

ACCESSIBILITY OF LIBRARIES FOR VARIOUS USER GROUPS

Public benefit organizations, such as libraries and community centers, play an extremely important role in building strong, inclusive and cohesive communities. By offering a wide range of services and resources, they support education, culture, and social integration. Therefore, they have a huge impact on the quality of life of residents, also contributing to improving their socioeconomic status. The usefulness and sense of existence of these institutions result from several key factors, among which their functionality and availability are particularly important.

It means the possibility of using goods, services, and information, participation in cultural life by all people on equal terms, regardless of their age, gender, race, ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or their financial situation, is a fundamental value for these public institutions and influences their success. This concept is broadly understood as both physical accessibility, free from all kinds of barriers including communicational, psychological, and informational barriers, and a program and offer adapted to the needs of the local community and its various resident groups.

It should be remembered that access to cultural institutions such as libraries is a human right. It is not only a matter of meeting legal standards, but above all an expression of concern for all community members and striving to create a space where everyone feels comfortable and can fully use the services and resources offered.

To achieve this, it is necessary for libraries to seek to identify these needs. It is worth recalling that libraries, by meeting the expectations and needs of their current users and striving to attract new ones, can fully implement their mission, thus confirming the sense of their establishment and activities.

This special issue of "Przegląd Biblioteczny" (Library Review) is devoted to the accessibility of libraries for people with special needs. The

topic of library activities for special groups of users has appeared in Polish literature for a long time. This time, attention was paid to various aspects of accessibility, showing the benefits it brings to society as a whole and to these specific groups, but the authors also show that accessibility is a continuous process, requiring constant involvement of library staff and searching for improvements.

And although the texts do not directly refer to Total Quality Management (TQM), the interpretation of the concept of library accessibility presented by the authors corresponds to the criteria used by users to assess the quality of services, understood as the degree to which the requirements of the client-user are met, both in relation to the quality of the product and to the service consisting in its delivery. In the context of TQM, the basic set of quality determinants includes:

- service availability – convenient location of branches, appropriate opening time, short waiting time for the service, information about services that is formulated correctly and accessible to every buyer,
- competencies of the service provider, which are obtained thanks to professional preparation and training,
- politeness of the service provider – that is, treating the customer with kindness, respect and a sincere smile,
- trust – credibility of the institution, in this case the library, and its employees, care for the interests of customers,
- reliability – correct and accurate provision of services,
- responsibility of the service provider – quick and professional action taking into account the expectations of buyers,
- type of material means used – elements of the service visible to the buyer, such as the condition and equipment of the facility,
- knowledge of user needs – the service provider should try to understand the needs and expectations of customers,
- security – ensuring that the service and product delivered are risk-free (both physical and false content)¹.

The current special issue of “Przegląd Biblioteczny” presents changes that have taken place in legal provisions regarding the service of special user groups (Magdalena Cyrklaff-Gorczyca: *Communication and library services for people with special needs in the light of new legal regulations and specialist recommendations*). The needs of user groups that have not been taken into account so far in this approach are shown, such as pregnant women and people with small children (Dorota Grabowska: *Pregnant women and people with small children in public libraries in Poland*); seniors

¹ Joanna Michalska-Ćwiek: *Doskonalenie zarządzania jakością usług*. “Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Seria: Organizacja i Zarządzanie” 2015, v. 79, p. 193.

(Dariusz Grygrowski: *Libraries' activities to support and activate seniors*); blind and visually impaired people (Emilia Śmiechowska-Petrovskij: *Public libraries as an information space for blind and visually impaired people. Material and immaterial artifacts of access*); or people on the autism spectrum (Aleksandra Sztajerwald: *Library available for people on the autism spectrum*).

These articles are complemented by a review of the literature published in the last two years referring to the topic of this special issue.

We hope that the presented articles will meet your interest and that reading them will become an inspiration to improve your own work and the activities of your libraries.

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