

Community Information Needs of Urban Population – The Herzliya Model

Varda Shemesh

Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to identify the community information needs of the Herzliya community, as a model for other Israeli urban communities. The term "Community Information" refers to information about the community and its services; information produced by and needed for the everyday decision-making and problem solving of the citizens.

A community information center in a public library can greatly improve the quality of life of the community. This is especially true in times like ours, when individuals and societies are struggling with the challenges of a changing life style, the information explosion, an increased life expectancy, a rise in the standard of living, and an increase of leisure time.

The public library as an information center, will only improve its status within the community, in an age when many organizations are struggling to justify their existence, to obtain public funds.

While unheard of in Israel, and despite that people in the field are aware of its importance, the public library as a provider of community information has been well-known all over the world for decades.

Familiarity with the community and its needs, is a vital prerequisite for the establishment of a successful information center. Thus, this study was based on the following survey questions:

1. Into what major categories can the day-to-day problems of the community members be categorized?
2. Where do the people of the community turn to for information?
3. To what extent do these sources of information satisfy their information needs?
4. Which information channels does the community prefer?
5. Where would the community want its information center?

The analysis of the questionnaire data indicates that the five main categories, that cover almost 57% of the concerns, are (in order of frequency): environment, education, transport, issues dealing with government offices, and culture, recreation and leisure. Correlation analysis between the frequency of the problems in the specific areas and a number of demographic and socio-economic factors was performed. Though some correlation was found between some areas, they were not consistent; consequently, no definite correlation between the factors tested and the frequency of problems in the various fields could be determined.

A distinction was made between local community information needs, and general information needs. It seems that more than half the concerns were local, and within most categories, there were more local issues than general ones.

The surveyed population uses a variety of general and specific information sources. It seems that within the population studied, there is a definite preference towards specific information sources.

The main source of general information used was daily and local newspapers. The Internet, in some categories, was a popular information source, but it was not the most preferred method.

The preferred means for obtaining information were those that included personal contact, i.e. telephone and face-to-face conversations with the information provider.

The analysis of the interviews indicates that members of the community often turn to the community representatives for information on various subjects including some not within their direct responsibility. This phenomenon would indicate a lack of sufficient and accessible information.

This study qualified the importance of public libraries as major community information centers.

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