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# Teenagers' perception of a contemporary library Współczesna biblioteka oczami nastolatka

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## Selected publications:

- Tīmekļa 2.0 potenciāls pusaudžu un bibliotēku mijiedarbībai [Web
   2.0 potential for interaction between adolescents and libraries / Potencjał Web 2.0 w interakcjach między młodzieżą a bibliotekami], "Information and society: Proceedings of the Department of Information and Library Studies", 2013, no. 4
- Pusaudžu informācijas lietošanas paradumi [Information using habits of adolescents / Nawy-ki młodzieży w wykorzystywaniu informacji], "Information and society: Proceedings of the Department of Information and Library Studies", 2013, no. 3
- Electronic books: content provision and adoption possibilities among users in Latvia [Książki elektroniczne: dostarczanie zawartości oraz możliwości adaptacji użytkowników na Łotwie], "Information Research", 2012, vol. 17, no. 1.

Aiga Grenina – doktorantka na Wydziałe Nauk o Informacji i Bibliotekach Uniwersytetu Łotwy. Otrzymała stopień licencjata i magistra w zakresie bibliotekoznawstwa i informacji naukowej na Uniwersytecie Łotwy. Tematem jej badań jest możliwość interakcji między pokoleniem Google (dzisiejszą młodzieżą) oraz bibliotekami. Jej obecne badania koncentrują się szczególnie na interakcji obu analizowanych podmiotów biorąc pod uwagę nawyki informacyjne łotewskiej młodzieży w kontekście Biblioteki 2.0. Jej zainteresowania obejmują zachowania informacyjne młodzieży, a także nawyki korzystania z biblioteki, web 2.0.

## **Background**

Nowadays, in order to spark users' interest, justify their existence and prove their social value, almost all libraries irrespective of their type or target audience try to offer a wide range of services. For example, public libraries of Latvia divide the range of the major services provided into 22 different types of services. They include services, which are provided directly at libraries, and remote services (e. g. book reservation, e-services, home delivery of books, using the instant messaging software Skype) (*Trešais tēva dēls* 2012 [online]). Furthermore, the Law of the Republic of Latvia "On Libraries" stipulates introduction of new information technologies in libraries, in particular that:

[...] libraries, which provide services to children and youngsters, are obliged to pay a particular attention to improving the quality of the library stock and the introduction of new information technologies in order to facilitate children's and youngsters' disposition to reading and develop their skills of acquiring information technologies and tool' (Bibliotēku likums 2013 [online]).

The changes, which have occurred in libraries in the last decades, are characterised as more radical than those in other fields, e.g. education (Palfrey J., Gasser U. 2008, p. 250). After the implementation of these changes, the storage function of library resources has retained its significance, however, there is a range of new functions, which allow viewing libraries also as:

- information providers comparable to Google and other search engines;
- cultural centres alongside other cultural establishments;
- social space;
- facilitators of learning (Brophy P. 2007, p. 4-5).

The conceptual shift from the library as an institution of document storage to an institution with a much wider functionality has been, to a large extent, facilitated by the development of technologies and their adaptation in library practice. The application of technologies in library services in order to facilitate the interaction between libraries and their users is characterised as one of the key components of a contemporary library by library and information science (LIS) practitioners and researchers (Holmberg K. [et al.] 2009, p. 677-678).

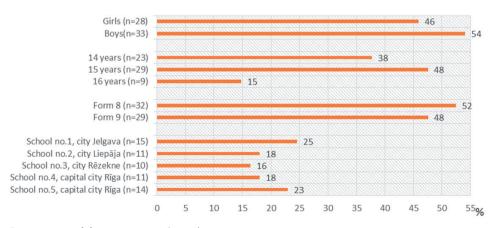
Willingness to communicate is a particularly pronounced trend among teenagers (*Common Sense Media* 2012 [online]; Dresang E. T., Koh K. 2009, p. 41-43; Green H., Hannon C. 2007, p. 15-16; Madden M. [et al.] 2013 [online]; O'Keeffe S. G., Clarke-Pearson K. 2011, p. 800). Besides, it is believed that teenagers tend

to be active information searchers and users (Agosto D. E., Hughes-Hassell S. 2010, p. 35; Dresang E. T., Koh K. 2009, p. 34-37). Nevertheless, researchers, educators and library representatives often characterise this age group as one of the most susceptible or even the most susceptible to the risk of abandoning library services or using these services less frequently than the previous generations (Agosto D. E., Hughes-Hassell S. 2010, p. 35; Bon I., Cranfield A., Latimer K. 2012, p. 1; *Latviešu valodas aģentūra...* 2011 [online]; Nowak K. 2011, p. 8; Palfrey J., Gasser U. 2008, p. 2; Purcell K. [et al.] 2012 [online]; Snowball C. 2008, p. 25-26). In order to establish how the expansion of library services and the use of technologies in library services have influenced teenagers' perception of libraries, the article summarises Latvian teenagers' associations on the topic of a "contemporary library". The main aim of the article is to reveal teenagers' perception of a contemporary library.

#### Methods

The article analyses 61 teenagers' responses to the open-ended question "In your opinion, what a contemporary library should be like?" The respondents were asked to provide short sentences or phrases in response. As a result, each teenager provided at least two associations of a modern library. Every single participant of this study has similar educational background and age: they are Form 8 or Form 9 students, who attend school in one of nine biggest Latvian cities (cities with the status of republic significance).

Figure 1. A socio-demographic profile of respondents of focus group discussions (%; n=61)



Source: own elaboration, 13.06.2014.

The focus group discussions were attended by the total of 61 respondents aged 14 to 16 years (28 girls and 33 boys). The youngest respondents are 14, but the oldest – 16 years old. 52% (32) of students are in Form 8, whereas 48% (29) – in Form 9. The respondents represent five comprehensive day schools in four different cities of Latvia (see Figure 1).

The answers received from the teenagers were grouped by topic and were subject to multiple reviews using the method of constant comparison, which involves re-reading of the respective text multiple times and earmarking certain categories for textual encoding (Flick U. 2006, p. 37). The responses were processed using the qualitative analysis software NVivo 10.

#### **Results**

The study resulted in a mind map, containing three hierarchy levels with 51 categories and subcategories in total (see Appendix). Five main categories for classifying teenagers' associations are as follows: 'library and technologies' (n=48), 'information resources' (n=48), 'premises' (n=39), 'general description' (n=19) and 'user-friendly staff' (n=11) (see Figure 2).

Internet connection (39)
Hardware (32)

Technologies used in library services (9)

CONTEMPORARY LIBRARY

Books (40)

Diverse range of information (4)

Latest fiction (2)

Information Resources (48)

Latest fiction (2)

Premises (39)

Rich in opportunities (2)

Other answers (3)

Figure 2. The main teenagers' associations on the topic of a 'contemporary library' (n=61)

Source: own elaboration, 13.06.2014.

Press publications (2)

Interior premises (39)

Library premises (20)

# Library and technologies

Among all 48 respondents' answers, where a contemporary library was associated with technologies, the majority or 39 teenagers pointed out that libraries should have an available Internet connection. Six teenagers specify that it has to be freely and easily available, four answers emphasise the necessity of the wireless

Internet, whereas three students believe that modern libraries should have a powerful Internet connection.

When describing a contemporary library, 32 students reveal what kind of hardware it should have. 27 students mention that there should be one or several computers in a library. Out of these, seven respondents point out that the quantity of computers should be sufficient, or a modern library should have a larger quantity of computers than at present. Another five students think that computers should be more powerful. With regard to the purpose of using computers, an identical number of respondents say that they would use the computers available at libraries for information search. For instance: "so that the visitor can quickly find what he is looking for" or "can view information, which cannot be found in books". Five students make a general remark that libraries should have more up-to-date hardware or technologies. Some of their peers specify that users should have an easy access to a printer or a scanner.

In all the responses analysed above and related to library technologies, teenagers describe technologies, which are available on the library premises. Although less frequently, when characterising a contemporary library nine teenagers believe that technologies should be used in library services. Six of the respondents clearly point out that libraries should be available online, whereas five students mention the existence of a digital library. None of the students use this concept, though, but rather refer to the Internet library or a computerised archive, or describe the possibility of receiving books by email.

It must be on the Internet, where everything is available. A computerised archive, which includes all the available books. Books could also be legally accessible via email.

Two more girls point out specific e-services, which would be required in a contemporary library. One of these girls emphasises that it has to be possible to extend the book return deadline electronically, whereas the other one emphasises the necessity of an e-catalogue.

#### Information resources

48 teenagers associate a contemporary library with information resources, most commonly – with books. Books as a component of a modern library have been included in 40 respondents' answers. Among them, 25 emphasise that libraries should ensure a diverse range of books, another eight students point out that there is the necessity for new books, three believe that older books have to be included in the stock of a contemporary library, whereas two students per each of the following

answers think that such a library should have books for all age groups, several copies of the same book and history books. With regard to the provision of information resources in a modern library, four respondents give a general recommendation that libraries should offer more varied information. Two respondents emphasise that the library stock should include press publications and the latest fiction.

#### **Premises**

The 39 teenagers' responses about the premises of a contemporary library could be divided into two groups – the characterisation of the interior premises and the types of library premises. The respondents, who describe the interior premises of a modern library, most often emphasise the necessity of comfortable premises. Such answers are provided by 19 students, and four of them specify that there should be comfortable furniture in libraries. In addition, 16 teenagers point out the necessity of an easy-to-understand layout. For instance:

A layout, which is not confusing, so that one can find everything fast. A clear layout of book-shelves.

Books should be easy to find, all books should have short descriptions.

Everything should be arranged in an alphabetical order.

A comparatively large number of students (11) believe that the premises of a contemporary library should be light. Five of these students specify that illumination should be sufficient. Six girls associate a modern library with cosiness; four students write that it should be well equipped. Two respondents per each answer say that a contemporary library should also have a modern interior, whereas the premises should be warm and equipped with the ventilation system. One respondent per each answer believe that a contemporary library should be: silent, colourful and beautiful.

Regarding the description of a contemporary library, 20 teenagers name specific premises, which, in their opinion, should be available in such a library. 14 teenagers write that a library should have a reading room. Five of them specify that there should be the silent reading room available for an undisturbed reading of e.g. books. Seven teenagers think that a modern library should have a catering area, whereas three respondents mention the necessity of a relaxation area, an audio room and/or a video room and a children's corner. Teenagers would like to use an audio and/or video room for the following purposes:

Listening to audio/video recordings. Listening to audio books. Watching movies based on particular books. Finally, one girl and one boy mention the necessity of restrooms in a contemporary library.

## **General description**

The content of 19 respondents' answers has been classified as a general description of a contemporary library. Among them, six students believe that a modern library should be interesting or available. In the respondents' opinion, the availability of a library means its openness to users, longer opening hours or a library, which is "easy to visit" or which is "easily accessible". Four respondents' answers show that a library should be a contemporary and free institution. Two girls believe that a modern library should be rich in opportunities, whereas one respondent per each answer writes the following:

Equipped with the latest technologies.

The possibility of working on assignments, presentations.

Readers' cards should be replaced by plastic cards.

## **User-friendly staff**

Eleven students believe that a contemporary library should have user-friendly staff. In their responses the respondents describe the library staff as: librarians, employers, consultants, workers or those providing library services. When describing the characteristics of the library staff, the respondents use the following attributes: responsive, clever, educated, helpful, nice, well-informed, friendly, able to provide information about the respective encyclopaedia or book, polite, acceptable, understanding and knowledgeable.

#### Conclusion

An identical number of respondents associate a contemporary library with technologies and information resources. With regard to technologies, teenagers mostly emphasise the Internet access and the availability of one or several computers at the library premises. Comparatively less frequently research participants mention the integration of technologies in library services, e. g. ensuring online access to various services, including the digital library. Books are the key information resources, which are associated with a modern library by students. In students' opinion, the interior premises of a library are also very important. Among all the characteristics of the interior premises of a contemporary library enumerated by the respondents, the most important seem to be comfort and the

layout of the information resources available. As regards the type of premises, students most often mention the necessity of a reading room. Comparatively less frequently students provide general characteristics or point at the existence of user-friendly staff.

The research findings indicate that the industry professionals and teenagers have a different perception of a contemporary library. If LIS professionals associate a modern library with a change in interaction between users and libraries in a culture of new social participation (Holmberg K. [et al.] 2009, p. 677-678), teenagers hardly notice such changes. They primarily interpret a library as a physical institution, which provides access to printed books and also the Internet. The study results show that it is vital to perform activities in order to change teenagers' perception of a contemporary library as a physical space which mainly operates as an access point to computers and printed books.

## **Acknowledgement**

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Easy-to-understand layout (16) Audio, video room (3) Children's corner (3) Modern interior (2) Other answers (3) Reading room (14) Relaxation area (3) Well equipped (4) Comfortable (19) Catering area (7) Ventilated (2) Restrooms (2) Warm (2) Light (11) Rich in opportunities (2) Cosy (6) Other answers (3) Contemporary (4) Interesting (6) Available (6) Interior premises (39) Library premises (20) Free (4) General Description (19) Premises (39) CONTEMPORARY LIBRARY Information Resources (48) User-friendly Staff (11) Library and Technologies (48) Diverse range of information (4) Latest fiction (2) Press publications (2) Books (40) Hardware (32) Internet connection (39) Technologies used in library services (9) Books for all age groups (2) Several copies of the same book (2) History books (2) Diverse range of books (25) New books (8) Older books (3) Computer(-s) (27) Up-to-date hardware or technologies (5) Printer for users (3) Scanner for users (2) Wireless Internet (4) Powerful connection (3) Freely and easily available (6) Digital library (5) Other e-services (2) Available online (6)

Mind map of teenagers' associations on the topic of a 'contemporary library' Appendix.

#### Abstract

The aim of the article is to reveal teenagers' perception of a contemporary library. The research is carried out in accordance with the original study conducted by the author. Written answers given by Latvian teenagers (n=61) to the open-ended question "What should a contemporary library be like?" were analysed using NVivo software. All the respondents were 14-16 years old students (Form 8 or Form 9) from five comprehensive day schools of big cities of Latvia. The study resulted in a mind map, containing three hierarchy levels with 51 categories and subcategories in total. Five main categories for classifying teenagers' associations are as follows: "library and technologies" (n=48), "information resources" (n=48), "premises" (n=39), "general description" (n=19) and "user-friendly staff" (n=11). Most of the associations classified as "library and technologies" are devoted to a perception of a library as a place providing public access to computers and internet. Meanwhile "information resource" mainly contains references to a library as a place where printed books are kept. The study results show that it is vital to perform activities in order to change teenagers' perception of a contemporary library as a physical space which mainly operates as an access point to computers and printed books.

#### **Abstrakt**

Celem autorki artykułu jest ujawnienie sposobu postrzegania współczesnej biblioteki przez nastolatków. Badanie zostało przeprowadzone zgodnie z pierwotnymi założeniami badań autora artykułu. Używając oprogramowania NVivo przeanalizowano pisemne odpowiedzi przedstawicieli łotewskiej młodzieży (n=61) na otwarte pytanie "Jaka powinna być współczesna biblioteka?". Wszyscy badani byli uczniami w wieku 14-16 lat (klasa 8 lub 9) uczęszczającymi do pięciu szkół z dużych miast Łotwy. Rezultatem badań było stworzenie mapy myśli, zawierającej trzy hierarchie poziomów z łącznie 51 kategoriami i podkategoriami. Utworzono pięć głównych kategorii klasyfikowania skojarzeń nastolatków: "biblioteka i technologie" (n=48), "zasoby informacyjne" (n=48), "miejsce" (n=39), "ogólny opis" (n=19) i "przyjazny personel" (n=11). Większość skojarzeń zaklasyfikowanych jako "biblioteka i technologia" dotyczyła postrzegania biblioteki jako miejsca zapewniającego publiczny dostęp do komputerów i Internetu. Tymczasem skojarzenie "zasoby informacyjne" zawiera przede wszystkim odniesienia do biblioteki jako miejsca, w którym trzymane są drukowane książki. Wyniki badań uświadomiły, że ważne jest, aby prowadzić działalność w celu zmiany postrzegania przez nastolatków współczesnej biblioteki jako przestrzeni fizycznej, która działa przede wszystkim jako punkt dostępu do komputerów i książek drukowanych.