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DIGITALNI AKADEMSKI ARHIVI I REPOZITORIJI

# Croatian library leaders' views on (their) library quality

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to determine and describe the library culture in Croatian public libraries. Semi-structured interviews with 14 library directors (ten public and four academic) were conducted. The tentative discussion topics were: definition of quality, responsibility for quality, satisfaction with library services, familiarization with user perspective of library and librarians, monitoring of user expectations and opinions. These interviews incorporate some of the findings of the project *Evaluation of library and information services: public and academic libraries*. The project investigates library culture in Croatian public and academic libraries and their preparedness for activities of performance measurement. The interviews reveal that library culture has changed positively in the past few years and that library leaders have positive attitude towards quality and evaluation activities. Library culture in Croatian libraries is a relatively new concept and as such was not actively developed and/or created. This article looks into the library culture of Croatian libraries, but at the same time investigates whether there is any trace of culture of assessment in them. Also, this article brings the latest update on views, opinions and atmosphere in Croatian public and academic libraries.

**KEYWORDS:** library culture, Croatia, public libraries, academic libraries, interviews

## 1. Introduction

Organizational culture, its types and variations and the significance it has for a successful organization management is a rather novel concept for Croatian library community. This is not surprising since it is a rather recent topic at the international library community scene, as well (the first writings on this topic in a LIS community come from mid-90s) (see Varner 1996, Kaarst-Brown & Robey 1999).

The term 'organisational culture' was first introduced by Pettigrew in 1979. According to him popular interest for organisational culture in the Anglo-American literature appeared in the late 1970s. Today, when a severe recession affects economies at the global scale, organizational culture is important more than ever. At times when 'going gets tough', when numerous organizations (especially non-profit ones) struggle to survive and when many of them are faced with the necessity to at least reduce the salaries (or to 'freeze' them for several years) organizational culture can help managers retain the best employees (instead of losing them to the better paid positions). Important for the LIS community, Kaarst-Brown et al. (2004, 33) suggest that there are characteristics of organizational cultures in information-based organizations that lead to increased collaboration, collegiality, and organizational effectiveness.

However, although the organizational culture is considered by many as a very important strategic resource that has value in ensuring the continuing existence and success of organizations (Kaarst-Brown et al. 2004, 33), many Croatian library directors are only implicitly aware of its existence and importance. Consequently, they only rarely utilize it to achieve a certain business goal. The main intention of this paper is to explore the level of current library culture awareness between Croatian library directors and to identify whether elements of culture of assessment can be found in those libraries.

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## 2. Theoretical background and review of the recent literature

### 2.1. Organisational culture

It is very important to understand one's organisational culture, especially for organisation's leaders, because the culture can be the very obstacle to having a completely rational budget process or to having a library's director that is able to institute changes (Linn 2008, 88). However, although important to understand, it is not always easy or straightforward to say what it actually is. Namely, organisational culture being an abstract phenomenon covering a wide array of behaviour or thoughts is defined in different ways, depending on who defines it. In addition, there is a wide variety of disciplines that have studied it, including management (e.g. Bititci et al. 2004), anthropology (e.g. Jordan 1989), education (e.g. Kezar and Eckel 2002) and medicine (Jacobs et al. 2013). The different disciplines, understandably, look at the phenomenon from different perspectives which, in turn, make it more difficult to come to a universally accepted definition of organisational culture. Its definitions therefore range from very simple "the way we do things around here" (Deal and Kennedy 1982, 4), to more detailed "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (Hofstede 1980, 25). However, Hofstede's definition, although more detailed than the first one, fails to fully explain the concept. For example, it does not mention that some of the facets of an organisational culture

are easily noticeable, such as behaviour and stories, whereas some other parts are more difficult to perceive such as beliefs, values and assumptions. The most widely accepted definition of organisational culture comes from Edgar Schein who defines a culture of a group as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein 2004, 17).

Understanding of organisation's culture becomes extremely important at moments when the leadership wants to institute changes. If the culture is not taken into account, the desired changes can, and invariably do, fail.<sup>1</sup>

As already argued, organisational culture is an extremely complex and evasive concept. It includes a number of interrelated, comprehensive, and ambiguous sets of factors. Libraries are often stereotypically viewed as organisations that have a single, dominant, or strong culture; however, there is a body of literature (Kaarst-Brown & Robey 1999, Martin 1992) that supports multicultural frameworks. To determine the most important factors on which to focus, it is important to use a framework, a theoretical foundation that can narrow and focus the search for key cultural dimensions. The Competing Values Framework (CVF) (Quinn and Rohrbaugh 1981, 1983) focuses on the competing tensions and conflicts inherent in any human system: primary emphasis is placed on the conflict between stability and change, and the conflict between the internal organisation and the external environment. Quinn and Kimberly (1984) have extended the framework to study organisational culture. Cameron and Quinn (2006, 31) assert that the CVF is a strategy for examining the organisation's characteristics that may impact its organisational effectiveness and success.

They also (2006, 23-25) devised an instrument to measure organisational culture according to CVF framework. Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) was developed to diagnose six key aspects<sup>2</sup> of organisational cultures. These subsystems

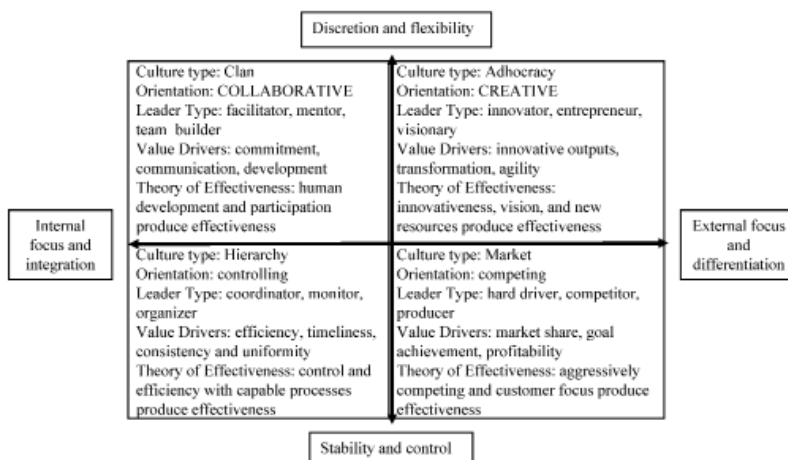
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1 Three most common organisational change initiatives in the last few decades are TQM, downsizing, and reengineering initiatives. However, organizations that have implemented quality initiatives in order to enhance effectiveness have by and large fallen short. Similar thing happened with downsizing. Downsizing was another attempt to improve productivity and effectiveness. Unfortunately, two-thirds of companies that downsized ended up doing it again a year later, and the stock prices of firms that downsized during 1990s actually fell behind the industry average a decade later. Also, many corporate libraries did not survive downsizing initiatives from the 1990s (Kaarst-Brown 2004: 34). The same happened with reengineering initiatives. The failure of these initiatives (TQM, downsizing, reengineering) came as a result of the fact that in most cases the culture remained the same. For those initiatives to have been successful they should have been treated as a fundamental shift in the organisation's direction, values, and culture (Cameron and Quinn 2006: 9).

2 Those six aspects are: dominant characteristics, organisational leadership, management of employees, organisation glue, strategic emphasis, and criteria for success (See Cameron - Quinn 2006: 26-29).

are integrated into the four theoretical archetypes of culture (clan, adhocracy, hierarchical, and market) and are briefly described in Figure 1. The OCAI instrument allows an organisation to analyse their present and the desired culture types.

Figure 1. Four cultural archetypes according to their main features (source: Cameron and Quinn 2006: 46).



The CVF enables understanding of the prevailing cultural conditions at the organisation while simultaneously revealing whether there are conflicts between cultural values of leaders and managers and those by staff and other stakeholders (Kaarst-Brown et al. 2004, 40). Here, it is important to stress out that an organisation will rarely have only one type of organisational culture – it usually has between two to all four of them.

Kaarst-Brown et al. (2004, 43-48) have analysed several prototypical library types and tried to apply CVF on them. Authors agree (see Kaarst-Brown et al. 2004; Maloney et al. 2010; Awan & Mahmood 2010) that academic libraries were traditionally close to hierarchical cultural type (valued stability and control, were internally oriented), but now they have to embrace clan and/or adhocracy frameworks if they want to survive in the changed environment. A research from 2010 (Maloney et al.) revealed that senior academic library administrators (associate directors and associate university librarians) perceived a significant gap between their current and preferred organisational cultures and that current organisational culture limited their effectiveness. Similarly, successful public libraries are likely to strive for a clan culture, with some hints of adhocracy through empowered committees (that work to make changes in library services). More recently, there are even signs that public libraries are changing their culture into marketing culture (Harrison & Shaw 2004) or even the 2.0 culture (Hammond 2010). Small institutional libraries also need to develop either the clan or the adhocracy culture, depending upon how much focus they place on the external

needs of the organisation over the internal needs of the library. In conclusion, it is obvious that the best cultural types for majority of libraries, being non-profit, service-oriented institutions, are either clan or/and adhocracy culture.

Finally, it is important to mention another type of organisational culture that is relatively new and usually referred to in the context of performance measurement activities. It is the culture of assessment and the concept and ideas that comprise the principles and practices of a culture of assessment were outlined for the first time by Amos Lakos and Shelley Phipps in 1999 (Lakos and Phipps 2004, 346). As already said, it is extremely difficult to change the present library culture, and Farkas, Hichliffe and Houk (2015) have identified several hindering factors for the development of the culture of assessment in academic libraries. Some of those factors are: assessment is not priority of administration, library culture is not user-focused, assessment data is not available to interested parties, library administration does not use assessment data systematically in decision-making, lack of sufficient staffing, lack of time, etc. Today, many library leaders in the world are advocating for the development of culture of assessment, but Croatian libraries (and library leaders) seem to be quite far from that idea. The interviews conducted should give us an insight into the type of organisational culture Croatian library leaders create and/or wish for in their libraries.

## 2.2. Performance measurement activities in Croatian libraries

In Croatia, an increased interest in performance measurement has been noticed in the last ten years. The pioneering work in this area was done by a Slovenian colleague Melita Ambrožič (Ambrožič 1999), later by Kornelija Petr Balog (Petr 2004) and Martina Dragija Ivanović (Dragija Ivanović 2006, 2012) with their master or doctoral theses.<sup>3</sup> In addition to their work, there have been several articles on this topic but they mostly dealt with user satisfaction (Pavlinić-Horvat 1998, Petr 2000, Šapro-Ficović 2000, Cvetnić-Kopljar 2002, etc.) or assumed a more theoretical approach and dealt with the quality of academic and national libraries (Mihalić 2000). There are only a few articles on the impact or outcomes of library services (Dragija Ivanović 2012, Morić Filipović 2012) or on the topic of library culture (Petr Balog 2012, Šmider, Petr Balog 2012).

As time progresses, the topic of library quality, its measuring and continuous improvement is becoming more and more interesting for Croatian libraries (for academic libraries it is because they, together with the institutions of HE they belong to, are

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3 Melita Ambrožič wrote the first thesis on this topic (1999) and she dealt with performance measurement of Slovenian academic libraries. Next was Kornelija Petr Balog in 2004 who wrote on performance measurement of Croatian academic libraries. Finally, Martina Dragija Ivanović, the only one who wrote on performance measurement of Croatian public libraries, wrote her master thesis in 2006. In 2012 Dragija Ivanović defended her doctoral thesis on library impact on the local community.

subjected to the process of external evaluation activities, mandatory for initial or re-accreditation of all institutions of HE in Croatia and conducted by the National Board of Higher Education i.e. Agency for Science and Higher Education<sup>4</sup> and for public libraries because they are financed by the local community and at times of recession have to work hard and prove to their stakeholders that their existence is necessary for the welfare of the community). This interest was also materialized in a conference<sup>5</sup> and a round table<sup>6</sup> on this topic, and at the moment there is one textbook in the Croatian language on evaluation of academic libraries (but with parts that can be applied on public libraries, as well) (Petr Balog 2010).

However, all those surveys, articles and meetings were not the result of a planned and continuous activity, but isolated attempts executed by enthusiasts.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, until the scientific project *Evaluation of library and information services: public and academic libraries* (2007–2012)<sup>8</sup> no systematic research of library quality was attempted in either public or academic library arena in Croatia.

The articles published in Croatia between 2000–2011 reveal that both practitioners and academic researchers in Croatia are familiar with the significant research in the area of performance measurement, as well as manuals and textbooks, but that this knowledge was not capitalized and applied in practical projects (apart from the aforementioned one) whose findings might be used to promote the Croatian library performance. Experience of international library community is definitely valuable and important, but Croatian library community must start its own evaluation projects and activities.

It is fair to say that up until the project presented in this paper Croatia was in Cronin's preliminary phase of efficient evaluation (Cronin 1982, 228). According to him, theo-

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4 The decision to start with external evaluation was made in 2007 by the National Board for Higher Education. The Agency for Science and Higher Education does the actual job on behalf of the Board. More about the whole process as well as the reports of the past evaluation activities can be retrieved from the Agency's web pages <http://www.azvo.hr/index.php/hr/vrednovanja>. Naturally, academic libraries are evaluated together with their mother institutions.

5 The conference 10th days of Croatian special and academic libraries (Opatija, 2008) were dedicated to the topic of quality in special and academic libraries.

6 The Section for Statistics and Performance Indicators of the Croatian Library Association organized in 2011 a round table on the performance measurement activities targeting all types of libraries. The conclusion of the round table was that primary goal of Croatian libraries should be to create a national statistical database which would allow benchmarking activities.

7 For instance, it is more an exception than a rule if a library has created its mission statement, stated its goals and objectives, has documented its activities and procedures or included the statement about the frequency of user satisfaction surveys in its strategic documentation.

8 The PI Kornelija Petr Balog. The project was funded by Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sport and dealt mostly with organizational culture of Croatian public and academic libraries. It looked into the attitudes, views and opinions of Croatian librarians toward various topics on performance measurement of their libraries (Petr Balog 2009).

retical discussions without empirical confirmation precede real evaluation activities, and that is evidently the case with Croatia. There are many authors that suggest an evaluation method, but majority of those propositions are never applied in the real world.

### 3. Project Evaluation of library and information services: public and academic libraries

Since insufficient awareness of library service quality affects all library processes and may lead to deterioration of service quality this project was motivated by the need to raise the awareness for the need of continuous improvement of library quality. Initially, the project was planned for five years, but at first only three years were approved (2007-2009) and the adjustment of project goals had to be made. Another two were approved upon the evaluation of project outcomes in 2009 and the project finished in 2011, as initially planned. Therefore, we shall refer to them as Phase I (2007-2009) and Phase II (2010-2011) of this project.

The project had several hypotheses which had to be tested:

- Croatian libraries did not pay enough attention to processes of measuring their performance.
- Croatian librarians are unprepared and unwilling to conduct any sort of evaluation at their library (lack of motivation, education, etc.).

The instruments used during the project were an online survey aimed at public and academic librarians in Croatia and interviews with public and academic library directors. During the project 34 interviews were conducted with public and academic library directors. This paper focuses on the last 14 interviews, the findings of which have never been published.

The previous 20 interviews were described and discussed in various journals during time (Petr Balog 2009; Petr Balog, Dragija Ivanović and Feldvari 2010). As already mentioned, this paper discusses the unpublished findings of the last 14 interviews conducted during 2011.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The interviewees came from the following academic and public libraries: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (Zagreb), Central Medical Library (Zagreb), Faculty of Medicine (Zagreb), Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture (Zagreb), Faculty of Law (Zagreb), Public library Nikola Zrinski (Čakovec), Public library 'Ivan Goran Kovačić' (Karlovac), Public library and reading room Požega, Zagreb City Libraries, Public library and reading room Pula, Public library (Rijeka), Public library (Gospić), Public library 'Juraj Šižgorić' (Šibenik), Public library and reading room Metel Ožegović (Varaždin), and Public library Vinkovci. The interviewees were coded V21-V34.



### 3.1 Interviews

The interviews presented here were conducted during 2011 and their purpose was to determine the kind of organisational culture present in Croatian public and academic libraries, with intention to detect traces of culture of assessment. As already mentioned, since the project itself was financed in several stages, the interviews ran in two phases: Phase I (2008) and Phase II (2010–2011). The interviews were semi-structured and the tentative discussion topics that will be analysed in this paper were: definition of quality, responsibility for quality, satisfaction with library services, familiarization with user perspective of library and librarians, user expectations, monitoring of user expectations and opinions. Interviews were recorded; only rarely notes were taken.

All together 34 interviews in 33 libraries<sup>10</sup> were conducted:

- Phase I – 10 interviews: 6 academic, 4 public libraries<sup>11</sup>
- Phase II – 24 interviews: 12 academic, 12 public libraries<sup>12</sup>. Last 14 interviews are part of Phase II and were conducted with 4 academic and 10 public library directors.

Geographically, during Phase I six interviewees came from the coast (Dalmatia) and four came from the far east of the country (Slavonia). During Phase II all the interviewed Chief librarians came from Zagreb University, the biggest and oldest University in Croatia. As for the public library directors, they came from all parts of Croatia.

The interviews were transcribed and coded in order to preserve the anonymity of interviewees<sup>13</sup>. In Phase I interviews were conducted with interviewees V1–V10, and the rest of the interviews (V11–V34) in Phase II (last 14 interviews: V21–34).

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10 Library director of Vinkovci public library was interviewed twice. Once in 2008 and again in 2011 because the first interview was extremely short and provided insufficient data.

11 In Phase I the chosen academic institutions were: Faculty of Maritime Studies in Split, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture in Split, University library in Split, Scientific library in Zadar, Faculty of Law in Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek. The public libraries were: Public library Marko Marulić in Split, Public library in Zadar, Public library in Vinkovci, Public library in Slavonski Brod.

12 In Phase II the academic institutions were all from the Zagreb University: Catholic Faculty of Theology, Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Economics and Business, Faculty of Science – Central Physics Library, Central Chemistry Library, Geophysics Library, Central Geology Library, Faculty of Teacher Education, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Central Medical Library, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture and Faculty of Law. Public libraries included in the sample were: Library and reading room Fran Galović Koprivnica, City and University Library Osijek, Public library Nikola Zrinski Čakovec, Public library 'Ivan Goran Kovačić' Karlovac, Public library and reading room Požega, Zagreb City Libraries, Public library and reading room Pula, Public library Rijeka, Public library Gospić, Public library 'Juraj Šižgorić' Šibenik, Public library and reading room Metel Ožegović Varaždin, Public library Vinkovci.

13 Academic interviewees were marked as V1, V3–V7, V11–V17, V19, V22, V29, V33–V34 and public library interviewees as V2, V8–V10, V18, V20–V21, V23–V28, V30–V32.

## 3.2. Results

### 3.2.1. Library quality

Both academic and public library directors have similar ideas about what makes up library quality: library staff (expert, friendly, courteous), satisfied customers, collections, functional and sufficient space and furniture, reading rooms. Some equal library quality with accessibility to information in a library setting (informed librarians that refer customers to information sources; organized collections) (V30, V32). One academic librarian thinks that library quality is strongly correlated with library budget (V22). On the other hand, for public librarians it is more about library programmes and activities, good relationship with stakeholders and financiers (V25, V27, V31). One librarian (V31) looks at the quality from a librarian and economic point of view and defines it as a way in which the library satisfies needs of the primary user groups, and other stakeholders. This librarian also makes a distinction between internal (motivated librarians and library administration, good information system) and external components (customers, their needs and expectations, other stakeholders – founders such as the local government or the Ministry of Culture) of quality.

Earlier interviews: Earlier interviews record similar views about the library quality. They (in particular public librarians) only fail to grasp the importance of cooperation with the stakeholder groups which the latest interviews address.

### 3.2.2. Satisfaction with library service

Judging by the answers from our interviewees, the public library directors are generally satisfied with their library services. However, there are some (V21) who think that the insufficient funding prevents a library from keeping pace with the ever-changing environment (higher standards of operation, new media, etc.) whereas some (V30) are openly dissatisfied with the knowledge and skills of their co-workers (lack the necessary formal education). Several interviewees mentioned that they base their satisfaction on customer feed-back that they receive through satisfaction surveys and opinion boxes. Some academic interviewees are satisfied with the service their libraries provide but there are those who have some reservations – V33 would like to see library finances improved in the future whereas V34 does not think that the library achieved the satisfactory integration within the scientific processes at its institution of higher education.

Earlier interviews: In the earlier interviews there seemed to be more dissatisfaction with library services, especially among academic librarians. The most pronounced reason for dissatisfaction was the lack of library software, but also the understaffing, or/and inadequate library space.

### **3.2.3. Library's strong points**

Majority of both academic and public librarians have similar ideas about strong points of their libraries: first and foremost library staff – their expertise, hard work, friendliness, ability for teamwork and acquisition of new knowledge and skills, appropriate working hours, pleasant and comfortable library space (lighting, air-conditioning, new equipment, flowers, parking space), and library collections. Although not directly asked, some of our interviewees offered also what they had thought were the 'weak points' of their libraries. In most cases they complained about the lack of space, shift of generations among library staff, and inappropriate working conditions.

Earlier interviews: Earlier interviewees had similar ideas about 'strong' sides of their libraries. Some of the elements of the service that were not mentioned in the later interviews were: cooperation with other libraries, interlibrary-loan service, accuracy of cataloguing department, and autonomy in regard to stakeholders (founders).

### **3.2.4. Satisfaction with workplace**

All our interviewees are satisfied with their workplace, majority even feels privileged to work at the library. According to V29 this is an important and noble profession. V34 stresses that academic libraries provide the most dynamic working environment in comparison to all other library types.

One interviewee came to library from other position (V28), and prefers working in a library to working anywhere else.

Earlier interviews: In the past, there were more dissatisfied library directors (mostly academic) because several of them (three academic and one public) expressed a wish for a more dynamic, better paid job, or simply, a new job with better human relations and possibility for development. Two additional academic librarians expressed a wish to work in a different kind of library – one librarian thinks that the institutional library is less stressful and offers more time for research whereas another one thinks that public libraries provide better possibility for promotion and professional education. Causes of dissatisfaction among academic librarians are mostly under-appreciation of their work, subordinate position within the mother-institution and insufficient funding of academic libraries. The dissatisfaction of public librarians is mainly caused by the local situation i.e. by the circumstances within the library. One public library director pointed out that he does not feel privileged for working at the library because it took a lot of effort to 'sort things out' when he assumed the position of a library director.

### **3.2.5. Customer opinion of library services**

Almost all interviewees from both academic and public libraries think that their customers have a good opinion of their library work. Causes of customer dissatisfaction

might be, according to some academic librarians, insufficient funding that affects library activities in general (V22). Causes for dissatisfaction in public libraries are, according to our interviewees, the unattractive or narrow space (V21, V25, V27), outdated equipment, and in some cases collections of poor quality (V27<sup>14</sup>). Two academic librarians, V33 and V34, express reservations regarding customer satisfaction since V33 noticed that some customer groups have high expectations that library cannot always meet. V34 points out that library has various customer groups with different needs noticing that each of those customer groups has different image of the library. Four (V23, V25, V26, V27) out of fourteen interviewees collect customer opinions through surveys. Some librarians (V26, V31, V32) talk to customers and find out how they feel about the library, however we have no information whether they write their findings down, record them in any way and/or use this information during decision making processes. Other interviewees did not mention the usage of any other methods or techniques by which they could substantiate their claims about satisfied customers.

Earlier interviews: Earlier interviewees expressed more concern for the possibility of customers' dissatisfaction, especially those from academic libraries. Causes of customer dissatisfaction might be, according to some academic librarians, customers' perception that library did not use the modern technology, the fact that some older members of the staff did not communicate with customers in a proper way, or inadequate library space. Public librarians seemed satisfied with the customer opinion of their services.

### 3.2.6. Customer expectations

In connection with the previous question, we wanted to know how our interviewees learn about customer needs and expectations, what they are and whether there is any discrepancy between the actual library service and customer expectations. 17 out of 33 libraries in our sample (52% – i.e. 44% academic and 60% public libraries) stated that they use some kind of method (survey, statistical data, Book/Box of Complaints/Suggestions) to find out about the customer expectations. The others obviously do that in an informal conversation with their customers. Academic librarians are faced with following expectations: good working conditions and good collection for preparation for exams (V22), automation of library activities (V33<sup>15</sup>), collections, or pleasant reading rooms. Public librarians think that customers expect information/literature (V23–V25), sufficient number of computers (V25, V27, V30<sup>16</sup>), computers for disabled

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14 Although in case of the dissatisfaction with this particular library collection our interviewee thinks this is more the case of the lack of information on customer side, than it is real a problem.

15 At the moment customers are required to fill out the loan request and they are not happy about it.

16 This public librarian thinks that customer expectations are too high in regard to modern technology.

persons (V25), more materials in electronic form (V27), more bestsellers (V27), fast and efficient service (V28), organizing of events (V31), and bigger space (V32).

Earlier interviews: Earlier interviewees did not mention some of the expectations present in the latest interviews such as services for disabled persons and/or more materials in electronic form, which indicates that the expectations have changed over time.

### **3.2.7. Competition**

Our interviewees were asked whether they thought they had competitors in their environment, whether in the form of some other library, bookstore or even the Internet. Majority of our respondents (either public or academic) thought that libraries actually had no competitors. They mostly see other institutions as partners who all together work toward the common goal – to solve the customer's information problem ('positive competition', as one librarian referred to it) (V25, V31). In fact, there was one public librarian who actually expressed the desire for a healthy competition hoping it would only help in creating quality service environment (V30). Only two public librarians from Phase II (V26, V32) thought that their libraries had competitors (in the form of other libraries, Internet, bookstores, but also internet cafes and book fairs).

Earlier interviews: Majority of earlier interviewees also did not think they had competition in the form of other institutions or the Internet. However, some public librarians did see the competition in shopping malls that did numerous things such as storytelling, theatre plays, etc. to attract children. Also, another public librarian stated that the library had numerous competitors, but that the library had strategically improved their performance and that they have reached the level of quality with which they have surpassed the competition in their environment.

### **3.2.8. Communication with stakeholders**

In this section of our interviews we were interested whether our interviewees had difficulties when they thought they needed to consult the HE administration (dean, vice-dean) or local founder/financier (e.g. mayor). Some academic librarians point out that the type of communication with stakeholders depends on who currently holds the position of the dean, vice-dean, etc. (V34), but majority seem to be relatively satisfied about the relationship with the faculty administration. Public librarians in our sample tend to solve minor problems on their own, and that they only ask for help when they come across an obstacle that they cannot solve by themselves (V23, V25, V31). No visible dissatisfaction in communication with stakeholders was noticed among these last 14 interviews.

Earlier interviews: We noticed temporal discrepancy in the answers we received from our respondents. Interviewees from 2008 thought, as a rule, that they had a fairly good

communication with their stakeholders, and their only objection was for the stakeholders' slow reaction/intervention. In interviews from 2010, on the other hand, this satisfaction deteriorated because there was a number of both academic and public librarians (five of them) who thought it was extremely difficult to make an appointment with the administration (dean/mayor) and usually tried to solve problems on their own.

### **3.2.9. Library status**

Interviewees were asked about their satisfaction with the status of library in local community (public libraries) or within the institution of higher education (academic libraries). It was to be expected that some librarians (regardless of library type) will be more satisfied with their position than others, but in general, it seems that academic librarians seem to be more dissatisfied with their position than public ones. In late Phase II, there seemed to be slightly more satisfied than dissatisfied academic librarians. The dissatisfied one (V33) raised the unsolved issue of promotion. Another reason for dissatisfaction was the fact that heads of academic libraries, as a rule, are not the members of the Faculty Board.

Public librarians are usually satisfied with their position. Some public librarians (V27, V31) interviewed in late Phase II (2011) commented on the media attention given to libraries in comparison to other cultural and/or heritage institutions (museums, theatres). In their opinion, libraries are, unjustly, neglected and think that articles on library activities are usually put under the section 'Town activities', and not 'Culture', as would be the case if the article dealt with a museum or a theatre. V27 points out that in the USA and Europe articles on libraries are listed under 'Culture', as well.

Earlier interviews: It seems that the most dissatisfied library directors interviewed in the past were also academic librarians, especially those interviewed in 2010. Their main objective was the fact that they do the research and publish the papers, but that work is not acknowledged within the institution, and they usually get labelled as 'technical services' (along with maintenance personnel).

### **3.2.10. Continuous professional education**

In our next interview topic we were interested to find out what the position of library directors is toward the continuous professional education efforts of their co-workers, and consequently, what the (professional) structure of the library staff is. Almost all of our respondents emphasize that they support continuous professional education activities of their co-workers, but one (academic) librarian (V22) emphasizes that it is up to the individual to decide whether (s)he wants to take part in those activities or not - however, library and the faculty in general support such requests from their employees. In our interviews we noticed that the term 'continuous professional edu-

cation' is understood in several ways: as taking part in a part-time study of library and information science at some of the institutions of higher-education in Croatia, as enrolment in doctoral programme, as a participation in conferences, or as a participation in courses and lectures organized by various organizations (e.g. Centre for Continuous Professional Education, Croatian Library Association, etc.). Some libraries motivate their employees to participate in such activities financially (give them a bonus for a published paper; cover the conference expenses, etc.), or through free days, and some only through notifications about upcoming manifestations. Many of the interviewees organize courses for further professional education on their premises (inviting experts from the Centre, Library Association or teachers from one of the Croatian LIS departments). As expected, younger librarians are more prone to participate in those programmes (V21, V24).

In general, public librarians think that their co-workers are employed at appropriate working positions, whereas academic librarians are more frustrated by their inability to achieve that level of staff education (V22, V33).

In our sample, only three public libraries (V23, V25, V27) employ librarians with higher professional degrees (higher librarian or library consultant).

Earlier interviews: Earlier interviewees also stated that they encouraged their employees to continuously educate themselves. Earlier interviews recorded six higher librarians and three library consultants in the sample.

### **3.2.11. Performance indicators and quality management systems**

Librarians were asked whether the user satisfaction indicators would help them plan and develop library services. Also, we wanted to know whether they apply any of the quality management systems (e.g. ISO 9000).

Although almost all of our respondents (both public and academic) agreed that user satisfaction data would help plan and improve their services, only few actually claimed that they conduct surveys (V31, V34), and the others mostly concluded that they receive user feedback in everyday communication (V22, V23, V28). None of the libraries in the sample introduced any quality management system, although, one public library was planning to introduce a Slovenian ISO 9000 for public libraries (V27). This was also the only library that had a positive attitude towards ISO standards - almost all of the remaining respondents thought that ISO standards only burden a library with unnecessary paperwork and formalities, and do little for quality improvement (V22, V29). Even though ISO standards are not represented in our sample, some libraries do take part in some other form of quality evaluation initiatives - such is the example of the public library that took part in an international statistical benchmarking project (V25), or the academic library that underwent the process of external evaluation by the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education (V29).

Earlier interviews: Although majority of interviewees in the earlier interviews claimed that the performance indicators would be extremely helpful for library management only one academic library conducted user surveys on a regular basis, and two other academic libraries were planning to introduce it. Libraries did tend to collect some sort of user opinion (through opinion boxes, for instance), but serious efforts to measure and collect necessary data were not present. However, several academic institutions from the previous sample introduced the quality management system ISO 9000.

### **3.2.12. Responsibility for performance measurement of library services**

We were interested to find out who, according to our respondents, should be responsible for performance measurement activities of libraries: libraries themselves, or some external body (e.g. Croatian library association with its sections).

Our respondents had different ideas about who should take care of performance measurement activities. Most of them, though, agreed that Croatian library association (or some of its sections) should be involved as a professional support to library's own efforts (V23, V25, V27, V31, V32). Also, many of our interviewees thought that evaluation activities must involve some external evaluator, such as the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport or the Ministry of Culture (V21), users (V26, V30), or the quality committee at the institution of HE (V33). Only one (academic) librarian in the sample thought that only the library in question should be involved (V22).

Earlier interviews: Interestingly, 2008 respondents insisted that the evaluations of library activities be done by some external body (provided that it also included the representatives from the library community), whereas the majority of 2010 respondents thought that that should be the responsibility of the library itself.

### **3.3. Discussion**

Interviews presented in this paper come from two types of Croatian libraries: academic and public. However, in many cases our interviewees gave similar responses to our questions. Almost all interviewees point out that library quality for them means satisfied customers, and that the satisfaction can be achieved through: collections, library space, friendly and expert staff, pleasant atmosphere, etc. Also, the connection was made by one academic librarian between the financial and the quality aspects. Electronic services were mentioned only once, by an academic librarian.

Majority of our interviewees are satisfied with services their libraries provide. However, there was pronounced concern about the budgetary issues among both public and academic librarians. Both groups seem to be convinced of the positive correlation between the money and the library quality. Also, public library directors put a strong emphasis on the good cooperation with stakeholders (especially with local government responsible for public library funding). On the other hand, finances seem to be the



excuse for not doing things in a case of one academic librarian (V33). One of the public librarians (V30) was unfortunately quite dissatisfied with the level of education and expertise of his/her co-workers (which was an exception in our sample since almost all library directors think that their co-workers present the 'strong points' of their library).

Almost all interviewees agreed about several traditional factors and pointed them out as strong points of their library. They are, in the first place, library staff, working hours, library space, collections and pleasant and friendly atmosphere in the library. From the point of view of successful management it is extremely important that library staff was given such an emphasis (especially because librarians with bad communication skills, unskilful and/or impolite can significantly reduce the perceived quality, which one of our interviewees very well pointed out). Only two respondents (too few in our opinion) pointed out good cooperation with other libraries and with stakeholders. Several interviewees volunteered the 'weak points' of their libraries: lack of space, shift of generations and inappropriate working conditions. At least two of the aforementioned are 'traditional' weak links in the Croatian library system – library buildings are usually old buildings adapted to serve library purposes and majority of librarians must cope with both insufficient working conditions and chronicle lack of space.

Academic librarians interviewed in 2011 are the most positive academic interviewees if we compare them with our interviews conducted before 2011. They are positive about their job and would not change it for anything. We were wondering what might cause such a change – whether it was the time of the interviews or the location of the libraries and the local situation, or maybe both. Interviews with academic librarians in 2010 and 2011 were conducted within Zagreb University, Croatian capital and the city with the biggest concentration of libraries in Croatia. Also, these libraries are perceived among the Croatian library community as the most forward and best funded in Croatia. However, other factors and not location must have influenced the 2010 librarians' negative feeling toward working in a library since 2011 interviewees also came from Zagreb and were extremely positive toward their work. Public librarians as a rule are satisfied with their work place. Only in one case we detected the desire to work somewhere else due to disturbed human relations within the library. Satisfied, motivated and positive leaders are crucial for the success of any organization. They are responsible for creating a positive working environment, motivated and satisfied workers, which cannot be achieved if they themselves are frustrated, unmotivated or dissatisfied.

Almost all interviewees in our sample are convinced that their library has a positive image in the public and that they can easily detect dissatisfied customers and undertake corrective measures. Those librarians who could think of the reasons why their customers might have a bad opinion of library services (space, equipment or collections) were positive that a better financial support to the library would solve those problems. Four out of fourteen libraries in our sample collect customer opinions

through surveys (or, five out of 34, if we consider the whole sample). This percentage is a huge step forward in comparison to the 2003 research (Petr 2004) conducted among academic librarians of one Croatian University when no library had any empirical proof that their customers were satisfied, yet they insisted that they both knew what their customer wanted and that customers were satisfied (because no one complained). Some academic librarians from our sample expressed concern that some customer groups might have too high or unrealistic expectations from their library and therefore become dissatisfied when the library fails to perform as they expect it to. Those librarians are obviously not familiar with ways and documents in which librarians outside Croatia 'curb' customer expectations and avoid their unwarrantable dissatisfaction. Those are documents such as Service Level Agreement<sup>17</sup> or Customer Service Pledge (or Commitment)<sup>18</sup>.

As already mentioned, several of our respondents collect data and feedback from their customers. In that way they can monitor the expectations from their customers and modify their service in time to prevent any significant dissatisfaction on their customer side.

Majority of our respondents do not fear or feel that they have a competition in their environment. They see other libraries, Internet or even book stores to be their partners or, even they see them as a competition, they think of that as a positive thing because it motivates them to continue to improve the quality of their services.

In communication with stakeholders (primarily founders and financiers) our interviewees seemed to have no real problems. Academic librarians seem to talk to their stakeholders (deans or vice-deans) more often than the public librarians, but this is expected since they have less independence in their decisions. However, we noticed a temporal discrepancy in the answers we received from our last respondents in comparison to previous interviews. Majority of those interviewed in Phase I (public or academic alike) tended to think they had good communication with stakeholders. On the other hand, those interviewed in Phase II, but before 2011, were sometimes quite negative and dissatisfied with that communication.

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17 Service Level Agreement (SLA) is a document that has elements of the contract between interested parties. Library describes its duties and responsibilities, but also duties and responsibilities of another party (customers). Service Level Agreement of the Birkbeck College Library from London is a good example of such a document. It can be retrieved from <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/lib/about/strategy> (accessed 2013-06-21).

18 Customer Service Pledge is a document in which library promises or pledges what it will provide to its customers. It has no element of contract and does not mention any duties or responsibilities of another party. Customers have a right to be displeased if library fails to deliver the level of service described in the pledge. Petersburg Public Library in US is a good example of a customer pledge. It can be retrieved from <http://www.ppls.org/about/customer-service-pledge/> (accessed 2013-06-21).

Librarians are relatively satisfied with their status. Academic ones are sometimes dissatisfied because of the inability to be promoted, although they publish and go to conferences. They may become the head of the library, but at some institutions that position is not even financially rewarded. Public librarians from our sample concentrated on the media attention given to libraries and criticised the habit of Croatian press to put articles on library under the heading 'Town activities' and not under 'Culture' as they would the articles on museum or theatre activities.

All our interviewees have positive inclination toward continuous professional education, however, public librarians have more opportunity for promotion and validation of their professional activities. For instance, if a librarian working in a public library got a higher professional degree such as a higher librarian or library consultant (awarded by Croatian Library Association) they would automatically be financially rewarded through higher salary. If such a degree were awarded to an academic librarian it would have no consequence on his/her salary. Therefore, academic librarians are not always as motivated to apply for those degrees (perhaps even not as motivated to become involved in professional work and activities) as those working in public libraries.

Our respondents, although convinced that the satisfaction indicators would help them organize and plan their service, only rarely conduct satisfaction surveys. Majority of them relies on oral feedback from their customers. Also, only one has a positive attitude toward the introduction of ISO standards for quality, the others see that as an unnecessary burden.

Almost all of our respondents think that evaluation activities, if conducted, should be carried out by a group of experts coming from various institutions (Croatian Library Association, library itself, customers, Ministry, etc.). Obviously, they do not feel that the institution that is being evaluated should perform the evaluation.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper presented the findings of the last 14 interviews conducted within the scientific project *Evaluation of library and information services: public and academic libraries*. Altogether 33 library directors in the time span of four years (2008–2011) were interviewed: 18 coming from academic environment and 15 from public libraries. The last 14 interviews described in this paper were conducted with four academic and ten public library directors. The main purpose of those interviews was to get the insight into the views and opinions of library directors and in that way to get some idea about the current library culture in Croatian libraries. The project of external evaluation of Croatian academic libraries has already begun<sup>19</sup> – the Croatian National

19 The Board started evaluation activities in 2008. The list of evaluated institutions together with evaluation reports can be accessed at: <http://www.azvo.hr/hr/arhiva-provedenih-vrednovanja>.

Board for Higher Education (NBHE) has started with the evaluation of institutions of higher education in 2008 (and academic libraries as integral units of any academic institution). The NBHE evaluation is somewhat feared among the Croatian academic community since it may have serious repercussions - in case that the institution of higher education fails to comply to the Board's prerequisites, it may lose the licence to operate. It is not surprising therefore that these external evaluation activities are directly responsible for the drastic change in organisational climate in majority of academic libraries. In contrast to interviews from an earlier research dating from 2003 (Petr 2004) interviews conducted during our project, only several years later, give evidence of the beginning of culture of assessment in academic libraries.

Public libraries in Croatia do not, at the moment, have to fear any similar kind of external evaluation. However, public libraries do not have a fixed budget and their existence is subjective to far more volatile laws of local policy than it is the case with academic libraries. And in the current situation of global recession and the major cuts of salaries and increasing of taxes that takes place in Croatia, it will really be difficult to get the necessary funding for any type of a library. In 2009, in some smaller communities local authorities found themselves in such a difficult financial position that they stopped meeting all overhead costs for public libraries. At difficult times such as these, libraries are advised to focus on fund-raising, but Croatian libraries (as many libraries from former communist regimes) are used to receiving funding from the authorities and not raising them themselves. It will take time and training to start significant fund-raising activities by Croatian libraries.

As already mentioned, the interviews presented in this paper revealed that the library culture in Croatian academic and public libraries has improved and that libraries are more open to the idea of performance measurement and continuous investment in quality of their service than several years before (see Petr 2004). Public and academic librarians gave similar answers to almost all questions - the only difference in answers was noticed regarding the satisfaction with status and position within the organization and wish to work somewhere else. Academic librarians interviewed in 2010 (which also indicates that they come from Zagreb, Croatian capital) are much more critical in comparison to their colleagues interviewed in 2008, but also those interviewed later, in 2011 (also from Zagreb). Problem areas that 2010 interviewees emphasize (also problems identified in 2003 interviews) are problems familiar to majority of Croatian academic librarians for decades. What made 2010 interviewees to be so loud in their expressions of dissatisfaction can only be speculated - namely, 2011 interviewees were also from Zagreb, but they were the most optimistic and positive of all of our academic respondents. Maybe the position of those several academic librarians from 2011 (only 4) within their institutions was significantly better in comparison to those interviewed the previous year?

Croatian economy has been strongly affected by the global recession and it had its reflection in library management, as well. These last interviewees, more than any other interview conducted within the project, stressed out and emphasized the importance of sufficient financial support and good cooperation with stakeholders. Our last speakers have obviously had experience with scarce and irregular funding and were forced to look for other ways to make ends meet in order to secure the smooth operation of their libraries.

It is clear that Croatian libraries are rather far from culture of assessment, however, these interviews revealed that the attitudes and opinions of library leaders changed significantly in the last ten or so years. Libraries demonstrate positive attitudes toward measurement activities, especially the academic ones. However, the public libraries do not lag behind much, although their activities are not so much formalized as are those of academic libraries who are, together with institutions of higher education, undergoing the processes of external evaluation. Many of libraries in the sample collect data, not only statistical, but also data about their customers, they intentionally look for the customer feedback and react accordingly.

It is obvious that Croatian libraries still have a long way in front of them when it comes to performance measurement of their activities but these interviews showed that the things have begun to change and detected a positive inclination toward evaluation activities, especially in academic libraries.

A big number of libraries (public in particular) demonstrate the inclination toward the clan culture - those are small oases that function like a family (one library director even emphasized the intentional efforts made by the library to be perceived as such by the public). Team work, consensus and participation, encouragement to continuous education are dominant in those libraries. However, there are several libraries in our sample where, obviously, some other type of culture prevails, where human relations are ruined and our interviewees would like to leave those places and find work somewhere else.

34 interviews from our research create strong basis for us to draw relevant conclusions about Croatian public and academic libraries and culture of assessment. Although it was not possible to analyse in-depth all the data gathered by our interviews, those presented here provide evidence that the Croatian libraries are on the good way to the culture of assessment. This also emphasized another problem - in Croatia there is only one manual for performance measurement, the one intended for academic libraries (Petr Balog 2010). Although the public libraries can use it as well, it is of vital importance that a manual intended for public libraries be drawn in near future.

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## Sažetak

### **Stavovi ravnatelja hrvatskih knjižnica o knjižničnoj kvaliteti**

Cilj je rada prikazati i analizirati 14 intervjuja provedenih 2011. godine s voditeljima narodnih i visokoškolskih knjižnica u Hrvatskoj (deset narodnih i četiri visokoškolske) u sklopu znanstvenog projekta Vrednovanje knjižničnih službi i usluga: narodne i akademске knjižnice. S ravnateljima knjižnica razgovaralo se o različitim aspektima povezanim s knjižničnom kvalitetom, s ciljem definiranja vrsta kulture u tim knjižnicama.

Za istraživanje su se koristili polustrukturirani intervjui, a teme o kojima se razgovaralo bile su definicija kvalitete, odgovornost za kvalitetu, zadovoljstvo knjižničnim uslugama, poznavanje mišljenja korisnika o knjižničnim uslugama i knjižničarima te iščekivanja korisnika.

Intervjui provedeni tijekom projekta pokazuju da se knjižnična kultura znatno promijenila unazad nekoliko godina te da su voditelji knjižnica počeli pridavati znatnu pozornost aktivnostima vezanim uz mjerenje i vrednovanje poslovanja. Intervjui opisani u ovom radu ukazuju na početak recesije u Hrvatskoj i na naglašenije iskazivanje nedostataka financijskih sredstava od strane ispitanika u uzorku.

Rad donosi nove i neobjavljene rezultate istraživanja intervjuja s 14 voditelja knjižnica, a temeljni mu je doprinos da kroz istraživanje knjižnične kulture propitkuje postojanje kulture vrednovanja u hrvatskim knjižnicama.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** knjižnična kultura, Hrvatska, narodne knjižnice, visokoškolske knjižnice, intervjui.