

## **The information professionals in the Algarve region: a study of the users' perspective**

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**Abstract:** In this article it is presented the research carried out in the South of Portugal (region of Algarve) with the general objective to know the users perspective about the information services (public libraries and archives) and their professionals and afterwards define a marketing strategy to improve the image of these services. After the literature review it was decided to apply a questionnaire (quantitative approach) to the users and non-users of archives and libraries of the region. The data collected were analysed and although the perspectives of the users were very good there is the need to develop a marketing campaign to show the non-user the information services potentiality.

**Keywords:** Marketing study, Information professionals; Libraries, Archives, Portugal

### **1. Introduction**

Along the times, there has been a reflection about the role of the information and documentation professionals (ID) but now more than ever this debate is important due to the continued technological challenges along with the new economic, educational and social policies that Portuguese libraries and archives face and keep on overthrow. Among the different reasons that guide the way these organizations assure their sustainability is the fact that they recognize that its Mission should not be a priori defined but should be designed according to the society where they act (Marques, 2012). With the purpose of considering all the changes in society it was planned to make a marketing research that will contribute to know and analyse the image that the citizens have of the ID services and professionals.

It may be considered that libraries and archives adopted the marketing concept in three distinct moments. 1) on the 70's with a first approach to marketing with

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the market researches; 2) on the 80's, with a bigger emphases in the services promotion; 3) after the 90's with the development of users studies, that were considered very relevant to have the perception of its benefits to the institution (Singh, 2005). Nowadays the tendency is to focus in the user for the relational marketing (Marques, 2012) in order to obtain the users and non-user point of view and not only the perspectives of the head of the libraries and archives.

With the marketing research, it is possible to gather the opinion and level of satisfaction of the stakeholders related with services, products and human resources. With this information the directions of the institutions can establish strategies for the users and non-users. Marketing as a concept must be understood as a permanent process with two ways: as a technic to organize and manage the services and as a philosophy, concerning the attitude of facing the job and the public. Libraries and archives should listen the users, understand their point of view and organize the services according to that knowledge (Klaassen, 1999; Amaral, 2008).

With the purpose to know the view of the citizens about the role and action of ID services and professionals it was applied a survey by questionnaire with non-exclusive multicotomic questions, with more than one level of answer and free of ambiguity. The South Delegation of the Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists and Documentalists (BAD) is developing this project. Its implementation was carried out in the public municipal libraries (15) and archives (13) of the 16 councils of the Algarve region with the total population of 450 000 people.

Apart the purpose to know the image of the ID professional there were other specific objectives:

- a) To characterize demographically the users and non-users;
- b) To identify the reasons that influence the fact of being a non-user of the services;
- c) To evaluate the image and quality of the services;
- d) To know the information needs of the users;
- e) To evaluate the relationship with the ID professionals.

## **2. Method**

This study begun with the research on different databases and catalogues about public archives and libraries, users and non-users perception in order to collect information and make the literature review about other experiences. The literature review was very important for the design of the questionnaire to be implemented, mainly with quantitative questions. According to Malhotra (1996) and Churchill (1998) there are three steps that should be followed:

- a. the formulation of the questions;
- b. to write those questions and
- c. organization.

The use of this method was decided to collect data about an embracing and geographically distributed universe. This questionnaire was organized in four different sections:

- a. demographic characterization;
- b. perception of archives/libraries: image, quality and user's needs;
- c. collaboration with the ID professionals;
- d. relationships with the archive/library.

The questions were non-exclusive multicotomics with more than one level of answer, with the purpose of eliminate ambiguities. Two different questionnaire were created: for the users one with questions about the services and professionals in archives and libraries and the other one, shorter, to identify the reasons why they are non-users.

Before the application of the questionnaire, a test phase was launched in 2015 with the participation of ID professionals. The distribution of the questionnaire started on 2016, according to the number of resident population of each county, in all the archives and public libraries, to their users and non-users; on paper to give the opportunity to all citizens to participate without the need of using the new technologies and due to the aim to reach the non-users. To collect the maximum of questionnaires the initial deadline was extended until the beginning of 2017. Without the cooperation and the participation of the professionals of the region contacting and sometimes persuading the populations to fill in the questionnaire it would have been impossible to carry on this study, therefore the authors are grateful to them. The data collected were analysed resorting to Microsoft Excel for the descriptive statistics and in the next phase to SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) with the aim to find meaningful relations between variables.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

At national level there are few researches of this nature and in the region of Algarve they don't exist. Therefore, this research can be an example to be followed by other regions of the country. Through the descriptive statistical analysis the data showed that among the inquired people that are users of archives and libraries (303 answer on the total) their opinion is quite good:

- ✓ 97%- the services corresponded to what they expected;
- ✓ 90%- are satisfied, or very satisfied with the quality of the staff in the different services;
- ✓ 90%- recognized the good level of technical competencies of the staff;
- ✓ 87%- considered the services fundamental to the community;
- ✓ 83%- level of human competences of the staff;
- ✓ 67%- agree, or totally agree that the services are innovative;
- ✓ 54%- go to the library diary/weekly and 24% monthly;

- ✓ 50%- consider the services fundamental to the community.

The very positive point of view of users of archives and libraries indicated that the services available are adequate and contributes for the actual perspective of the communities.

The same kind of analysis was applied to the total of answers collected for the non-users of archives and libraries and they justified their detachment, with the selection of one of the answer to be chosen, and in the end with the option, other.

- ✓ 25%- don't know the space nor the service;
- ✓ 10%- don't use due to the opening hours;
- ✓ 8%- don't use due to the distance;
- ✓ 4,72%- nor the archive nor the library answer to their needs;
- ✓ 1,3%- don't recognize in their staff competences;
- ✓ 50,98%- answered other reason.

These data showed that although the level of satisfaction of the users was very high there was still a relevant part of the population that ignore the existence of the archives and libraries and probably don't realise the benefits they could take from their services. The results about the hours of opening and the distance should be considered to better answer to community's needs.

The analysis with SPSS will allow crossing different variables that will answer to questions such as: what age scale, which sex, with what level of scholarly and what situation about employment characterize de non-users of archives and libraries. For the users it will also be possible to know better their opinions related with the services and professional staff quality related with their characteristics.

#### **4. Conclusions**

This research was planned to take place in the Algarve region, in the South of Portugal, and a questionnaire was applied in the 16 councils, with the collaboration of archives, libraries and their ID professionals that cooperate in an intensive way in order to better know the region, in general, and their own council in particular. It represents a tool that can be used in future research and actions.

Although the results showed that the users have a good opinion, there are areas that archives and libraries could improve and develop to act according the needs of the community where they belong.

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