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### **Shaping Our Future: Library Services for Youth: The interests and preferences of children, teens, and young adults who visit the public libraries in the city of Havana**

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#### **Introduction**

Studies of the public's reading tastes and preferences are a form of research that has been conducted throughout the world, especially during the last forty years of the past century and into the third millennium, by the institutions and entities whose work is aimed at a particular group or segment of the population.

In Cuba the public libraries throughout the country, as well as other cultural institutions, have carried out this type of study in order to understand their user's preferences and to be able to design or redesign the services including the cultural programming they offer their communities and to establish work strategies that correspond to the preferences of their users and the role and mission of each library.

In the past the R.M. Villena Provincial Library and some of the other libraries of the capital's library system have carried out isolated taste and preference studies that take into account the needs of individual libraries only. Other research, for example an earlier study directed at determining the "connection between the bibliographic collection and the reader's demands", was carried out biennially through the middle 90s. This research was conducted in all libraries throughout the country as part of the broader study entitled "Dynamics of the reader". This research has allowed us to know, in some measure at least, the preferences and interests of users by specific topics and titles. This project, as well as a taste and preference study done at the Villena Library a few years ago and a

more recent study conducted at the “María Villar Buceta” municipal library in Central Havana completed in 1999, has been important for the libraries of the capital.

One study that involved all of the capital’s public library system was only recently completed. To further fill this gap in our knowledge, the need to understand the tastes and preferences of the system’s users was added to allow us to design new work strategies, and, at the same time, contribute current information to the city’s cultural program in order to design an integral cultural strategy of the capital.

**Research Problem:**

What are the tastes and preferences of today’s readers and what are their preferences among the activities we carry out aimed at enhancing the culture of the readers who visit the libraries of the capital’s public library system?

**Hypothesis:**

The tastes and preferences of the children and adolescent users who visit the system’s libraries tend toward the topics of literature, history, and science fiction as well as such activities as book presentations and watching educational videos.

The tastes and preferences of young adult users who visit the system’s libraries are associated with the topics of literature and history and such activities as book presentations, book sales and music and poetry clubs.

**Objectives:**

1. To understand the tastes and preferences of the users visiting the system’s libraries, with respect to reading.
2. To understand the tastes and preferences of users visiting the system’s libraries with respect to the activities of cultural enhancement.

**Bibliographic resources consulted:**

The principal bibliographic sources consulted related to social research and communication. For example:

- Berger, Horst. Problemas de las investigaciones sociales.  
Dewey, Melvil. Sistema de clasificación decimal.  
Estudios de dinámica de la lectura realizados en la Bib. R.M.Villena, 1992-94  
González Castro, Vicente. Ese misterio llamado público.  
Goodo, William. Métodos de investigación social.  
Pardinas, Felipe. Metodología y técnicas de investigación en Ciencias Sociales.  
Viciado Valdés, Miguel. Informe de la investigación Correspondencia entre el fondo bibliográfico y la demanda de los lectores. Bib. R. M. Villena 1995-1996.

**Techniques and procedures employed:**

- Development of the questionnaire  
Conducting surveys

Carrying out standardized interviews  
Collection and compilation of data  
Tabulation of data  
Analysis of data

### **Development**

The provincial library recently completed a taste and preference study of users of the capital's public library system. The development and the fulfilment of the research's objectives and the results obtained corroborate and enrich our original hypothesis.

In order to achieve this study, a group of specialists from the provincial library developed a questionnaire composed of seven questions (see appendix) as a means of measurement, to be applied as a survey of a sample of 30% of the average number of children, teens, young adults, and adult users who visited the libraries over a period of six months.

Eleven of the fourteen municipal libraries that make up the system participated in the study. These libraries applied the questionnaire and used standard interview techniques with a total of population of 3618 patrons who visited their institutions during the survey period. This was accomplished in accordance with the resource availability, e.g. paper, pens or pencils, staff etc. The following results are organized by age group:

### **Children and teens**

A total of 1630 users were surveyed of whom 35% (578) were between 6-11 years old and 64.5% (1052) between 12 and 16 years old. Of that total, 60.4% (685) were female and 47.5% (645) were male.

Of the total surveyed (1622), 99.5% were students. The educational level of these respondents was divided into the following categories: Elementary 43.19% (704), secondary 54.7% (892), technical schools 20.2% (33) and advanced polytechnic institutions 0.06% (1).

Of the respondents, 58.1% indicated that they liked to read, 21.1% at times, and 17.6% responded negatively. Of the total of those polled, ten did not respond to the question.

Of the group who liked to read, 49.6% preferred to read at home, 40.9% preferred to read at the library and only 8.7% preferred to read in another location. The users who read at the library state that there they are able to read books and other materials that are not available at bookstores, that the library has a pleasant atmosphere or because their home environment is not conducive to reading. Those that read at home like the intimacy of an environment where they can spread out, read can read in bed and enjoy comforts not found in the library. They also like not being pressured with closing times.

At 54.8%, the reader's preferred genre is novels, followed in second place by the short story with 53.3 and in third place by poetry with 37.1%. The preferred topics by those polled are: in first place is literature, 50%, followed by science fiction 26.4%, history, 24.1% and sports and recreation 15.09%

Of the cultural activities chosen by children and teen users, respondents stressed in order of preference the following:

- 1- Educational and entertainment videos, 29.7
- 2- Game workshops, 26.1%
- 3- Book talks and sale of books, 23.1%
- 4- Talks on subjects of interest for children and adolescents, 21.1%
- 5- Art workshops, 20%

Among the titles of greatest preference mentioned by those polled, they stressed  
Harry Potter  
Lord of the Rings  
Alice in Wonderland  
La princesa nomo  
Viaje al espacio  
The jackal  
Great biographies  
Coloring books  
Journey to the center of the earth  
Textbooks (geography, physics, music, botany, chemistry)  
Greek Mythology  
History of dance

Those surveyed did not state a preference for particular authors.

### **Young adults and adults**

A total of 1988 young adults and adults were surveyed. Of these, 34.7% (691) were between 17 and 24 years old, 27.9% (556) between 25 and 40 years, 20.3% (404) were 55 years of age or older, and 16.9% (337) between 41 to 54 years old. Of that total, 57.1% (1137) were female and 42.8 (851) male.

Of the total surveyed (1622), 99.5% were students. The educational level of these respondents was divided into the following categories: Elementary 43.19% (704), secondary 54.7% (892), technical schools 20.2% (33) and advanced polytechnic institutions 0.06% (1).

Workers amounted to 37.7% (751), 30.7% (611) students, 17.7% (353) retired, 9.8% (196) were housewives and 2.4% (49) weren't working.

Those who like reading were 78.9% (1569), 14.8% (295) occasionally and 5.8% didn't like reading. Of the total of those polled, eight didn't respond to the question.

A large group of the readers preferred to read at home, 59.7% (1187), 30.9% (616) preferred the library and 5.2% (105) preferred to do it in another place Those who preferred to read at home claim it is more comfortable, there is no pressure about closing

time and that they have the book with them. Those who opt for the library, state that it is quieter; many of the books cannot be found in the bookstores; and the library environment is pleasant. Those who prefer to read in another place like parks, areas with vegetation and fresh air, and beaches because they see reading as a leisure activity.

The genres preferred by the users are, in the first place, novels at 63%, in second place, the short story at 42.25%, followed by poetry 25%, satire and humor 23.2%, and first-person accounts 15.7%

Topics preferred by those surveyed are, in descending order, literature 52.1%, history 32.3%, science fiction 19.7%, biography 17.5% and social sciences 15.2%.

Of the cultural activities preferred by both young adults and adults at the library, they emphasized:

- 1- Presentation and book sale 37.1%
- 2- Book fairs 18.2%
- 3- Music and book clubs 15.3%
- 4- Advanced cultural classes
- 5- Talks and conferences 14.6%

Among the titles of greatest preference they emphasized the following:

El Monte by Lydia Cabrera  
Máscaras (Masks)  
Jardín (Garden)  
Paisaje de otoño (Autumn passage)  
Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada (Twenty poems of love and a song of despair)  
La casa de los espíritus (House of the spirits)  
Paula  
Poesías de José A. Buesa (Poems of Jose A. Buesa)  
Tipos y costumbres (Social life and customs)  
Biographies of famous authors  
Biography of Napoleon Bonaparte  
Buenos días tristeza (Good morning sadness)  
Great biographies  
Gigi  
Literature about yoga  
Diario de Ana Frank (Diary of Anne Frank)  
History of art  
Text books about social and pure sciences

And they emphasized the authors that they prefer:

Lydia Cabrera

Leonardo Padura  
Isabel Allende  
Dulce María Loynaz  
José Ángel Buesa  
Mario Benedetti  
José María Vargas Vila  
Gabriel García Marques  
Pablo Neruda  
Amado Nervo  
Jorge Luis Borges  
José Cantón Navarro  
Albert Camus  
José Mancisidor  
V́ctor P. Landaluze.

### **Conclusions**

The results of the study confirm the original hypothesis. The proposed objectives have been achieved. The analysis of the data allows us to advance the following conclusions:

The majority of library users surveyed are female.

The ages most represented in the study are adolescents between 12 and 16, young adults between 17 and 24, adults from 25 to 40, and senior citizens 55 and older.

The school level that predominates in children and teens is junior high, and in the young adults and adults those from pre-university and technical school.

In the population's economically active sector the most represented are workers and in those economically non-active are students and housewives.

In the majority, users who visit the libraries, children and adolescents as well as young adults and adults, in the majority like to read, whether at home or in the library, with books and documents which are available to them in our libraries. This confirms the need for libraries as public spaces that enhance the culture and education of the population both within and outside of the institutions.

The novel, the short story, and poetry are the three genres preferred by the readers of all age groups surveyed. The topics preferred are literature, history, and science fiction.

The activities preferred by our children and teen users at the library are educational theatrical videos, game workshops, and book talks and sales.

The activities preferred by the young adults and adults at the libraries are: book talks, book sales, book fairs, and music and poetry clubs.

Authors preferred by young adult and adult users surveyed are: Lydia Cabrera, Leonardo Padura, Dulce María Loynaz, Isabel Allende, José Ángel Buesa, Mario Benedetti Y Gabriel García Márquez.

The preferred titles of the children and teens are Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Alice in Wonderland, Journey to the Center of the Earth, and The Gnome Princess, among others.

The titles most preferred by young adult and adults are: El Monte by Lydia Cabrera, Máscaras (Masks by Ramo Perez de Ayala), Jardín (Garden), Paisaje de otoño (Autumn Landscape, by Leonardo Padura Fuentes), Twenty poems of love and a song of despair (Pablo Neruda), House of the Spirits (Isabel Allende), Paula, and Poetry of José A. Buesa.

### **Recommendations**

Utilize the results of the study of the tastes and preferences in the design of strategies and work projections of the libraries of the Capital, as well as in the selection and acquisition of books corresponding with the interests and preferences of children, teens, and young adults who visit the public libraries of the city of Havana.

Design a program of activities for our public libraries that promotes reading and the cultural level of the population and corresponds to the interests and preferences of the users.

Present the results of this study to the administrative authorities and cultural and government employees in the capital, as well as to others involved in the development of the capital's culture, in order to demonstrate to them how the interests of this segment of the population are driven, and to allow them to establish strategies that contribute to the fulfilment of the long and short range plans of these interests.

Achieve this research by conducting a taste and preference study every two years in the libraries of the public library system of the city of Havana, to be able to determine how user interests are changing and to enrich in a systematic and dynamic way the work strategies established in conformance with new options and criteria. This continuity of study will ensure that the librarian's work with children, teens, and young adults remains fresh and vital.

Utilize the results of this study in the design of the Cultural Program of the City of Havana.

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