

## **APAT LIBRARY AND THE QUALITY PROCESS: CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT TO THE SERVICE OF THE USER SATISFACTION**

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The Agency for Environmental Protection and Technical Services (APAT) Library, National Geological Service Library heir, specialized in geological sciences and environmental topics, in cooperation with Quality Management Service, adopted the International standard UNI EN ISO 9001:2000. In 2006, APAT Library obtained the certification by CSQ (Italian Federation of Management System Certification Bodies) for the following process: *acquisition, catalographic treatment, internal management, preservation, protection and use of the bibliographic, cartographic and photographic library resources. Creation of an "on line public access catalog" (OPAC), providing information services (reference, local consultation, internal and external loan, document delivery)*. The Library, since the beginning of the quality process, chose as main objective the internal and external user satisfaction. This objective is consistent with one of the eight principles of the quality management, which is the user-oriented approach to satisfy the explicit and implicit needs through the relative monitoring and the continual improvement. The library is an open system, based on a dynamic balance between needs and services, request and offer, employed resources and effectiveness of the provided services. The user satisfaction degree is proportional to the benefits obtained and to the necessary effort. Libraries are open system articulated in different functional areas (sub-systems) strictly interdependent. A system is not only built by the elements forming it, but also by the relation connecting its elements. Libraries should pay attention to their users' needs. Suggestions and claims are carefully evaluated to eliminate dysfunctions and inefficiencies and to obtain the services improvement. Such service improvement can also be originated from an accurate analysis of the critical issues. The library staff employed in the attendance to the customers must interact with the users in the correct way, adopting the so-called welcome attitude, characterized by high professionalism and a smart *problem solving*. The quality management follows the four activities of the Deming wheel: *Plan, Do, Check, Act* applicable to all the library micro-processes. APAT Library's decision to undertake the way of quality, although highly demanding and conditioned from the human and structural resources available, offers significant advantages to users, among which the back-office activities rationalization, not visible to the users (identification of responsibilities, simplification and optimization of the job flows), with the subsequent front-line services improvement, visible to the users. Among these we underline: enlargement, restructuring and putting in compliance of the Library rooms; acquisition policies, coherent with the library mission, but also more responding to the users requests; a more effective, prompt and efficient communication about the status of the different requests; a deeper awareness of the staff to the reduction of the times and the discomforts for the customers (*Save the time of the reader*, 4th Ranganathan's law); re-engineering of the website of the library, in order to make easy recognizable and consultable the traditional information (geological e geothematical maps, periodical and monographical publications) and the full-text (thematic, normative and legal data banks) resources through the on-line catalogue; projects of valorization of the texts of the library (exhibitions, optical acquisition of cartographic material, etc...).