for the management of prison libraries, entitled *Libraries inside: a practical guide for prison librarians* (1995). Fellow Daniel Suvak is also the author of the only annotated bibliography of prison libraries published to date: *Memoirs of American prisons: an annotated bibliography*, 1979.

Table 7 shows the 12 authors with a minimum of 4 published documents. As can be observed, in 8 of the cases they are practitioners, namely, librarians and/or library consultants. And only in three cases author is an academic researcher.

Author	Nº. documents	Professional description	Country of professional trajectory
Rubin, Rhea Joyce	9	Independent library consultant	USA
Suvak, Daniel	8	Librarian	USA
MacCormick, Austin H.	7	Criminologist and prison reformer	USA
Shirley, Glennor	7	Librarian and Independent library consultant	Jamaica/USA
Garner, Jane	6	Lecturer in Information Studies at Charles Sturt University	Australia
Pearson, Arthur	6	Librarian	UK
Heie, Bjørg	5	Librarian	Norway
Schneider, Julia	5	Librarian	USA

Vogel, Brenda	5	Professor of criminology and criminal Justice at California State University Long Beach	USA
Lehmann, Vibeke	4	Librarian and independent library consultant	USA
Pérez Pulido, Margarita	4	Lecturer in Library and information science at Universidad de Extremadura	Spain
Peschers, Gerhard	4	Librarian	Germany

Table 7. Authors with 4 or more documents.

### 3.5. Languages

As is the case in many other disciplines, the predominant language of publication is English, accounting for 79.7% of the total, very similar to the 85.8% obtained by Garner (2022) for the period 1970-2020. None of the other languages exceed 5% (table 8).

Language	Nº. documents	%
English	762	79.7%
German	38	4.0%
French	28	2.9%
Dutch	16	1.7%
Polish	15	1.6%
Danish	13	1.4%
Italian	12	1.3%
Norwegian	11	1.1%
Hungarian	10	1.0%
Others	51	5.3%

Table 8. Number of documents per language.

The predominance of English has been constant throughout the period analysed, albeit with a slight drop in the last few decades (table 9). Again, the calculation for the current decade has been omitted. These figures must be contextualized against the backdrop of the characteristics of the databases used for this study, as both Proquest and EBSCO are North American companies with a greater focus on collecting publications from their own country, which are, therefore, in English.

Decade	1901-1910	1911-1920	1921-1930	1931-1940	1941-1950	1951-1960	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001-2010	2011-2020
% in English	100%	100%	100%	94.7%	100%	83.3%	86.4%	80.0%	74.4%	78.9%	74.9%	77.8%

Table 9. Number of documents in English, by decade.

### 3.6. Document types

The predominant document type is the journal article, accounting for 91.6% of the total output.

Document type	Nº. of documents	%
Journal article	866	90.5%
Book chapter or book part	56	5.9%
Booklet and book	31	3.2%
Thesis	2	0.2%
Others	2	0.2%

Table 10. Number of documents, by type.

Once again, the nature of the databases used in the study may have distorted the reality of these figures, as they primarily focus on collecting journal articles and it is harder for

them to discover local monographic case studies from foreign contexts. As such, the number of books and theses published is probably somewhat higher than the figures suggest (Sivertsen 2014; Kulczycki et al, 2018).

### 3.7. Journals in which the articles were published

Another issue that has been analysed is the distribution of the articles published in the different journals (table 11). The data shows that, out of a total of 251 journal titles (grouping together title variations and official continuations), only 16 contain 10 or more articles, with a typical potential distribution.

Journal	Nº. articles	% of total
Library Journal	75	8.7%
ALA Bulletin; Bulletin of the American Library Association; American Libraries	58	6.7%
Wilson Library Bulletin	30	3.5%
Library Trends	22	2.5%
Interface	20	2.3%
BuB Forum Bibliothek und Information [BUB-JOURNAL; Buch und Bibliothek]	18	2.1%
Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France	16	1.9%
Library & Information Update	16	1.9%
Library Association Record	15	1.7%
Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly	14	1.6%
Illinois Libraries	13	1.5%
Bok og Bibliotek	12	1.4%
Law Library Journal	11	1.3%
Biblioteche Oggi	10	1.2%
Konyvtari Figyelo	10	1.2%
Library Philosophy and Practice	10	1.2%

Table 11. Number of articles per journal title.

In other words, the top 16 journals in terms of the number of articles they contain only account for 40,5% of the total number of documents, which indicates a very fragmented distribution of the publications. This may be linked to the hypothesis stated in the Geographical Scope section regarding the high number of documents published in local bulletins and journals, especially in the North American context.

It is useful to ascertain the international visibility of the documents on prison libraries, which we can estimate by analysing whether a document has been indexed on the Web of Science (WoS) or Scopus and, if it be so, which quartile it is in.

In WoS database, of the 250 journal titles in which articles on prison libraries have been published, only 38 were indexed (15.2%). In the case of Scopus, this percentage is slightly higher, at 20,0%, but remains low.

With respect to the impact factor, the analysis of the Journal Citation Report (JCR) of the WoS for the period 1997-2021 (rankings corresponding to 2022 were not yet available at the time of writing the article) shows that only one paper included in this source was published in a journal in the first quartile (table 12). In contrast, the large majority of articles were published in journals in the third and, in particular, the fourth quartile. These results are in line with previous studies that show that most journals on specialist subareas of Library and Information Science hardly ever make it out of the third or fourth quartile in these rankings (Urbano; Ardanuy, 2020).

Quartile	N°. of articles	%
Q1	1	1.9%
Q2	8	14.8%
Q3	15	27.8%
Q4	30	55.6%

Table 12. Number of articles by JCR quartile.

In contrast, analysing Scopus through SCImago Journal & Country Rank reveals a higher number of publications in the top quartiles (table 13). This difference is due to the greater coverage that Scopus gives to Social Sciences, which is also in line with previous studies.

Quartile	N°. of articles	%
Q1	27	28.4%
Q2	19	20.0%
Q3	39	41.1%
Q4	10	10.5%

Table 13. Number of articles by quartile in SCImago Journal & Country Rank

The number of citations of the indexed papers is low, with a median of 1 citation in WoS and 2 in Scopus. Table 14 offers the papers with a minimum of 8 citations in WoS or Scopus (January 10, 2023).

Author	Title of paper	Journal	Year	N. of citations (WOS)	N. of citations (Scopus)
Lehmann, Vibeke	Challenges and Accomplishments in U.S. Prison Libraries	Library Trends	2011	18	18
Eze, Jacintha U.	Information needs of prisoners in Southeast Nigerian prisons	Information Development	2016	11	12
Bowe, Carole	Recent Trends in UK Prison Libraries	Library Trends	2011	11	12
Conrad, Suzanna	Collection development and circulation policies in prison libraries: an exploratory survey of librarians in us correctional institutions	Library Quarterly	2012	11	11
Ljødal, Hilde Kristin; Ra, Erlend	Prison Libraries the Scandinavian Way: An Overview of the Development and Operation of Prison Library Services	Library Trends	2011	10	12
Šimunić, Zrinka; Faletar Tanacković, Sanjica; Badurina, Boris	Library services for incarcerated persons: A survey of recent trends and challenges in prison libraries in Croatia	Journal of Librarianship and Information Science	2016	9	12
Wilhelmus, David W	A new emphasis for correctional facilities' libraries	Journal of Academic Librarianship	1999	8	13
Intrator, Miriam	Avenues of intellectual resistance in the ghetto	Libri	2004	4	8

	Theresienstadt: Escape through the central library, books, and reading				
Šimunić, Zrinka; Faletar Tanacković, Sanjica; Badurina, Boris	Library services for incarcerated persons: A survey of recent trends and challenges in prison libraries in Croatia	Journal of Librarianship and Information Science	2016	9	12

Table 14. Most cited papers in WoS or Scopus

### 3.8. Document length

The number of pages that a document contains can be an indicator of the greater or lesser degree of its scientific ambition. In documents of just one or two pages, it seems unlikely that a topic can be developed with sufficient scientific rigour (justification, methodologies, results, conclusions, etc.), suggesting that the documents have a more professional or perhaps simply general dissemination focus.

In this case, the data shows that, to date, 40.5% of the published documents contain one or two pages. If we add three-page documents, the cumulative total reaches 54.3%.

### 4. Conclusions

The historical analysis of publications on prison libraries contained in *LISA* and *LISTA* reveals a considerable increase in the number documents from the 1970s onwards, possibly related to the boom in social movements that took place in many countries around the world throughout the 1960s.

The topic most covered in these publications is *Cooperation* between prison libraries and other institutions (15%), particularly public libraries. This predominance increased from the 1970s onwards, coinciding with the consolidation of the idea that prison libraries are an extension of the public library system. On the other hand, the scarce production of publications on subjects as important nowadays for any library service as user studies, technologies or evaluation is remarkable.

As would be expected to a certain extent, in view of the North American origin of *LISA* and *LISTA*, the most common geographical scope of the publications is the United States of America (52.0%), followed by the United Kingdom (14.8%). A more surprising finding is the low number of studies with an international scope (1.9%), as well as certain degree of “endogamy” with respect to the country of analysis, as most of the articles focus on the same country in which the journal it is published in is based.

The average author profile is a woman (61.7%), librarian and/or library consultant, who only publishes one document, which she produces alone. However, over the last few decades, the average number of collaborative works has climbed to almost 1.5.

The predominant language in which the resources analysed are written is English (79.2%) and the most common document type by far is a journal article (91.6%). These articles were often published with a short length in journals that are not indexed either on the Web of Science (only 15.1% are indexed) or Scopus (just 20.3%). This all indicates a prevailing publication profile of minimal or no scientific relevance that, as Rosen (2020) states, “remains descriptive in nature and relies more on speculation than empirical claims when describing impact”. In other words, it is a subject that has interested to the

professional practitioners, but not academics. It seems another sample of the existing gap between the two communities (Ardanuy, Urbano 2017). On the other hand, the issue of prisons and their libraries is neither glamorous nor does it seem to worry society, so the hopes for funded research are small. Garner (2022) also outlines as discouraging factors “the time required to satisfy all ethical and research integrity requirements to gain access to research sites, the potential dangers to the researcher”, “the gender-related complexities of working with largely male prison populations”, “and the emotional toll of working in prison environments with incarcerated populations”.

Therefore, the road ahead is long and wide as far as the research field of prison libraries is concerned. A significant initial step forward would be a shift from speculation to the use of scientific methods and techniques that would enhance the rigour of the results, assessments and recommendations generated. Another useful step would be to progress from the simple description of services, programs, activities, collaborations, etc., to an evaluation of them because, without a professional assessment of their efficacy, it is very unlikely that the authorities involved will be convinced to increase the funding of prison library services. To achieve these objectives will require, on the one hand, a greater involvement of the academic community, which has the tools and time to carry out specific and rigorous research. And on the other hand, working in multidisciplinary teams composed of psychologists, sociologists, jurists, statisticians, computer scientists, etc., in order to carry out holistic, multifaceted analyses and evaluations that rigorously consider the different elements involved. As Garner (2022) also points out, the role of libraries and literacy in education, the acceptance of poor education as a major criminogenic factor, understanding the value of prison education for rehabilitation and reducing recidivism, all of these are topics that can be investigated much more effectively and efficiently through interdisciplinary groups. A person working on their own, no matter how much effort and determination they put in, is very unlikely to achieve these objectives.

## 5. References

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