

Library as a Lifestyle – New Standards of the Young People’s Library Behaviour, Russia

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Abstract:

Every country has its own standards and specifics regulating a young person behavior in a public library, which particularly depends on the philosophy of a library towards its young patrons.

You are unlikely to find a special “youth area” in a Russian library, while it is the common practice in the USA and is widespread all around the world. However Russia is nearly the only country to have a network of regional specialized libraries for young adults, which has been operating for more than 40 years. Russian State Library for Young Adults is the methodical center for all public libraries dealing with young people in Russia.

For young people of today the familiar image of a library in Russia is rather poor: it is a library strictly divided into two zones – the lending library and the reading zone, where only 30% of collection are in the open access, where the most items are out of date and new arrivals are rare, where you can use the internet but there is no Wi-Fi or remote access to digital libraries, where one can hear “No” and “You are not allowed to do this” much more often than “Yes, sure”.

This presentation discovers how the changes in a library influence the changes in the library behavior of its young customers taking as an example Russian State Library for Young Adults, which has been recently updated and modernized.

Keywords: young adults, library behaviour

Library as a Lifestyle – New Standards of the Young People’s Library Behavior, Russia

Every country has its own standards and specifics regulating a young person’s behavior in public spaces, including a public library. We all know that young people’s behavior changes together with the external environment. These behavioral changes can become generally accepted rules and sometimes they are accepted as new standards, so most people start to follow them.

In this paper we tried to analyze the process of changing of the young people’s library behavior during the last 3 or 4 years, which we can observe in Russian State Library for Young Adults. This is the specialized federal library designed for young adults from 14 to 30 years old. Russian State Library for Young Adults is supposed not only to deal with young customers, it is also the informational and coordination center for all public libraries working with young people in Russia. It has a collection of 900 thousand of printed, electronic and multimedia items, there is a full self-service cycle for customers based on RFID technologies there, our premises are designed the way that young customers like, there are 20 clubs and creative groups in the library – starting with the Comics Club and ending with the circle for ancient Greek language fans. The library organizes a lot of activities like master-classes, studies, art exhibitions, table games battles, etc.

It should be noticed that Russian libraries used to develop “youth space” in a different way that our colleagues from other countries do. You are unlikely to find a special “youth area” in a Russian library, while it is the common practice in the USA and is widespread all around the world. Russia is nearly the only country to have a network of regional and municipal specialized libraries for young adults, which has been operating for more than 45 years. The last years we have been actively trying to introduce the idea of a special youth zone among public libraries in Russia.

Today we can state that the library behavior of our customers corresponds to the slogan of a youth zone of one of U.S. libraries: “Respect yourself, Respect other people, Respect the library”. But it was not always like this.

A comfortable place

At the beginning the majority of our visitors were high school students and senior people who lived near the library. Since that time we have renewed the library collection and have made it much more accessible, so now we can see that high school students are being replaced by college students – they can find in our library some materials that are not available in their college library (they post about it in the Internet) and also they like the working conditions here. Senior people do not always feel comfortable in the interiors designed for youth, so they are also being replaced by young people of about 30-35 years old.

Our customers like that they do not need to guess about the library rules - whether you are supposed to keep silent or you are free to talk. Just at the entrance the library is clearly divided into two zones – a “silent” zone is on the left side, it is meant for serious work with informational materials and on the right side there is an “entertainment” zone, where you can also find reading halls which are meanwhile arranged in a more relaxed manner – with a café, comics, a children’s room, a podium and TV screen, a rare books room and a room for group (and loud!) work. There are no written restrictions, but the rules are nevertheless obvious for all of our customers and respected by them.

Although you can take out the most of our items, customers prefer stay in the library. And this is true not only for studying. This is the phenomenon that has to be analyzed – we often see young people reading classic books such as Shakespeare, Márquez, Remark, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, etc. They read them in the library not because they can’t take them home (by the way, such books are most probably presented in their home collections), but because they feel the library to be the most suitable and comfortable place for such reading.

Another fact which is new for senior people but natural for young is that more than 70% of young people take their gadgets with them, such as laptops, readers, iPads, iPhones, etc. They alternate reading paper books and chatting in the social networks.

They like to spend an hour at the library computer desk waiting for a date or to use the library as a shelter while raining.

Feel free but respect the others

Three years ago when we placed the first padded stools (poufs) around the library, our young customers asked us: "Are you serious I can sit down on this?" They used to know that people normally sit down on chairs and work at tables in a library. But few time passed and now we see them long sitting with a book on a pouf nearly on the floor.

But they still respect the others: they enter into a stylized telephone booth to make a call on a mobile phone, they speak loudly only behind closed doors, they never put their feet with shoes on either on poufs or on tables (while we saw the contrary in some European and American libraries). Nobody warns them against that, this is just out of our Russian practice.

Both adults and kids do not need to be reminded to put off their shoes when they come into the children's room with a carpet on the floor (although shoe covers for adults are also available). And now if we see some shoes behind this room we know that anybody is in!!

They like to watch movies or to play music with friends, but they never turn the volume too high or speak too loudly.

They do not mind to leave their coats in a cloakroom, they used to do it because it is more comfortable and proper.

As independent as possible

They dreamt for independence, but they have only got it now. We've offered them the possibility to use the self-service station to take or to return books. They can also make photocopies, fill an order form for books and of course they can rummage on the book shelves - all by themselves. From time to time they move poufs, chairs and small tables from one hall to another where they need it more. We have noticed that our debtors prefer to use the auto-return booth situated outside the library on its face wall – so they can avoid the reproachful eyes of a librarian.

Lonely in public

They feel comfortable to rehearse in a room with a glass wall, they are not afraid to look awkward. They never miss a chance to lay down with a book or a laptop on the podium, so sometimes they fall asleep on it. Once in the library young people like to "check in" via the Internet, to tweet to all their friends and to the whole world where they are and what they do right now, and of course they like to post their photos from the library. To be lonely in public is normal for them.

Two heads are better than one

Very often young people come in couple and they look for a suitable place for a long time – they need a place for two to be isolated from the others.

They like a teamwork while searching for their diploma thesis or doing other researches, they crowd near the blackboard to make drawings and to discuss something.

Freelancers use the library as their working place. They come on the same time and take the same chair. Recently we've also noticed among our customers some young tutors teaching in undertones their pupils who are even younger than they are.

Communication

Young people are more relaxed than seniors, but also they are more sensitive to privacy and independence matters. Formerly young customers tried to avoid the persistent assistance of librarians. Librarians of that time were sure that they had not only the right but the duty to lead young people's

reading. Today a librarian offers his or her help only to a person who obviously needs it. And now our visitors are very comfortable to fill questionnaires, to answer questions and to advise other customers what to read.

No sooner had librarians stopped to impose their assistance, than customers seemed to like to talk to them as equals.

Feel safe

It is important to know that young people need to feel safe in a library. They want to be sure that they as persons and their belongings will not be subject to any harm or damage in this place.

Sometimes such certitude is very close to light-mindedness. It is significant that in case of loss they blame themselves, not the library and they still trust the library.

Old Ideas always become new ideas when they are well forgotten

Young people are often impressed by something that was common some time ago.

They like to put records on and to listen to the popular songs of 50-80 and they are turning over the pages of a book at the same time. They like to find a place to stay in private and to listen to a radio show or poems performed by great authors. Yes, they can find all of this on audio-books, but they enjoy the way a stylus swishes over a record.

They go by the closed showcase with rare books. They need not only to see books, but also to touch a cover, to turn pages, to breath the scent of antiquity.

The most grateful

Normally a library has to use all its energy to get any feedback from its customers: interviews, questionnaires, press review, etc. While young people being the permanent residents of social networks, just post all their ideas, messages, opinions and suggestions in their blogs or on a page of a social network.

Russian State Library for Young Adults is mentioned in the Internet several times per day. Some people pay compliments to it, others invite friends to come to the library together. Somebody can be very surprised to meet a course leader in the library while both of them supposed to attend a lecture at this time (OMG!). Another one is excited by the fact what a model and cute person he or she is – being in the library and reading. While the other one decides where to go tonight – to a school party or to the library.

Positive, friendly and enthusiastic attitude towards our library inspires us with great optimism. This means that young people of today choose a library from the great number of other options for intellectual leisure they have in Russia. And they make this choice again and again.

We are absolutely sure that if young people do not go to a library today, they will not take their children to a library tomorrow. And what is a library for in that case?