Presentation: EN 13 816 and its importance for public transport

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Introduction: What does “quality” mean in public transport?

Punctuality, security and cleanliness of both buses and trains are of the first importance. This would seem to be self-evident but even this statement raises questions. Punctuality needs defining, but that at least is measurable. From the objective point of view, what exactly is a “clean” bus, or “friendly, well-informed driver”. These are the main questions raised by the concept “quality management in public transport”. The relevance for our topic is obvious. This paper is an attempt to outline current developments in European standards and the opportunities and limits which they present.

1 The way to EN 13 816 – the introduction of the passenger view in quality management

Quality management systems were originally designed for factory production and consequently concentrated on the avoidance and/or recognition of errors, and non-delivery of products. Simply transferring this to the service sector is problematical: a faulty product can be re-called, poor service reaches the customer at the moment of production. Among other points which are not the subject of this paper, it can be mentioned that there has been considerable improvement in taking the passenger view into account in the recently issued EN 9000:2000. However a particular problem for adaptation remains in our case: we recognise the “double customer” in public transport – both the passenger and provider are customers in the context of EN 9000.

This problem, together with the expressed aim of the OPNV to impose more effective standards on a European-wide basis, led to the formulation of EN 13 816. Transport professionals, public transport authorities and representative bodies in different European countries, cooperated on this concept up until 2002.

At the moment, the prEN 15 140 standard, an extension of EN 13 816 which is mainly concerned with assessing quality of service but which also contains many helpful hints, is close to completion.

To obtain an overview of the “standard jungle” the following method is useful: for setting up a quality mqanagement system, e.g. for a company, use EN 9000:2000; EN 13 8916 is the best tool when taking the customer perspective into account.

2 Aims and methodology of EN 13 816

The stated aim is to focus on the theme of “Quality in Public Transport” and to enable sound decisions to be made within the framework of finite resources, to make agreements on quality comparable and to contribute to continual improvement in quality.

EN 13 816 is not (perhaps contrary to general belief) a legal requirement, but a guide to achieving the stated goals “in sensible circumstances”, i.e. being practical. This cautious approach results from the variety of interests which had to be taken into account in the compilation of the draft. The document contains both legally binding decrees (when they are designated as a "Standard") and recommendations.

The basic intentions of EN 13 816 could be described as being three-dimensional within the “quality circle” presented. From our point of view the most important point is that the passenger must be quite clearly recognised as the person travelling while the carrier and local transport authorities are seen as the service provider.

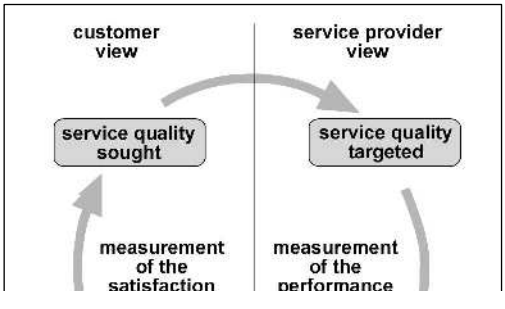

Image: The quality circle of EN 13 816

The importance of EN 13 816 is that it creates a system of quality management from this "quality circle". Starting with the identification of customer requirements, areas suitable for quality improvement are pin-pointed, taking into account inherent external problems. Using suitable assessment techniques it is possible to document the conclusions. Finally, customer satisfaction measures must be taken into account as these can, when required, provide information for action plans to close the gap between perceived and expected quality.

The standard includes a list of eight criteria (groups) which are separated in the attachment.

- Availability
- Accessibility
- Information
- Time
- Customer service
- Comfort
- Safety
- Environment effects

The flexibility of the standard is illustrated by the fact that it proposes neither concrete standards nor individual criteria, but leaves this as the responsibility of those involved in the application. In addition no mention is made of concrete quality standards. Above all, in the face of the very different conditions existing for public transport within the European countries, the pin-pointing of differences between city and rural transport are to be especially welcomed. This places more responsibility on those responsible for local decision making, to formulate their policies with care and not just to copy others.

3 What is important to achieve customer orientated quality management?

EN13 816 sets out a system of quality management which fulfils the demands, mostly internal company demands, of the performance measurements, coupled with customer satisfaction measurements. It is emphasized that EN 13 816 does not demand the explicit quality management system required by EN 9000:2000. Certification is also not a requirement and consequently is not included in EN 13 816. Some companies in Europe however, try to get their efforts assessed by claiming they are "in conformity with EN 13 816".

The first step is a calculated choice of quality criteria for the relevant public transport system. As soon as this choice is made, the importance of the customer's view must be paramount, however the conditions of the justifiable expenses of the exercise must be kept in mind, to avoid contributing to the building of a "quality bureaucracy". The standard recommends a clear division of responsibility between the parties concerned, enterprises, service providers, local authorities and contractors. This is necessary to avoid disputes when problems arise but above all to make the division of responsibility for quality criteria absolutely clear – something which, unfortunately, is not always apparent.

The lynchpin of successful quality management from the customer‘s point of view, which appears on the left-hand side of the „quality circle“, is sound market research. Detailed statements are expected, and observed quality in clearly formulated items and their arrangement in order of importance are essentials. Generalisations and global satisfaction are not enough because they do not provide an alternative to really effective measures. In addition, the customer‘s view is not really reflected if attention is paid only to the comments and complaints of particular groups. The costs of in-depth market research can be an inhibiting factor, but it should be remembered that because of the value of the information gained, the results can be used over and over again.

The measurements on the right hand of the „quality circle“ show the chances and risks for successful quality management from the customer‘s point of view. The effects of the different aspects of service quality have to be understood in the context of how they arise, e.g. from the inconsistencies between punctuality and connection. The challenge is to develop a realistic quality standard. The same is true for the formulation of measuring systems. Inadequate procedures can not only waste resources but can also exercise a negative influence on the whole service market if, e.g. they exclude bidders by their complexity. Calling for tenders should stress the goals rather than demand exact procedures, which has the added advantage of calling for more creativity.

4 Prospects

The fact that transport undertakings are increasingly taking EN 13 816 into consideration in quality management is a positive factor. Public transport authorities are taking this topic more seriously, if for no other reason, because of the consequences for financing which are not always easily assessable. As with quality management in general, the value of customer satisfaction and consequently for the covering of costs in the public transport sector in the medium term, is being recognised. However there is an inherent danger, that of creating exaggerated bureaucratic structures which can detract from the value of the policies.

References:

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