

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN COMMUNITY

QUALITATIVE STUDY

Methodology

Target groups:

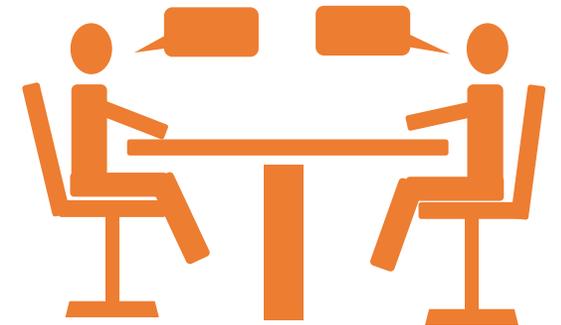
1. Mayors;
2. Local counselors;
3. Adult members of the community (30-60 years) who visited the library at least once during the last 2 years;
4. Librarians.

Research methods/ techniques: focus group and in-depth interview

The localities researched: 6 localities, of which 5 villages and 1 city, covering all 3 regions (North, Center, South)

Data was collected in the period of time : October 15 – November 2, 2016

The study was performed by the Independent Sociological and Information Service OPINIA



Perception of library

The library is perceived as a cultural and informational center, a place that cumulates knowledge and provides the necessary information to its citizens, mainly by means of lending books and printed materials.



„Library is a home for books. The place has a reading hall that everyone can visit to get the information he/she needs.” (Inhabitant, man, rural area)

“Library is a source of knowledge. It is the place where I can quietly read a book or find some information I need.” (Mayor, man, rural area)

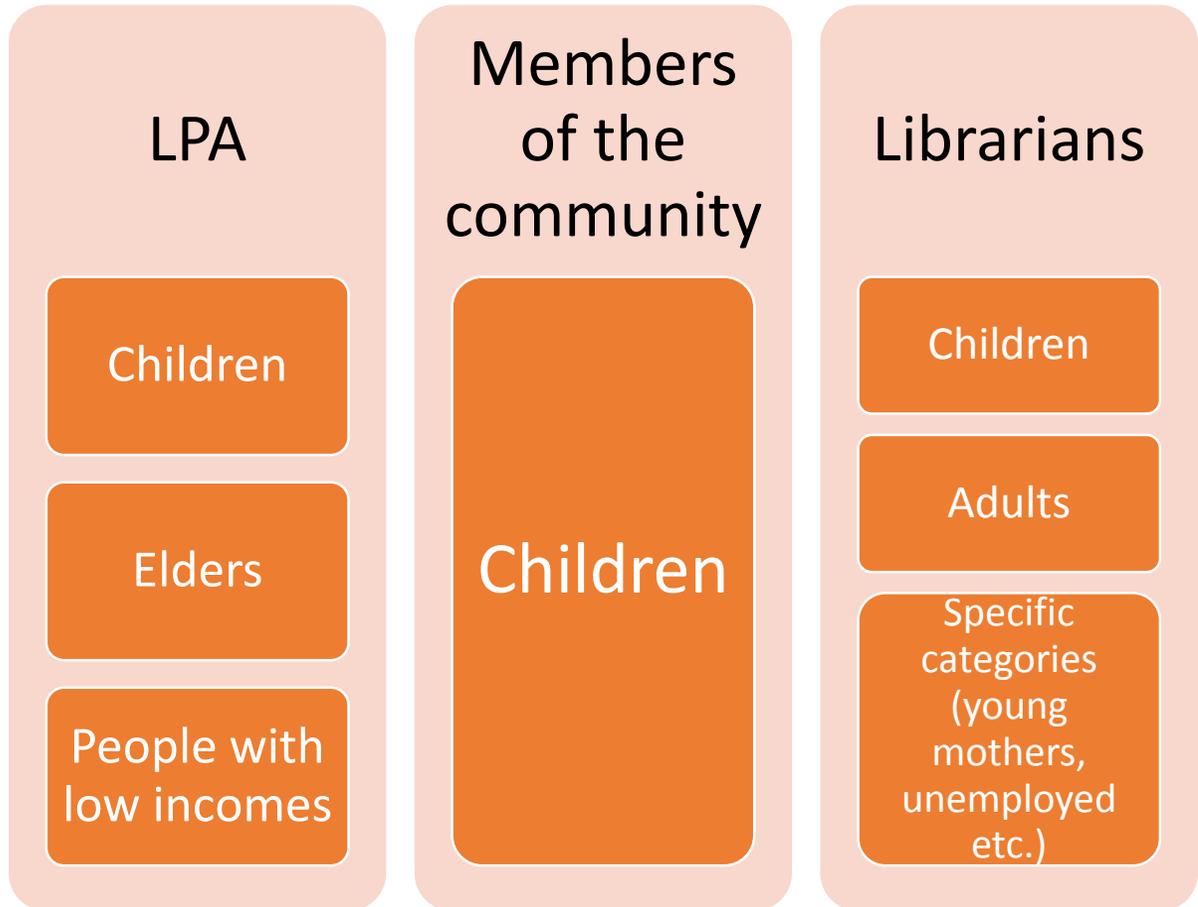
“Library is a storage of books on various topics, such as culture, history, politics etc.” (Mayor, man, rural area)

“Library is a place where the villagers - especially children- can enrich their knowledge, mainly through reading.” (Local counselor, man, rural area)

“Library is a place where one learns new things. It has information and people come here to read. It stores information.” (Local counselor, woman, rural area)

Perception of library visitors

(LPA and community members consider that libraries are not visited by adult population)



„The main beneficiaries of the library are children. Unfortunately, adults do not visit the library very often.” (Mayor, man, rural area)

“Retirees and children are the ones who visit the library more often, since they have more spare time.” (Councilor, man, rural area)

„Currently, children visit the library only because it offers free access to internet.” (Inhabitant, woman, rural area)

„Children visit the library more often than they have done before. Adults visit it less, they rarely need to come to the library. People do not have time.” (Inhabitant, woman, rural area)

Library problems

The main problems of their library, according to participants in the study are related to poor infrastructure and insufficient/outdated collection

Library problems

Infrastructure problems

Outdated collections of books

If I were to discuss library conditions, I would mention the need for an autonomous heating system that would cover the entire building. We heat the library ourselves and it takes time until it gets warm inside. Also, it would be good to change the entrance door. Now, the door is old and does not function properly. We need new shelves for books, since the current ones are old. There are also shelves for newspapers, but we keep them on the desks. (Librarian, woman, 20 years, rural area)

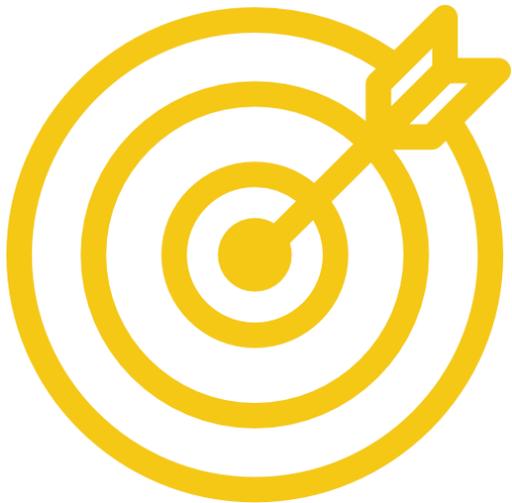
The library needs repair works. Currently, they changed the doors and windows, but we need essential repair works, we need new shelves, new equipment, desks, chairs. The desks and chairs we currently own are about 30-40 years old. (Librarian, woman, 57 years, rural area)

Currently, there are being done some repair works, but it is still in process. It will be good to have our own restroom. Currently, we use the one from the store or the City Hall. Also, we need to solve such problems as heating and water. We need a tap, a sink. (Inhabitant, woman, rural area)

Library conditions are poor. It is cold, it is dark, it is not nice and it is not comfortable. (Inhabitant, woman, rural area)

Perception of library achievements

The LPA representatives and the members of the community discuss the library achievements based on some important cultural events it organizes.



People who know about the new library services tend to highlight them as examples of successful functioning of their public libraries.

Informing community members about the library activities

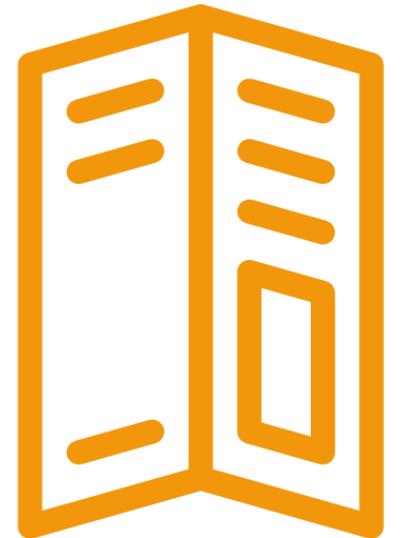


The majority of the community members are not aware at all or very little about the library activities.

Personally, I do not know what happens at the library. We are not interested because nobody bothered to awake our interest. The library does not take any action in this respect. (Inhabitant, woman, rural area)

All the participants express their desire to be better informed about the activities organized at the library, through various means of communication: ads on public panels, radio, local newspaper, TV, verbal announcements etc.

I would like librarians to make some announcements, to inform us about the newly-arrived collections of books, so that members of our community could be better informed and thus, visit the library more often. The librarian should come up with a technique to arise interest and attract more visitors. The library should post announcements, maybe even have some information panels. The library should be more transparent and attractive. (Inhabitant, woman, rural area)



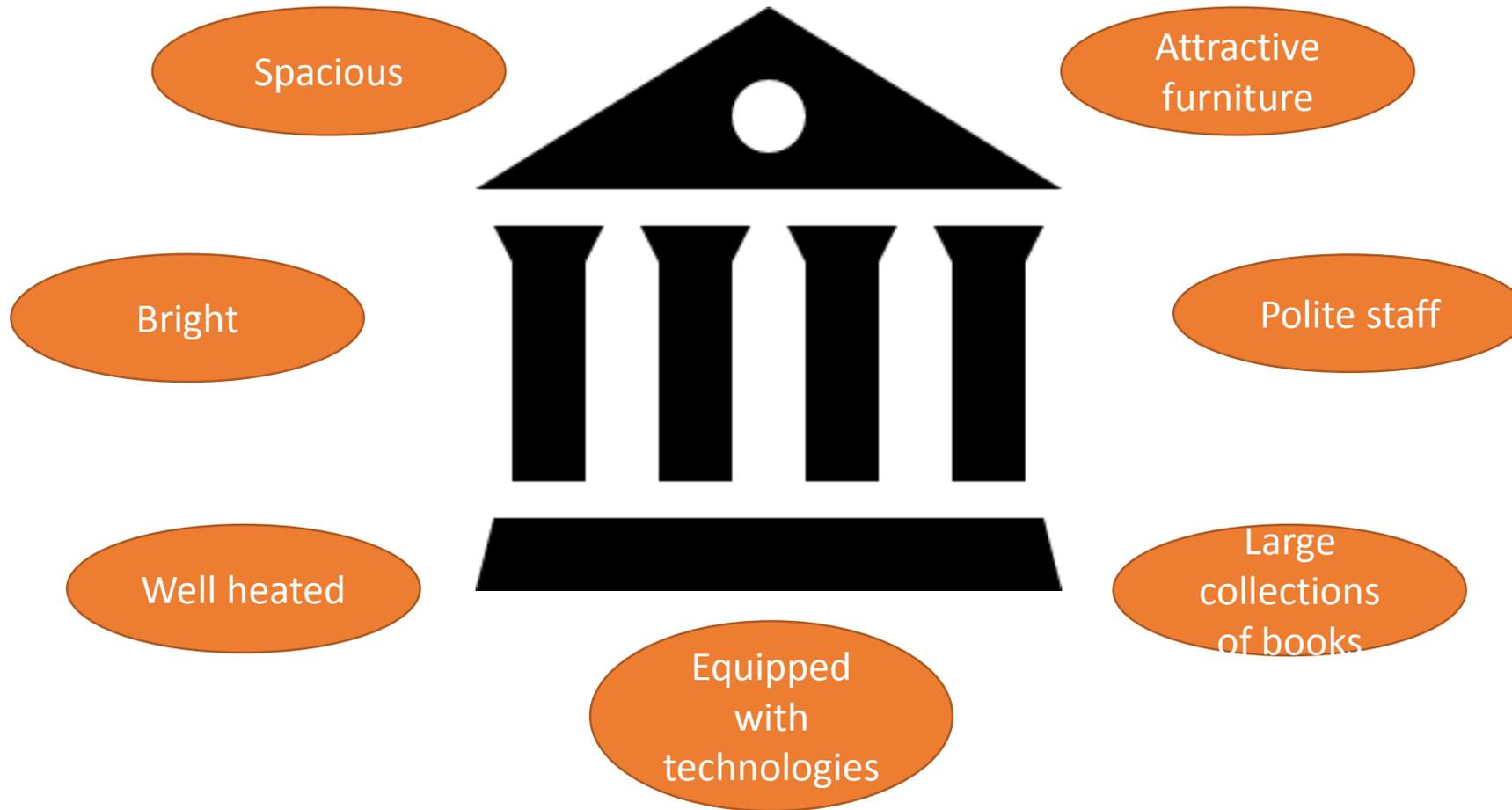
Library activities

According to the librarians who participated at the given study, their libraries offer both, traditional and new services, such as:



- matinees performances,
- local or national holidays,
- poetry lessons,
- painting lessons,
- contest of drawing on the street,
- cyclists' competition,
- evening sittings,
- storytelling,
- concerts,
- carpet weaving,
- knitting,
- services related to selling agricultural products via internet,
- studying foreign languages, kinematics, etc.

The ideal library



The ideal librarian



L
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A
L
S

Active, educated, polite, well-groomed, respectful, sociable, responsible. He/she should speak nicely, awake visitor's interest and also, be a good mediator.

L
P
A

Professional competence, creativity, encyclopedic knowledge, teaching, psychological, administrative and communication abilities.

The responsibility of library development



Members of the community believe that Local Public Authorities are mostly responsible for the library development.

The City Hall and the mayor should be in charge of the library development, as well as the Counselors, who are each responsible for their own tasks. (Inhabitant, man, urban area)



Librarians consider that the main responsibility for library development belongs to them and the Local Public Administration

The librarian should be in charge, as he/she is constantly at the library and thus, knows better the problems the library faces, as well as the financial resources it owns. There is no doubt that librarians should develop a tight collaboration with the City Hall and the local councilors.(Librarian, 20 years, rural area)



LPA considers that the main responsibility for library development should be attributed to librarians.

Librarians play a crucial role, as they are the specialists who generate the library development.(Mayor, man, rural area)

Library-City Hall relationship

According to mayors, the interactions between libraries and the City Halls occur as follows:

1. Participation at the weekly meetings/ working sessions,
2. Random checks concluded by mayors in order to verify the library activities,
3. Occasional interactions, when librarians address their concerns to the mayors and ask for help in solving them.
4. The organization of festive events for the community.



LPA representatives are aware of the libraries' problems related to infrastructure. They affirm that they would like to help the libraries and satisfy their current requests, but they do not have enough finances to do so. In their opinion, the only solution is – participation to projects.

Library budget and librarian's wages

Some mayors and representatives of the local councils confessed that even though libraries are important to communities, the budgets which are to be allocated for them, are usually last on the list of priorities.

The local budget we own is not sufficient. The library is always treated as a last priority. (Mayor, male, rural area)

Several LPA representatives (mainly men) mentioned that they cannot ask librarians to perform many tasks due to the fact that their wages are very low.

When a person is not motivated financially, he/she starts to think of their own problems. First of all, librarians should get an increase in salary. When people are happy with everything they own – they work accordingly. It is hard to focus on your activities, when you have so many problems to solve. (Local counselor, male, rural area)



Librarian-Local Council relationship



The relationship with local councilors is distant. Councilors do not invite librarians to their meetings, or prove to be indifferent towards the necessities of the libraries.

It's not even that they don't help me, they prove to be simply indifferent. If we managed to establish some sort of relationship with the mayor, the relationship with the Council remains to be a very distant one. (Librarian, woman, 57 years, rural area)

Personally, I do not participate at the Council's meetings, I usually discuss with the mayor – afterwards she discusses with the Council. (Librarian, woman, 52 years, rural area)



There is no relationship with the librarians. They avoid to interact with the local council

Librarians have never addressed any issues to the Council. They never came to the Council and claimed anything. It would be good if the librarian joined us at the meetings and came with a report. (Local councilor, man, rural area)

Currently, there is no interactions between local councilors and the library, though there should be one. (Local councilor, woman, rural area)

Librarian-Raion Council relationship



Councilors express their interest towards aspects, such as: number of visitors, collections of books, and social activities organized by the library.



Councilors are not satisfied with the fact that librarians interact only with mayors and thus, encourage them to address their concerns to the councilors, as well.

The librarian discusses with the mayor; I haven't heard her addressing any issues to the Council. The librarian does not know she must ask the local council for help. (Local counselor, man, rural area)

Library services requested by community members

Local councilors and most of all, the members of the community have stressed out the need for diversifying library services, such as:

- public manifestations (festivals, soirees/evening parties, etc.),
- extra curricular educational activities for children,
- activities for groups of interest or handicraft workshops for both, children and adults,
- meetings with famous local people,
- activities related to national traditions (evening sittings, holidays, etc.),
- activities that involve craftsmen, as well as exhibitions based on certain topics,
- IT courses,
- foreign language courses.

