**Type of Contribution: STUDENT SHOWCASE**

**The Role of Osijek Public LIbrary in Modern Society: With Special Consideration of It's Physical Accessibility**

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**Introduction**

Modern libraries are complex institutions that constantly adapt to society in variety of ways (Elmborg, 2010). From their early history, their forms have, more or less successfully, followed their function. The spaces of modern libraries must cater to their role of information, culture, knowledge and social centers, both physically and virtually. Despite the enormous impact of information and communication technology on library collections and services, the physical space of public libraries is still very important. Public libraries increasingly serve as community living rooms, in line with Hardy and Griebel’s (2014) argument that citizens see libraries as essential to creating complete communities and feel strongly that libraries are a powerful catalyst for inclusiveness, learning and growth.

In the city of Osijek, a relatively large city in Croatian context with population estimated at 100.000 and the library membership rate estimated at 13%, neither the central library nor its branches were purposefully built. They are located in adapted buildings that originally functioned as family houses or urban villas and as such they are meeting numerous challenges inherent to adapted library buildings, most prominently that of inadequate size and physical inaccessibility (Vidanec, Faletar Tanacković, 2016).

**Methodology**

In order to help librarians make an informed decisions about the required library spaces responsive to the patrons’ needs (in the preliminary process of preparing the new library building program), and lobbying for the new library building, the study was launched to investigate the patrons’ use of the City and University Library in Osijek and their perceptions about both the current and ideal library spaces and facilities. Also, the study of librarians’ uses and perceptions of the library spaces (both public/user areas and their working areas) was conducted.

The study tried to answer the following research questions:

1. How do patrons perceive the role of the public library?
2. What are patrons doing in library spaces?
3. What do patrons think about library spaces (and its physical accessibility)? What patrons’ needs are, and are not, being met by current library spaces?
4. What does staff think about library spaces?
5. How could library spaces best meet the needs of its patrons?

The research was conducted as a part of student project work at the Department of Information Sciences at Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek, under teacher and librarian supervision. The study used mixed methodology: observation of library spaces (central library and six branches) and interviews with librarians and patrons in all library branches. The observation was conducted in November 2017, and interviews in December 2017. During the observational part of the study, students took photos and made notes based on the IFLA’s “*Access to libraries for persons with disabilities – checklist”*. A total of 37 interviews were conducted (11 with librarians, and 26 with patron). Selection of patrons who participated in the study was done as convenient sample (authors interviewed the patrons who happened to be in the library branches on several occasions when they visited them, at different time of day and days of week). The majority of respondents agreed to be recorded. The average interview took 20 minutes. All interviews were transcribed, coded into meaningful categories and analyzed. The content analysis of the transcripts was carried out manually. The data were analyzed qualitatively but also, where appropriate, quantitative results were identified.

**Research results**

Results that are currently being processed show that patrons believe the library is important to the community and culture, most common purpose of their visit to the library is to borrow and return books or to study, also, patrons would like more spaces in the library just to hang out or spend time. The library staff agrees that library needs more space primarily for collections as well as for patrons. Library spaces should adapt to its patrons to meet their growing needs. Spaces should include more quiet areas for patrons to study as well as more spaces for groups of patrons who come to spend time or to do some group work in the library.

Even though librarians have a lot of ideas, they are limited by space and financial recourses. According to checklist, developed by the IFLA Standing Committee of Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons (LSDP), results show that access for patrons with disabilities to libraries in Osijek is not yet available or even expected.

**Conclusion**

Research showed interesting and useful results which library can later use for its benefit. Tested methodology can be used in similar studies in the future and the research will continue with a quantitative survey. Students who worked on this research learned a lot about different methodologies and adopted new knowledge as well as experience.

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