Evolution of strategic issues: a 20-year analysis of public library planning in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the strategic issues faced by public libraries in South Korea spanning the period from 2003 to 2022. An extensive examination of 176 strategic planning documents from 17 local governments resulted in the selection and analysis of 75 documents using a strategic planning analysis model. The findings reveal that issues such as staff/training, collaboration/networks, information literacy, digital libraries, physical space, and collection emerged as major concerns in the strategic planning of public libraries in Korea. An analysis of the top issues' distribution over five-year intervals showed that staff/training issues consistently held a high rank over the 20-year period, underscoring their enduring strategic importance. Conversely, collection-related issues started with a low rank between 2003 and 2007 but consistently rose in significance from 2008 to 2022, becoming crucial strategic considerations for public libraries. Notably, these trends align closely with the direction set by the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan at the national level for each period. The study underscores how the national-level development plan for libraries significantly influences the detailed strategic planning directions of local public libraries.

Keywords: Public libraries; Strategic plans; Library development plans; Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan; Library management.

INTRODUCTION

Public libraries deliver essential information services with backing from national and local governments in the form of facilities and personnel support. In Korea, the Libraries Act, initially enacted in 1963, serves as the foundation for overseeing library operations within the realm of public administration. A notable aspect of this law is that the chairman of the Presidential Committee on Library and Information Policy (see https://www.clip.go.kr/) must establish Korea's Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan as a strategic plan for libraries every five years; while the national and local governments should establish and promote a detailed implementation plan every year based on the five-year plan. Local governments in Korea have taken steps to formulate strategic plans for public libraries. Examining these strategic plans offers a window into how an organization prioritizes its goals and allocates resources to achieve them (Shields 2007). However, despite the importance of understanding these strategic plans, there remains a research gap in comprehensively analyzing the evolution of strategic priorities for public libraries over the years and their

alignment with national-level library development plans in Korea. This study aims to bridge this research gap by providing an in-depth exploration of the strategic issues identified in the planning documents of Korean public libraries and their correlation with broader national library development initiatives.

This study explored the predominant trends in strategic issues faced by public libraries across local governments in Korea. It also sought to understand the connection between the systematic formulation of strategies at the national level and the strategic planning undertaken by local governments. Specifically, the investigation delved into the critical strategic issues identified by local governments in Korea for public libraries, spanning the period from 2003 to 2022. This study focuses on the following research questions:
(a) What have been the most highly prioritized issues in the strategic planning of Korean public libraries over the past 20 years (2003–2022)?
(b) How have key issues in the strategic planning of Korean public libraries changed over the past 20 years (2003–2022) in five-year cycles?
(c) How are these strategic issues aligned with the national government's plan (i.e. Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan) of Korean public libraries?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategic planning, also known as long-range planning, involves guiding an organization to ensure its future trajectory aligns with a planned approach, progressing in a favorable direction. The process of business management planning typically encompasses three key steps: (a) long-range planning, (b) strategic planning, and (c) strategic management (Pacios 2004). In essence, strategic planning involves the entire organization making decisions about its future direction and the means to achieve the established goals (McNamara 2023). Bryson (1995) proposed a process of strategic planning for public and non-profit organizations in the following 10 steps:
    (a) initiate and agree to the strategic planning process;
    (b) clarify an organization's mandate;
    (c) identify and understand stakeholders, and define and improve missions and values;
    (d) assess the environment to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT);
    (e) identify and compose strategic issues;
    (f) formulate strategies to manage the issues;
    (g) review and adopt strategies;
    (h) establish an organization's effective future vision;
    (i) develop an effective implementation process; and
    (j) reassess strategies and the strategic planning process.

The American Library Association (ALA) has applied strategic planning to libraries since the late 1960s (Jacob 1990; Shields 2007) and has continuously promoted strategic planning that includes an explanation of six broad goals, along with the purpose of establishing the ALA and its mission statement, vision statement, major implementation areas, and detailed goals. Furthermore, numerous organizations within the ALA have announced their own values, core purposes, and visions through strategic planning (Shields 2007) (e.g., the Association for Library Service to Children (*ALSC Strategic Plan*), the Association of College and Research Libraries (*Charting our future: ACRL strategic plan*), the Public Library Association (*Tecker Consultants*), and the ALA Public Programs Office (*ALA Public Programs Office Strategic Plan*). Lachance (2006) claims that library and information associations

must devise flexible and future-oriented strategies that connect individual members with their organizational goals to create a healthy future and actively support libraries' strategic planning.

Corrall's (2000) planning model, which is frequently used in the strategic planning of public libraries, specifically emphasizes the importance of helping to plan the future of libraries by implementing a detailed research process in an organization's environment; identifying the libraries' priorities on which the plans should focus; and addressing education, selection, and assessment in strategic exploration. The strategic planning process proposed by Corrall (2000) comprises the following elements: (a) environmental analysis (macroscopic, microscopic, and corporate or internal environment), SWOT analysis, planning assumption, and scenario creation; (b) mission; (c) values; (d) vision; (e) priorities (important success factors, main result area, information service priority); (f) goals; (h) strategies; and (i) formal plans.

Strategic Planning in Public Libraries

In evaluating the structure and differences between library strategic and long-range plans, Pacios (2004) conducted an analysis by examining planning reports from the websites of 65 public and university libraries in Spain. The aim was to determine if variations existed between the two types of planning. According to Pacios (2004), strategic planning is regarded as a more sophisticated concept compared to long-range planning, involving detailed future plans derived from an assessment of the broader library environment. Buchanan and Cousins (2012) emphasized the necessity of establishing strategic planning for libraries. They introduced an efficient rubric-based strategic planning assessment method comprising a rating scale and tested the proposed method in Scottish public libraries. The findings of their study led to recommendations for improving the precision, specificity, explicitness, coordination, consistency, and overall mapping of public library services in Scotland. They also suggested the broader application of the rubric method.

Kostagiolas, Banou, and Laskari (2009) provided an overview of the current situation of libraries based on a strategic planning analysis of public libraries in Greece and identified development areas related to education and training, social and economic development, e-government, reading policy, and cultural cohesion. They conducted comprehensive interviews with 29 public libraries in Greece using a semi-structured questionnaire. The results led to a redefinition of policies and priorities, highlighting the need for official strategic planning to better address the demands and expectations of users and society. In their 2015 study, Mehra and Davis performed a content analysis of U.S. public library websites. They put forth a forward-thinking manifesto aimed at guiding public libraries in the 21st century to embrace diversity comprehensively. The manifesto aims to bridge the gap in strategic planning and the communication of information within web documents (Mehra and Davis 2015). This Strategic Diversity manifesto provided a mechanism for individual public libraries to strategically question, explain, discuss, and reflect on in a localized context and environment.

Based on a content analysis of strategic planning material published online by public libraries in the U.S., Shields (2007) analyzed the goals of strategic planning representing the current priorities for the change and improvement of public libraries; categorized them into 15 items; and analyzed the patterns in the relationship between each factor using factor analysis. The results show that the strategic planning of U.S. public libraries mostly establishes collection, facilities, marketing, programming, and technology as goals that represent the priorities of their planned library services. Levitt, Steele, and Thompson

(2000) investigated the accomplishments of the U.K. Library and Information Commission (LIC) resulting from its general tasks and specialized projects impacting the public. Established by the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport in 1995, the LIC is recognized as a national professional organization providing advisory services to the government on matters pertaining to the library and information sectors. The evaluation of factors aligned with LIC policy achievements was carried out through a qualitative study involving public interviews.

To study the assessment and analysis of strategic planning for public libraries in Korea, Noh (2007) utilized the SMART method, a policy assessment method, to evaluate the validity of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan (2003–2011). The evaluation focused on the specificity, measurability, attainability/achievability, realisticness/reliability/relevance, and timeliness/time-boundedness of future vision, development goals, promotional tasks, and major projects of the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan. The findings indicated that while the relevance of the master plan was notable, there were issues with measurability. Furthermore, the progress in library services was commendable, but certain aspects, such as strengthening library functions by type, establishing public–private partnerships, and promoting a national reading culture, necessitated revision and supplementation. Earlier, Cha (2014) assessed the importance and relevance of policy tasks by analyzing the progress of the unification of library administrative systems included in the first and second phase of the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan, and sought strategies for the unification of library administrative systems by reviewing relevant promotion measures. The analysis, conducted through a synthesis of prior studies, expert policy evaluations, and in-depth interviews with field workers, indicated that the policy orientation towards local government unification was deemed reasonable. However, aspects such as the unification method, organizational structure, personnel transfers, and position adjustments, as well as property transfers, were identified as areas necessitating additional deliberation and discussion.

In a separate study also conducted in Korea, Jang et al. (2010) assessed the mid- to long-term work plans of local governments and their sub-level organizations responsible for library policies. Their analysis encompassed the policies implemented by local governments to extend various benefits of public libraries to communities and the organizational structures facilitating these policies. The findings indicated that while the majority of local governments had mid- to long-term strategic plans for libraries, only a limited number had dedicated departments overseeing library policy. Furthermore, the predominant focus of library-related policies was on the construction of libraries. These policies included the establishment of public libraries, the support and formation of small libraries, the augmentation of librarian resources for newly constructed libraries, the creation of a library cooperation system, and the implementation of a city-wide reading promotion policy. Suggesting a new model for establishing library policy at a national level, Choi (2014) introduced related experiences and practices of library policy, along with Korea's Five-Year Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan proposed by the Presidential Committee on Library and Information Policy.

Overall, previous studies on the strategic planning of public libraries have mostly established a standard of value for library organizations by specifically planning their strategies through a systematic self-diagnosis of current library work. Most previous studies have assessed and analyzed the validity and practicality of strategic planning for library promotion. In Korea, studies have focused on the validity of planning and

attempted to suggest improvement directions by discovering issues, establishing integrated strategic planning for all public libraries at a national level, and analyzing the policy environment of each library type.

Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan in South Korea

Korea's Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan, the national government's library strategic development policy, was established in three phases over a five-year period. The first phase (2009–2013) plan set the vision of "library leading" and the main keywords were "service," "infrastructure," and "ubiquitous." The eight detailed driving strategies included the following (Presidential Committee on Library and Information Policy of Korea 2008): (a) improving library accessibility and service environment; (b) strengthening the role of libraries in cultivating creative talents; (c) contributing to social integration by bridging the knowledge/information gap; (d) re-establishing the national library system for utilizing national knowledge/information; (e) promoting university/special libraries as education/academic/research support centers; (f) specializing in library personnel and advancing related systems; (g) implementing a U-Library for propagating and sharing knowledge/information; and (h) achieving global library information services based on strengthened library cooperation.

The second phase (2014–2018) set the vision of "libraries creating happy life and future" and the main keywords were "information service," "forming a knowledge ecosystem," and "information-based advancement." The detailed driving strategies included the following (Presidential Committee on Library and Information Policy of Korea 2014): (a) expanding library services customized per life cycle; (b) reinforcing library services for the social class vulnerable to knowledge/information; (c) strengthening the identity and role of national libraries; (d) strengthening education/learning and academic research information support services; (e) expanding the library base and substantializing its operation; (f) establishing a linking/sharing/cooperating system for library resources; and (g) maintaining a library law/system.

The third phase (2019–2023) set the vision of "libraries changing our lives" and the main keywords were "people," "space," and "information." The detailed driving strategies included the following (Presidential Committee on Library and Information Policy of Korea 2019): (a) expanding cultural services to strengthen the public; (b) increasing information access convenience of users; (c) strengthening library services customized per life cycle; (d) building a decentralized library operation system; (e) preserving/sharing/propagating collective memory; (f) reinforcing the platform function of exchange/cooperation; (g) actively realizing informational welfare; (h) expanding the openness of spaces; (i) conducting a cross-boundary linking of information; (j) improving the quality of library operation systems; (k) strengthening library cooperation systems; (l) building the basis for sharing library resources; and (m) expanding the library infrastructure.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data for the study were obtained from the 'Policy Research Information System & Management (PRISM)' (https://www.prism.go.kr/homepage/), a government-operated system overseen by the Ministry of the Interior and Safety in Korea. This platform is specifically designed to oversee the implementation process of research documents for policy or strategic planning and to facilitate the dissemination of research outcomes. The primary purpose of this system is to systematically manage research from various

institutions to prevent redundancy, enhance research quality, and increase utility. Additionally, it provides research information, allowing the public to search for research documents easily and quickly and access relevant information. As an additional source for data collection, the study gathered data from the 'Korea ON-line E-Procurement System' (https://www.g2b.go.kr/index.jsp), a comprehensive national electronic procurement system offering procurement information for both public institutions and private businesses. This platform oversees the complete procurement process online, encompassing bidding, contracting, inspections, payment processes, and other tasks related to procurement.

The data collection spanned 20 years, commencing in 2003 with the inception of the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan and concluding in 2022. Given that certain strategic planning initiatives were ongoing or their results had not been disclosed at the time of data collection for this study in January 2023, not all relevant data available up to that point were included. The data search involved the use of diverse keywords such as "library," "public libraries," "strategy plan," "long-term planning," and "library development plan" within 176 strategic planning documents submitted by 17 local government bodies in Korea. Subsequently, two researchers reviewed the details and selected 75 documents on the topics of long-term planning, strategy plans, and library development plans, from which the trends in mid- to long-term strategies for local public libraries could be deduced.

The selected data underwent content analysis as the chosen method for data analysis. It refers to "identifying, quantifying, and analyzing of specific words, phrases, concepts or other observable semantic data in a text or body of texts with the aim of uncovering some underlying thematic or rhetorical pattern" (Huckin 2003, p.14). To conduct the content analysis, strategic planning processes such as mission, values, vision, goals, strategies, and formal plans were extracted from each document based on Corrall's (2000) strategic planning analysis model. To analyze the details of strategic planning, the contents of each document were counted as separate keywords if they were related to at least one strategy or formal plan. Through content analysis of the 75 documents, keywords were identified, and 907 issues from strategic action plans were extracted. This extraction involved word cleansing to refine synonyms, singular/plural forms, abbreviations, spaces, and changes in parts of speech. It is worth noting that a strategic action plan encompasses specific goals and objectives for the implementation of a given strategy.

The researchers participated in a systematic and repeated review of the text to improve the reliability of the content analysis and developed a codebook by cross-checking the keyword extraction results to explain the scope and code used for analyzing the data. The content of the codebook was developed using the online list of the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), updated in 2022 for accuracy and proficiency in English keywords. A content analysis was conducted on 907 strategic action plans, classifying them into 52 common categories of LCSH. This categorization was accomplished using 18 keywords and organizing the plans by subject, as outlined in Table 1.

This study, upon analyzing the data, initially investigated the overseeing institutions, executing bodies, and budgets associated with the 176 strategy documents. Subsequently, it delved into identifying prominent trends and areas of particular emphasis by assessing the frequency of strategic issues extracted from the 75 documents, thereby elucidating the primary areas of interest. Lastly, the study examined the evolution of key strategic issues in the strategic plans of Korean public libraries over five-year cycles from 2003 to 2022.

Table 1: Categorized Keywords and Common LCSH Subject Headings for Content Analysis of
Strategic Action Plans Codebook

Category (N = 18)	LCSH Examples (N = 52)
Administration/management	Library systems, Regional
	Central processing (libraries); Special libraries— Reference services
	Libraries—Administration
	Strategic planning
	Corporate governance for library policies
	Library management
Collaboration/networks	Library networks
	Library cooperation
Collection	Libraries—Special collections—Management
	Library collection development
Community	Corporations, Community development
	Community development—Citizen participation
	Local library cooperation project
Digital libraries	Integrated library systems
	Digital libraries—Collection development
	Digital information resources
	Digital reference services (libraries); Electronic information services
Facilities/environment	Buildings—Design and construction
	Buildings—Repair and reconstruction
	Expansion of library infrastructure; Local transit accessibility; Parking lots
Information literacy	Literacy; Reading programs
	Information literacy/digital literacy
Institutional repositories	Shared repository
Lifelong learning	Continuing education
	Lifelong education; Lifelong learning
Marketing/promotion	Libraries—Marketing
Organization	Organizational development
	Libraries—Organization
	Functional competencies
Physical space	Multifunctional library spaces
	Libraries—Space utilization
	Welfare buildings in industry
	Commons; Learning commons
Preservation	Local archives
	Legal deposit of books; Depository copies
Programming/outreach services	Outreach programs in libraries
	Services to people with adult; Public libraries—Services to adults
	Services to people with disabilities
Small libraries	Rural and small libraries
Staff/training	Librarians—Recruiting; Special librarians
	Library staff; Skills training
	Library staff manuals
Technology	Intelligent sensors
	Virtual reality, Augmented reality
	Robots—Information storage and retrieval systems
User Customized Services	User Customized services
	Data curation services
	Youth services in libraries
	Career advancement; Business—Information services

Experience-based learning

FINDINGS

Statistical Insights into the Strategic Planning of Public Libraries

From 2003 to 2022, Korean local governments compiled a total of 176 plans. The analysis revealed that annually, fewer than 10 plans were conducted until 2015. However, since 2016, there has been a consistent increase, with more than 10 plans conducted each year. Notably, in 2020, the highest number of plans thus far (23 in total) were conducted (see Figure 1).
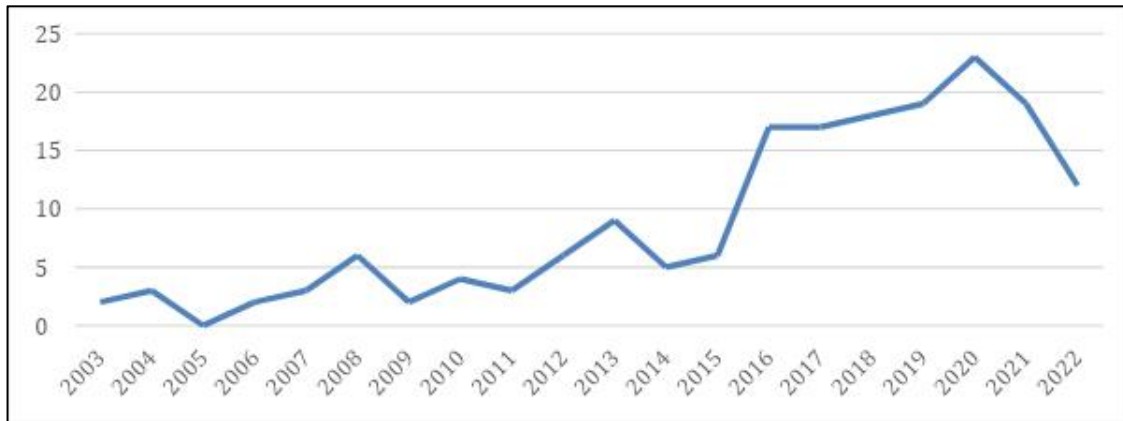

Figure 1: Annual Number of Strategic Plans Conducted by Korean Local Governments (2003-2022)

Out of the 176 documents, 147, for which the executing institution's information had been verified, the highest number of plans (28) were conducted by university research staff, followed by research institutes affiliated with local governments, foundations, and corporations, contributing 18 plans each. Additionally, the Korean Library Association conducted 16 plans, corporations executed 13 plans, and national research institutes were responsible for six plans (see Figure 2).
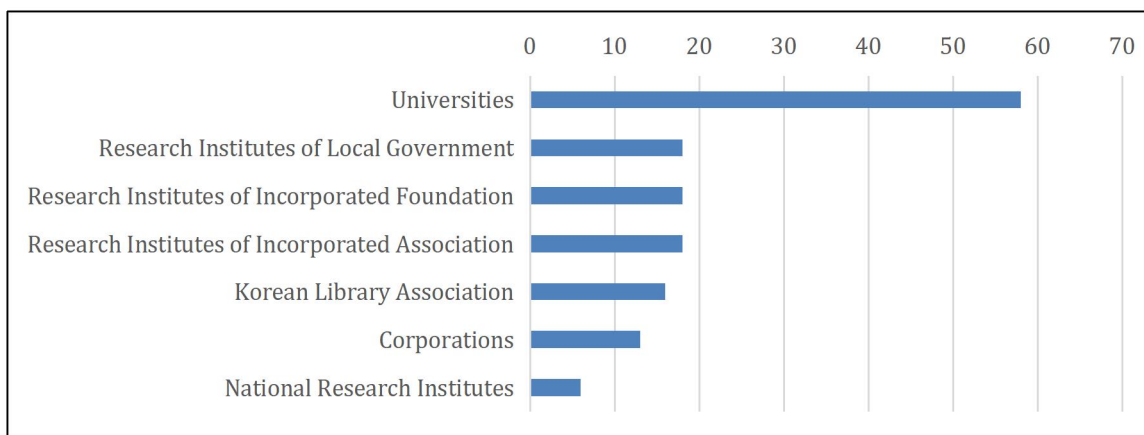

Figure 2: Distribution of Strategic Plans by Executing Institutions (2003-2022)

In the analysis of 142 strategic documents with disclosed research funds, it was observed that over 60 plans had research funds falling within the range of $15,000–$24,000. This was followed by plans in the ranges of $25,000–$34,000 and $35,000–$44,999, as

illustrated in Figure 3. The lowest recorded research fund was approximately $10,000, while the highest reached $156,500.
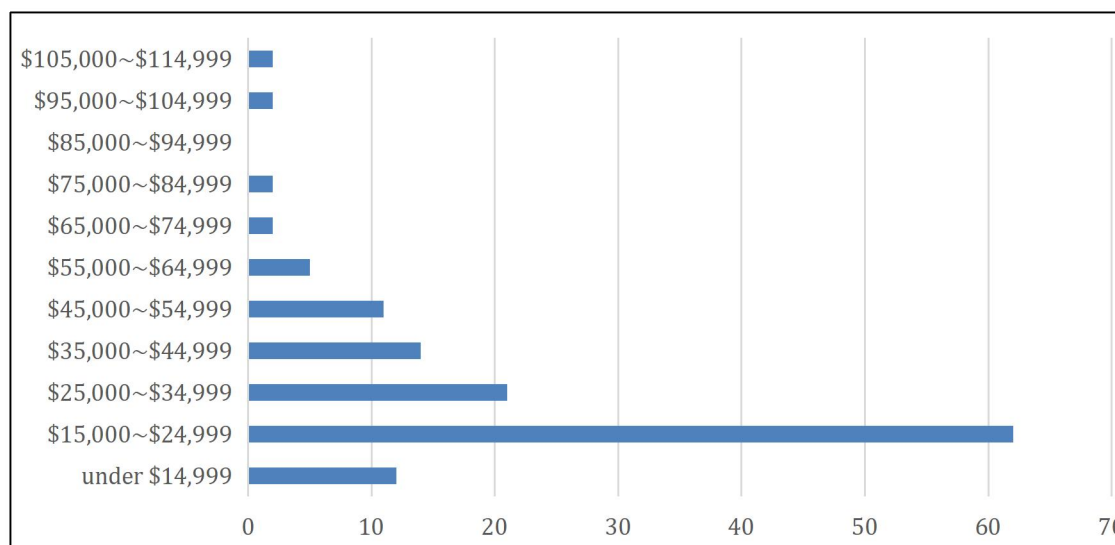

Figure 3: Distribution of Budgets for Strategic Planning of Public Libraries

Top Trends of Public Libraries' Strategic Plans in Korea

Among the strategic action plans extracted from 75 documents in Korea published over the past 20 years, those with the highest frequency encompassed staff/training, collaboration/networks, information literacy, digital libraries, physical space, and collection. Staff/training emerged as the most frequently mentioned category (91, 10.0%) among the 907 strategic action plans. Notably, discussions focused predominantly on recruiting librarians, particularly addressing changes and improvements related to the recruitment of specialized librarians tailored to the unique needs of each library. Various improvements were proposed, such as expanding the number of operational personnel and full-time employees, including librarians and general staff, and the pool of special librarians responsible for specific services. According to the annual distribution, staff/training category was first mentioned in 2003 and has been consistently discussed in strategic planning since the late 2000s. In addition to the expansion of professional library staff, skills training of existing library personnel was mentioned 30 times. Specifically, the expansion of training programs for the empowerment of librarians was proposed as an improvement. Additionally, there was a focus on strengthening professional competence for specific service targets, including the elderly, children, and foreigners. Hence, improvements in the empowerment of professional library staff have sharply increased since the mid-2010s and have been consistently mentioned. Furthermore, the suggestion to develop a library staff manual was proposed as an improvement to systematize the work of library organizations.

The strategic issue with the second highest level of interest was collaboration/networks, (79, 8.7%). In 41 strategic plans, library cooperation was mentioned as a major change and improvement in strategic initiatives. Library networks measure the connection and cooperation between libraries, whereas library cooperation primarily refers to cooperation with related organizations for the development of libraries. In particular, cooperation refers to the development of programs for reinforcing cooperative networks within local communities and for data and service cooperation with other cultural organizations such as museums, art galleries, and cultural centers. Discussions on library networks were

proposed in 38 strategic plans. They primarily covered linkages for cooperation systems among libraries by type, region, and purpose, such as with collections of universities or special libraries, and with collections and information systems of the National Library of Korea, public libraries, and small libraries. These plans also addressed cooperation among specialized librarians at each library, the sequentially integrated operation of dualized municipal and district libraries, cooperation on facility arrangements and programs with municipal galleries between special libraries, and library exchange cooperation with North Korea. The discussion of library collaboration/networks first emerged in strategic planning in the early 2010s and has consistently been mentioned since then, reaching its peak in 2017. Library cooperation has been discussed since 2004, and more specific measures have been suggested since the mid-2010s.

The third most frequently mentioned issue is information literacy, which was included in 67 (7.4%) strategic plans. Specifically, the purpose and direction of 59 strategic plans were centered around reading programs. These plans aimed to (a) support reading clubs within libraries to promote a reading culture; (b) facilitate the operation of humanities classes; (c) provide support for reading activities across various life cycles; (d) foster the formation of citizen-participatory and personalized reading programs; and (e) involve the selection of book topics representing specific regions. According to the annual distribution, this category significantly increased from 2013 and drastically increased from 2016 to 2022. Strengthening digital literacy education services using information and communications technology (ICT) and, in particular, the provision of education programs according to age and level, were discussed as improvement directions.

The fourth most frequently proposed issue was digital libraries (60, 6.6%). With regard to integrated library systems, a common metadata model for collections, integrated service, and library automation integrated system as well as collection development policy for securing digital content, including the expansion of scientific books and electronic materials by field, were discussed. In addition, strategic initiatives included the expansion of digital information services through mobile applications, the enlargement of integrated search services for specialized academic materials, the establishment of digital libraries and digital archives, and the introduction of book curation and blind lending services.

Next, physical space was mentioned 59 times (6.5%). Within this category, multifunctional library spaces were the most frequently discussed, with 51 mentions. Specifically, proposals were made to transform the spaces in public libraries into complex cultural hubs, expanding beyond their traditional roles of book lending and education. The suggested additions include book cafés, multi-service spaces offering virtual reality/augmented reality experiences, book playgrounds, maker spaces, and information places. This strategic issue category has been discussed since the late 2000s; its frequency sharply increased in 2016 and was actively mentioned in 2018 (11 times). Additionally, other strategies for the diversification of library operation facilities were suggested, including information commons and the expansion of childcare and welfare facilities in public libraries.

The least frequently mentioned issue was collection, noted in 57 strategic action plans (6.3%), and this is pertaining to the management of special collections in public libraries. Specifically, the details include the development of specialized subjects, collections, and programs by institutions, introduction of digital archives, provision of humanities and art programs related to specialized subjects, expansion of experience programs, development by living area, and strengthening of ecological environment-specialized programs. In the data collected for the 20-year period, this subject's strategic planning was first discussed in

the late 2000s and was consistently mentioned until 2022. For library collection development, 17 strategic plans suggested major changes and improvements. Regarding the improvements on collection expansion, which have been consistently discussed since the mid-2010s, details related to digital materials and digital library expansion, the operation of specialized materials by field and region, and legal deposit material expansion were also discussed.

In addition to the aforementioned predominant trends, other frequently highlighted areas in the strategic planning of public libraries include community, organization, programming/outreach services, facilities/environments, and administration/management. Each of these aspects was featured in more than 50 of the strategic planning reports examined in this study.

In the "community" area, community development stands out as a strategy aimed at strengthening the support for the vitalization of local communities. Numerous strategies have been proposed to shape public libraries into shared and communal spaces within the region. These strategies aim to foster resident participation through activities such as reading, learning, and volunteering. Other measures were also discussed to strengthen the role of public libraries as art and cultural hubs representing the region through resident participation. Furthermore, public libraries concentrate on facilities/environment improvement. Proposals include construction and remodeling to expand new library facilities, along with the augmentation of library infrastructure such as collections, personnel, facilities, and spaces.

Meanwhile, within the area of "programming/outreach services" catering to diverse targets and objectives, outreach programs in libraries, specifically as a service for the disadvantaged class, were identified as the primary strategic initiative. Detailed measures were also proposed, including building a braille library for the knowledge/information of the disadvantaged class; reading promotion programs; expanding alternative material for the socially disadvantaged class; developing programs for the elderly, the disabled, and multicultural families; developing programs for lifelong learning; supporting digital literacy education; and operating mobile libraries. In addition to focusing on physical spaces and services, new organizational composition, and improvement as well as empowerment strategies have been discussed to improve the efficiency of library operation.

Changes in Key Strategic Issues over the Past 20 Years

Table 2 illustrates the primary areas of focus in the strategic planning of Korean public libraries spanning the past two decades. During the period from 2003 to 2007, a total of 27 strategic action plans were formulated, with the most extensively discussed topics being information literacy and facilities/environments. This encompassed literacy initiatives, reading programs, and considerations related to building design and construction. In addition, the recruitment of librarians, particularly special librarians, was prominently featured in the staff/training category, while library administration was predominantly discussed under the administration/management category.

A total of 59 strategic action plans were created between 2008 and 2012, and their numbers gradually increased every year for five years. The area of most interest was staff/training for strengthening the professionalism of library staff. Commonly discussed topics encompassed the recruitment of librarians, special librarians, library staff, and skills training within the staff/training category. In the collaboration/networks category, focus areas included library networks and library cooperation to facilitate collaboration among

libraries. Additionally, in the collection category, attention was directed towards the management of libraries' special collections.

A total of 301 strategic action plans were formulated between 2013 and 2017, with primary areas of interest including staff/training, collection, collaboration/networks for linkages and cooperation among regional libraries, and strategic planning for information literacy. This highlights a comprehensive discussion of various topics encompassing personnel, facilities, and education. Within the staff/training area, the most frequently mentioned topic was discussed 35 times (14.75%), focusing on detailed aspects of librarians—recruiting, special librarians, library staff, and skills training. Moreover, the collection area featured detailed discussions on libraries—special collections—management and library collection development, with 32 mentions (13.4%).

Table 2: Changes in Key Strategic Issues in Korean Public Libraries (2003-2017)

Rank	2003–2007			2008–2012			2013–2017			2018–2022		
	Topic	N	(%)	Topic	N	(%)	Topic	N	(%)	Topic	N	(%)
1	Information literacy	4	14.3	Staff/ training	7	11.9	Staff/ training	35	14.7	Collection	52	10.0
2	Facilities/ environment	4	14.3	Collection	6	10.2	Collection	32	13.4	Staff/training	47	9.0
3	Staff/ training	3	10.7	Collaboration/ networks	6	10.2	Collaboration/ networks	31	13.0	Collaboration/ networks	47	9.0
4	Administration/ management	3	10.7	Physical space	5	8.5	Information literacy	24	10.1	Information literacy	38	7.3
5	Collaboration/ networks	2	7.1	Programming/ outreach services	5	8.5	Preservation	24	10.1	Physical space	35	6.7
6	Digital libraries	2	7.1	Facilities/ environment	5	8.5	Physical space	20	8.4	Digital libraries	31	6.0
7	Programming/ outreach services	2	7.1	Small libraries	5	8.5	Programming/ outreach services	19	8.0	Lifelong learning	31	6.0
8	Organization	2	7.1	Organization	4	6.8	Digital libraries	19	8.0	User Customized Services	30	5.8
9	Community	2	7.1	Community	4	6.8	Organization	18	7.6	Programming/ outreach services	29	5.6
10	Collection	1	3.6	Administration/ management	4	6.8	Facilities/ environment	16	6.7	Facilities/ environment	28	5.4

A total of 520 strategic plans were formulated between 2018 and 2022, marking the highest count among the four five-year periods. In 2018, a total of 140 strategic action plans were proposed, representing the highest number in a five-year span. The area with the most interest was building a specialized collection for each library (52, 10.0%),

Specifically, discussions centered around the management of libraries' special collections and the development of library collections. Staff/training, the second most frequently mentioned area, was related to librarians—recruiting special librarians, library staff, and skills training, and library staff manuals, concerning the professionalism of library operation personnel. Moreover, collaboration/networks for the cooperation among libraries, information literacy, physical spaces, digital libraries, and lifelong learning were mentioned as major improvements.

Hence, the strategic issues have covered a spectrum of topics related to collections, materials, programs, digitalization systems, and library spaces. Analyzing the distribution of top strategic planning issues over the past two decades in five-year periods reveals a consistent high ranking for staff/training issues over the entire 20 years. These concerns have consistently been regarded as important strategic considerations. In contrast, issues related to collections held lower rankings between 2003 and 2007 but consistently rose to first or second place from 2008 to 2022, establishing themselves as crucial strategic matters for libraries.

DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the trends in Korean local governments' strategic planning for public libraries over the past 20 years. The findings underscored that staff/training, collaboration/networks, information literacy, digital libraries, physical space, and collection emerged as the most frequently addressed areas in strategic plans. Additionally, community, organization, programming/outreach services, facilities/environment, administration/management, and user-customized services were also prominent. As these aspects were featured in over half of the examined plans, they evidently hold a high position on the priority list for strategic changes and services in the mid- to long-term plans of public libraries established by Korean local governments. These focal points signify crucial areas for improvement in Korean public libraries.

The focus on library staff, especially the expansion of professional personnel and professional development, reflects the changes in the role and responsibility of librarians and the necessity of consistent training. Thus, staff/training was the most frequently mentioned area in the strategic planning. Owing to the digitalization of resources and the introduction of the latest information technology, libraries are expected to be competent in new fields, such as digital curation, data utilization, and informatics. Public libraries play an essential role in supporting education and literacy and thus provide various services, activities, collections, and resources for education and leisure (Abumandour 2021). Local governments are seeking strategies to ensure that libraries become more efficient, sustainable, and mutually connected as smart libraries. Public libraries are information literacy hubs for experimenting with new technology and identifying new concepts related to technology, in which librarians must fulfill the new role of utilizing specific knowledge to provide services to other smart library users (Jerkov, Sofronijevic, and Stanisic 2015).

Another major area that frequently appeared was collections/networks among the resources and personnel of regional libraries. In particular, more rural and smaller libraries were established, in addition to the expansion of regional libraries, for which the following detailed improvement plans were actively discussed through the linkage of cooperation systems among libraries by type, region, and purpose: expansion and revitalization of collections and programs, mutual cooperation with local communities, and activation of

mobile libraries in neglected areas. These discussions received increasing policy support through the creation of the "Small Library Policy Team" in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2006 and the enactment of the Promotion of Small Library Act in 2012. As per a survey conducted in 2018 regarding the operational status of small libraries in Korea, 6,330 were reported to be in operation (Kang 2021).

A notable aspect of the primary issues experienced by Korean public libraries is the proposal of public library services for various classes and forms. With regard to information literacy, strategies for the development and promotion of user-customized services were discussed. These services aim to provide information tailored to specific subjects, including classes for youth, seniors, employment, education, and culture, facilitating lifelong learning. Additionally, programming/outreach service strategies were explored for children and the underprivileged, encompassing information curation services utilizing big data, promoting reading and cultural literacy across diverse classes and targets, and implementing digital literacy programs for utilizing digital information.

The diverse service strategies demonstrate that Korean libraries provide services tailored to the interests of individual users and data content requirements, taking the traditional role of simply providing information and knowledge resources a step further. In particular, library communities experienced a significant change from a traditional large-scale service model to a personalized service model due to rapid advancements in digital and big data technology, while the form and content of library services gradually shifted from literature-oriented to user-oriented, and from general services to personalized services (Wang 2015). Because libraries are essential elements of a public social service system, it is important to create strategies for providing personalized services by applying big data and state-of-the-art technology in line with technological advances to satisfy user demands.

Higher-level strategic improvements for digital libraries, which are virtual spaces, physical spaces, and the community playing a social role, were also discussed in the strategic planning of Korean public libraries. This aspect reflects how current library services expand from the conventional purposes of book lending and education to offer hybrid functionalities, integrating physical and digital dimensions and social communities. The space model of current public libraries can consist of physical, social, and digital spaces. In the past, library spaces were accepted based on the concept of the complex and multidimensional model of library space (Mehtonen 2016). Therefore, more effort is necessary to discover how the design of a library space is associated with promoting the efficient usage of digital resources, mutual interaction with communities, and the utilization of various library facilities through the strategic planning of public libraries.

In local governments' strategic planning for public libraries, details related to the development and management of specialized collections include the expansion of deposit materials; operation of specialized data according to field and region; and expansion of digital materials and development for specialized topics, collections, and programs by institution. The major purpose of public libraries is to collect, preserve, and analyze information on various subject areas relevant to the region and make it accessible (Chattopadhyay 2011) as well as to create regional collections accessible by users based on sufficient digital archives and information technology (Bijali and Khan 2018).

Since library services in the region have shifted from information- and education-oriented services to cultural organizations, strategic planning concerning linkages with other cultural organizations such as museums and art galleries were also actively discussed. Cooperation

between institutions is considered a solution for libraries wishing to provide quality services to increasing populations with a low budget (Smith 2014). In particular, partnerships and cooperation between public libraries and local communities enable public libraries to smoothly operate and finance their projects and programs in connection with local communities, for which cooperation from other institutions and regions is also required (Uthmann 2013).

The changes in key issues of strategic planning were analyzed by five-year periods, and the results showed that the number and diversity of related issues increased over time, with a sharp increase after 2016. It can be inferred that the strengthening of research and investigation on library users was reflected in the promotional task in the third phase of the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan, which resulted in an increase in strategic planning for public libraries based on library users and research. Furthermore, the major strategic planning issues of public libraries per five-year period were similar to the topics of major promotional tasks in each analysis period. Thus, it can be inferred that the establishment of the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan, which is the mid- to long-term national plan for promoting libraries, determined the direction of public library policy of local government and also affected the detailed mid- to long-term strategic planning for improving the quality of user-centered library services.

The Relevance of Local and National Government Strategic Issues for Public Libraries In Korea

How do the key issues identified in the strategic plans of Korean local governments for public libraries connect with the formulation of library policies at the national level? To explore this connection, the discussion centers on the relevance of the Comprehensive Plan for Library Development—a national government policy geared towards the strategic advancement of libraries. The discussion demonstrates that the direction set by the Comprehensive Plan for Library Development closely aligns with the primary issues articulated in the strategic plans of local governments for public libraries.

As per the reviewed strategic plans, the foremost priority in the strategic planning of local governments for public libraries is staff/training. The Korean government initiated specialized public library projects in 2017 to collect and preserve information relevant to regional characteristics and to strengthen information services in an effort to become specialized libraries, which thus required professional experts with related experience and knowledge (Noh and Oh 2018). These demands for improvements were reflected in the strategic planning of local governments. The details of the first three phases of the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan promoted by the Korean government demonstrate this direction. The core work of each development plan phase was "specializing library personnel and advancing related systems" for the first phase, "library base expansion and operation substantialization" for the second phase, and "quality improvement of library operation systems" for the third phase. Detailed promotional tasks included the continuous expansion of librarian personnel, retraining for the specialization of librarians, and organizational empowerment. These details are reflected in the strategic planning of public libraries for each local government.

Collection/networks was the next most popular strategic issue. In the first phase of the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan, the "citizen-led library vitalization movement for the formation of mature local communities" initiated the discussion on the promotion and vitalization of small libraries, which are life-friendly public libraries. In the second phase, the "role expansion of libraries as the base of local communities" was proposed as a

strategy to discuss matters related to building a connection system between public libraries and small libraries. The third phase suggested the goal of expanding the number of small libraries from 6,058 in 2017 to 6,820 in 2023 through a consistent expansion of the number of public libraries.

In addition, among the primary issues that appeared in the strategic plans of public libraries in Korea, information literacy related to various classes, strategies for developing and promoting user-customized services, strategies for lifelong learning and program/outreach services, information curation services using big data, and digital literacy programs were discussed. These strategic issues in public library services were included in the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan. The first phase of the plan emphasized the role of information literacy in a ubiquitous library, where the direction of library informatization was aimed at building a ubiquitous-based national information infrastructure platform for delivering information. The second phase emphasized strengthening creative competency by knowledge ecosystem, proposing the conversion to a smart digital library service system conforming to digital and mobile usage environments and the necessity of big data-based services as promotion strategies. Recently, the third phase emphasized the necessity of implementing smart libraries using various advanced technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and discussed the tasks for collecting and building a utilization foundation for internet-of-things data within the library and collecting and managing user activity and environmental data to strengthen user-customized curation information services.

Space, virtual and physical, which was discussed as a major issue in the strategic plan for Korean municipal public libraries, is also related to the content of the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan. The first phase of the plan stressed the importance of fulfilling the role of a library in the formation of local communities as a general cultural space for the public. The second phase emphasized the importance of library activities that promote the integration of local communities by strengthening library functions as creative activity spaces for residents. The third phase proposed the expansion of universal design application based on continuous expansion and remodeling of library facilities, and smart library model construction and pilot operation.

The development and management of specialized collections, as deliberated in the strategic planning of public libraries, are closely linked to the fundamental strategic planning outlined in the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan. The promotional task in the first phase aimed to build an efficient collection system and expand digital content to strengthen library services and promote library informatization, while the second phase aimed to strengthen the accessibility of digital knowledge/information resources, expanded in the first phase. The third phase emphasized strengthening user customized curation information services, building a deposit material/preservation system of regional materials, and continuous expansion of digital materials, and suggested a plan to reinforce and manage the specialized collections of public libraries.

Finally, the strategic issue of connecting local library services with other cultural institutions, such as museums and art galleries, is also actively discussed. Such issues are also exhibited in the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan, in which the first phase discussed the construction of a cooperation system centering around regional representative libraries by proposing the establishment of a linkage/sharing/cooperation system of library resources as a core task, while the second phase encouraged the expansion of a role as a regional representative library through the promotion of joint

cooperation projects between libraries and local governments. The third phase aimed to construct a specialized information cooperation service system with specialized, public, school, and university libraries by establishing an operational strategy for the joint utilization of life-friendly specialized information.

CONCLUSIONS

This study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the strategic dynamics shaping the landscape of public libraries in Korea. In conclusion, the analysis of Korean local governments' strategic planning for public libraries from 2003 to 2022 has provided valuable insights into the evolution and prioritization of key issues. The consistent emphasis on staff/training as a crucial strategic consideration for 20 years underscores its enduring importance. Additionally, the shift in collection-related issues from initially lower rankings to consistent prominence from 2008 to 2022 highlights their growing significance in the strategic landscape. This study illuminates the intricate connection between local and national-level library policies, particularly exemplified by the alignment of local government plans with the overarching trajectory set by the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan. The plan, executed in three phases in 2009, 2014, and 2019, increased the interest in and support for libraries by national and local governments, ultimately resulting in the establishment and implementation of mid- to long-term planning for public libraries by each local government body.

The directions of the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan and the major issues expressed in the strategic planning of public libraries by local governments were closely related by period, indicating that the direction of library development at national level had a noticeable impact on the detailed policy direction of public libraries. In addition, Korea's public library administrative system before the establishment of the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan was divided into local governments and the Office of Education, which faced an array of problems in forming and implementing a uniform library policy and building a cooperation system for providing user-centered library services and regional-level services. The integration of public library administration and the establishment of the Comprehensive Library Advancement Plan can lead to the operation of region-centered public libraries based on local governments' policy development plans, which, in turn, will have a significant impact on public libraries in Korea, fulfilling the pivotal role of knowledge/information and cultural spaces. Although the environment and situation may vary from country to country, establishing library policies at national level lays the foundation for public library development.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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