

## **The quality of services of public media libraries in Warsaw – in youth's view. Research done using the SERVQUAL method**

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**Abstract:** The paper presents the results of research conducted in 2012 in three Warsaw multimedia libraries. The subject of the study was to assess the quality of library services for young people in secondary schools and high schools. In the study there was used SERVQUAL method, based on measuring the gap between perceived quality and expected quality of the service. The quality of service was analyzed in the context of nine determinants. The assessment included *inter alia*: library staff, resources, interior spaces.

**Keywords:** library service quality, media library, multimedia, needs assessment, public library, quality, SERVQUAL

### **1. Introduction**

Despite the unceasing efforts of librarians and library enthusiasts, in the common vision libraries are still identified only with lending. Nonetheless the library is not just a place, where books are collected, catalogued, stored and shared. The library is also a particular public space, and people, who work in it, possessing special knowledge, skills and abilities. First and foremost, the library is based on the idea of sharing and the free access to culture, information and knowledge. Tarkowski and Bendyk (2011)

Changes associated with technological development, affecting the whole culture sector, do not avoid the libraries. The growing popularity of new media, digitization and global network, makes the libraries more than a “temple of the books”. Tarkowski and Bendyk (2011)

There is some tension between the two common visions of the libraries. The first of these, the library as a warehouse, storehouse of knowledge, requires the reader to focus and to be absolutely silent. This model focuses primarily on the book and maintaining its physical form. On the other hand, the library is considered as a public space, meeting place, not necessarily associated with the printings. Not the books, but people and their relationships are in the center of

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attention. Tarkowski and Bendyk (2011)

Public libraries serve five basic functions, which are mutually contradictory:

- Archiving and storing - collections stored in the libraries are more long-lasting than in the market. They are more available than private collections as well.
- Sharing culture, knowledge and information – public libraries are the only cultural institutions in Poland, where access to culture, information and knowledge is absolutely free
- Cataloguing, organization and selection of collections - libraries usually do not create random sets of documents, but its form and content are adapted to the users' needs.
- Public place - the library is a particular space that users come to read, study or meet with friends.
- Equal opportunities - libraries give the opportunity to actively participate in culture and access to information to many people, especially those from socially excluded groups. Tarkowski and Bendyk (2011)

The report by H. Borowski states that 69% of respondents said that public libraries are changing for the better. But what exactly would these changes mean? Authors of "Scenarios for the future of libraries" created three concepts of public library in Poland in 2030, using foresight method. The concepts are correlative with two factors: state interference in the sphere of culture and level of enforcement of copyright law. Borowski (2011), Tarkowski and Bendyk (2011)

In the first scenario, called *panopticon*, it is assumed that by 2030 the library will hold a governmental programs of preventing digital divide through the promotion of reading and education in the field of information and media literacy. The libraries will be transformed into multimedia centers providing the legal digital resources covered by the restrictive copyright law. The librarians will serve the role of the guardians of copyright. Libraries will play an important role in providing access to culture, however not stimulating it. Tarkowski and Bendyk (2011)

In the second concept, *bottom-up library*, public libraries are replaced by commercial bookshop-coffee bars. This will raise a number of civil initiatives, in which private collections will serve as public. Librarians will use their knowledge and skills to create new cultural institutions in the civil rights movement. Tarkowski and Bendyk (2011)

In the last scenario, *creative destruction*, it is assumed that the liberalization of copyright will make the Internet free or very low cost platform for exchanging information. Because of losing its function and because of limited funding, the libraries will be closed. The librarian profession will be transformed into culture animator or manager, and the skills associated with the profession so far, will be replaced by technology. Tarkowski and Bendyk (2011)

In today's perspective it is difficult to assess the probability of the above scenarios, moreover foresight method has not been designed for the effective

prediction of future events. However it is an undeniable fact that libraries are during the time of change, and one of its manifestations is the emergence of new type of libraries - media library.

## **2. Definition and idea of media libraries**

Media libraries are multimedia, information and book center. They serve as a local center for culture and knowledge access. There are three elements combined: education, information and entertainment. The designers of the media library should ensure that the books are about 40-50% of the total collection. Dutkiewicz and Ociepa (2005), Małkowski and Pol-Czajkowska (2005), Ślusarczyk (2005).

The idea of multimedia public libraries might be derived from the concept of widespread education and lifelong learning. These institutions are created to make culture accessible (not only prints but also multimedia) for all social groups, regardless of age, education or financial condition of users. Jean-Marie Compte noted that talking about media library as a new form of public library is using the complicated term to explain the simple idea - public cultural institution open to the world and the local environment. Bertrand (1994)

In 1931 Henri Lemaître at the International Congress on Reading in Algiers said that the word "library" has become repulsive and another term for the place where the books are stored needs to be found. Many proposals were submitted over the years, such as "public bookshop" and even "house of books, image and sound". In the 70s the term "media library" (fr. *médiathèque*) was created. Since the mid-seventies a number of new public libraries in France have adopted the name "media library" to change the perception of these institutions (old room full of dust) to a more flattering. These changes, however, were not only a skin-deep, as the whole image of the library has changed. Bertrand (1994)

Anne-Marie Bertrand identified three areas the media library must pay particular attention to:

- Aspiration for modernity – responding to the needs derived from the emergence of new forms of information; meeting the new methods of science; modern architecture and interior design; library public relation service.
- Rich and diverse collection – responding to even the most diverse needs; free access; working with reluctant readers.
- Usability - media library as a place for working, studying, reading and socialization. Bertrand (1994)

The designing of library buildings and interior areas to be seen as a place for meeting, leisure activities, searching for inspiration fits today's media library into the theory of the "third place", developed in the 80s by the American sociologist Ray Oldenburg. In *The Great Good Place* Oldenburg stated that social life is focused around three places: home, work and so called "third place". Oldenburg defined a "third place" as a neutral public space, where people can gather and build social relationships. „Third place" is a place of resting from work and daily routine, where local community life is teeming, new ideas are born and important social values are strengthened. In the late 80s

Ray Oldenburg showed some examples of the "third place", as it is: promenades, pubs, cafes, and even post offices, but today malls usurp the role of a common public space. Koszowska (no date), *Ray Oldenburg* (no date)

### **3. Purpose of the research**

The aim of the research was to answer the question if and how do Warsaw media libraries respond to the needs of the young using its services - in other words, whether the youth appreciates the quality of their services. There was an assumption made that the services not only meet the needs but exceed them, especially in the aspects of visual attractiveness of the library and diversity of collection.

### **4. Methodology**

The interest in the customer and the quality of products and services has increased significantly above the industry, market and academia in the 80s. As a result in 1985 A. Parasuman, Leonard Berry and Valarie Zeithalm created *A Conceptual Model of Service Quality*. In 1988 they published another paper which presented the concept of measuring the quality of service and called it SERVQUAL. This method was used in studies of service institutions, related to health care, banking, maintaining. Sidor (2005), Nitecki (1997)

Parasuman, Berry and Zeithalm created the model of differences between the expected and the actual level of service quality from the perspective of the client (called *The Gaps Model of Service Quality*). The model made the assumption for the following differences or gaps:

- "The difference between customer expectations and managers perceptions of these expectations.
- The difference between the managers perception of customer expectations and specification of services (standardization).
- The difference between the standardization of the service quality and the service currently provided.
- The difference between the service provided and the information about this service provided to the customer.
- The difference between customer expectations and his perception of the service. " Głowacka (2000), Sidor (2005)

The authors of SERVQUAL named four basic factors influencing customers' expectations, i.e. oral communication, personal needs, past experience and the ability to communicate with service providers. They also emphasized the fact that customers use similar criteria in assessing the quality of services regardless of the type of service. These criteria are called determinants of perceived quality of service. Sidor (2005)

Initially they itemized 10 determinants of quality of service, and after many studies, the number of determinants was reduced to five:

- Reliability - ability to perform the promised service reliably and accurately.
- Responsiveness - the desire to help customers and rapid implementation of services.
- Assurance - knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to

communicate and being confident in customers' eyes.

- Empathy - caring and individualized approach.
- Tangibles - the physical appearance of facilities, equipment, personnel and materials. Coleman (1997)

SERVQUAL questionnaire is comprised of two parts. The first measures the expectations of customers, while the other perception of quality in a particular institution. There are 22 statements referring both to the expectations and perceptions. Sidor (2006)

Based on the experiences described by Maria Wanda Sidor, according to the nature of library services, in addition to the five determinants distinguished by Parasuman, Berry and Zeithalm, four more were included:

- Accessibility - availability of information about the collections and library, as well as physical access to the library and its collections and equipment.
- Format - format of documents.
- Information - quality of information about collections, services, and library.
- Resources - amount availability and timeliness of documents stored in the library. Sidor (2005)

## **5. Research description**

The following study was conducted in three Warsaw media libraries: Multimedia Library for Children and Adolescents No. LVI "Nautilus", Book Stop Media Library, Start-Finish Media Library. Survey covered a group of young people using the services of Warsaw media libraries. The group consisted of people aged 13-21 and going to school: secondary school or high school, specialized, technical or vocational school. There were 17 women and 29 men among the respondents. The youngest respondent was 13 and the oldest 21 years old. The largest groups of respondents were secondary school students - 36 people. Four people attended the high school, three the vocational school, two technical school and one specialized school.

Almost half of the respondents said they use the library several times a week, and more than a quarter - every day. Seven people use library a few times a month and two people several times a year. Three people have not responded to this question. They were also asked about the district of residence in order to obtain information if the library the research was made in is their local library. 85% of respondents live in the district, where the library is located.

Surveys were distributed to libraries in the following period: 20.02-03.03.2012 – Start-Finish Media Library, 27.02-10.03.2012 – "Nautilus", 19.03-30.03.2012 – Book Stop. The period of two weeks was chosen because the schools reading are usually withdrawn for this time.

The modified SERVQUAL questionnaire was used in the study, based in part on a questionnaire used by Wanda Maria Sidor. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first the respondent was asked to answer questions about the "perfect" library. The second set of questions was about the library which he or she was using.

There were 41 questions divided into 10 groups: library staff (10 questions), materials provided by the library (5 questions), library catalogs (2 questions), rooms appearance (3 questions), furniture (3 questions), equipment in the library (3 questions), forms of documents available in the library (7 questions), opening hours (two questions), information about the library (3 questions), location (3 questions).

57 questionnaires were collected. Eleven of them were rejected due to formal errors. Therefore 46 questionnaires were analyzed.

### **6. Analysis of research results**

In all three libraries in the **Empathy** determinant gap between perceived and expected quality has reached a positive value. It might be correlated with a thoughtful, careful selection of employees with high interpersonal skills. The staff is dedicated to their readers, they want to know their needs and preferences. Librarians know not only the names of the users, but often they also know where they go to school, how do they learn, what is their family situation, and most of all - what they like to read, listen and watch. Respondents pointed to some problems with communication with library staff, which may be a result of age, experience and interests difference.

In **Assurance** determinant average gap between perceived quality and expected quality also took a positive value. This is also the result of deliberate, careful selection of employees - in terms of hard competencies.

It should be noted that the gap between perceived and expected quality was negative in question about the politeness of librarians. This may be a result of the reaction of librarians on young people's behavior. The requests to keep quiet and not to use mobile phones, paying attention to the retention of books can be received negatively by young people. Respondents also noted some problems with giving information by employees. Failure to understand what information the users are looking for can result in imprecise formulation of information needs. Also in question on the exact answering the gap between perceived and expected was negative. The young library users, who are used to getting information via the Internet, sometimes expect a very specific answer to their questions and suggesting them a chapter or even the position where they can find the information does not satisfy their needs - they often expect factual information.

In the **Tangibles** determinant the gap between perceived and expected quality took a positive value as well, which confirms the hypothesis that was stated.

One of the reasons is the interior design. It's an interesting fact that in Book Stop Media Library, where interior is styled in the nineteenth-century railway station, the gap between perceived and expected quality was the highest.

In some cases the respondents negatively assessed the correctness of the settings of books on the shelves. This problem is faced by all libraries providing free access to the shelves. They also noted the poor physical state of materials. Rundown materials are not attractive for the users and the destruction of the multimedia can lead to inability to use them.

**Reliability** determinant was examined by one question - whether employees provide materials in the promised time. Only in the case of Start-Finish Media

Library the average gap between expected and perceived quality has reached a positive value - 0.2958, and in other two libraries these values were slightly negative. Not supplying materials on time may be the result of underestimation of the time needed for cataloguing documents by the librarian or retention of the ordered books by another user, which is beyond librarian control.

**In Responsiveness** determinant gap between perceived quality and expected was negative in the case of Book Stop and "Nautilus". Users have to wait for new materials and the opening hours are not adjusted to their needs and capabilities. In all three libraries gap between perceived quality and expected occurred negative in the question about the availability of workers. This may be a result of insufficient amount of employees in some of the departments.

The results of **Accessibility** aspect clearly show how important it is for users to open the library on the weekends. For Start-Finish Media Library, which is open every Saturday from 10 to 16, the gap between perceived and expected quality was 0.2500. In the case of the "Nautilus", open every other Saturday from 10 to 14, the gap was -1.0184, and the Book Stop, library closed on weekends: -1.5385.

Analysis of the questions assigned to the **Format** determinant has brought interesting results. The great interest in new form of books – e-books is shown. E-books are widely advertised, becomes fashionable, but the price is still high in comparison to the price of paper books. Sharing them through the library could increase its attractiveness.

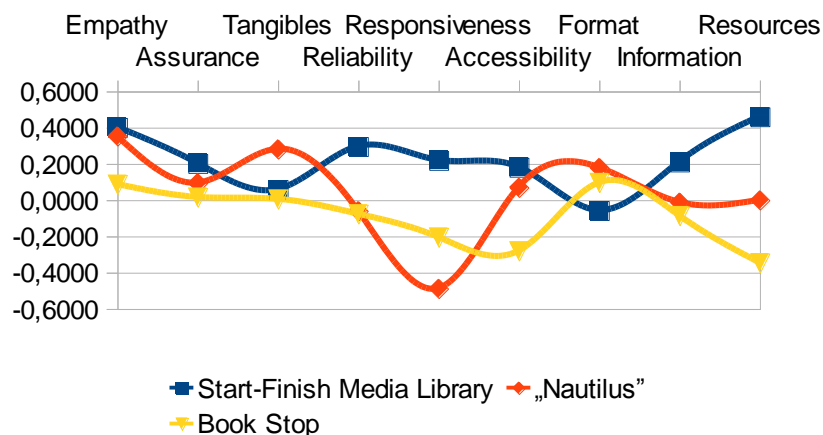
Analysis of the **Information** determinant questions, concerning the place of putting information about the library, brought surprising results. Contrary to the predictions, the most desirable information is not the Internet (average 4.3750), but the door and library boards (4.4150). It is worth noting that all libraries have websites, and Book Stop and Start-Finish Media Library have also site on Facebook.

**In Resources** determinant only in Start-Finish Media Library perceived quality far exceeded the expected quality. Respondents in other libraries noted problems with the availability and timeliness of materials.

## **7. Summary**

Warsaw multimedia libraries can offer young people not only broad access to information through a rich collection of books and the ability to use the Internet, but also provide a space for meeting and entertainment. Cultural and educational offer of these libraries is extremely rich. However, there are aspects of their activities that do not fully respond to the needs of some young library users, such as opening the library on the weekends.

Needs assessment, as well as testing quality services are essential in every library and are the starting point for the improvement of services, which is necessary, because nowadays libraries compete with other places of leisure - and not just with other cultural institutions, but also with more and more shopping centers.



**Figure 1: Gaps between expected and perceived quality**

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