The Impact of Library Services on Customers’ life
Findings from the National User Survey of Finnish Libraries

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The National User Survey of Finnish Libraries

- Conducted twice: 2008 and 2010, next on April 2013
- Online questionnaire aimed at customers of all library sectors
- Topics: use of local and electronic library services and resources, user satisfaction, impact of library services
Tracking the impact of libraries based on survey data

- Analysis of most recent survey data (2010)
- Respondents’ experiences on public libraries’ benefits and impact
- “How have the library's services impacted on your life?”
  - Improved the quality of my life
  - Have helped me find the information I need (e.g. for work or studies)
  - Supported my cultural interests such as reading
  - Offered new ideas for recreational activities and interests
  - Increased the number of social contacts
  - Improved my computer skills (such as using the internet, using online services)

- Scale: not at all – to some extent – substantially – don't know
- Analysis by certain background factors: age, gender, life situation and level of education
Description of data

- 13,484 respondents
  - 34,300 in all

- 72% females, 21% males, 7% did not state gender

- Fairly rich regional variation
The age group distribution, %

- Under 15: 3.9%
- 15-19: 6.3%
- 20-25: 7.2%
- 26-35: 17.2%
- 36-45: 19.9%
- 46-55: 21.4%
- 56-65: 17.3%
- 66-75: 5.7%
- 75+: 1.1%
Respondents’ life situations, %

- Employed: 51%
- Student: 18%
- Unemployed: 8%
- Retired: 16%
- Stay-at-home parents: 4%
- Other: 3%
“How have the library's services impacted on your life?”, %

- Improved the quality of my life: 43% substantially, 43% to some extent, 8% not at all, 2% don't know
- Supported my cultural interests such as reading: 69% substantially, 26% to some extent, 3% not at all, 2% don't know
- Helped me find the information I need: 51% substantially, 41% to some extent, 3% not at all, 5% don't know
- Offered new ideas for recreational activities and interests: 55% substantially, 36% to some extent, 4% not at all, 4% don't know
- Increased the number of social contacts: 10% not at all, 36% substantially, 43% to some extent, 11% don't know
- Improved my computer skills: 15% substantially, 29% to some extent, 49% not at all, 1% don't know
**Does gender matter?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved the quality of my life</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported my cultural interests such as</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me find the information I need</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offered new ideas for recreational activities</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and interests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased the number of social contacts</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved my computer skills</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Does age matter? 1/2

- Supported my cultural interests such as reading
- Helped me find the information I need
- Offered new ideas for recreational activities and interests
- Improved the quality of my life substantially to some extent
Does age matter? 2/2

- Increased the number of social contacts
- Improved my computer skills
Does life situation matter?

- Differences between employment statuses are generally quite small

- Main differences: retired respondents and the group "other"
  - experience libraries’ positive impact on their **life quality** bigger than other groups
  - experience libraries’ impact on their **social contacts** and **computer skills** bigger than other groups, but only among the 26-45 year old respondents

- Students assess the impacts generally a little less than others
Conclusion

- The survey suggests that from customers’ point of view, libraries’ positive impacts are remarkable – or at least moderate – regardless of gender, age, life situation or education.

- The most effective background factor seems to be age, which to some extent increases positive impacts.

- Another group that stands out is working-aged people, who are retired or belong to the “other” group and thereby do not work or study.
  - They evaluate the impacts higher than average.

- Small differences exist between genders.
Limitations of survey data

- The results tell about experience-based impact of libraries among library users
  - How about impacts on whole population or society level?
  - Non-users remain invisible

- The scale is open to interpretation
  - How much is ”to some extent”?
Thank you!

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