



FEEDBACK

The passenger is always right!

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Who knows better about the quality of buses, trams and metros than its users? Within the ENERQI¹ project – co-funded by the Intelligent Energy Europe programme of the European Commission – a methodology has been developed allowing operators to listen to their customers and to improve the quality of public transport based on customer observations taken on a continuous basis.

“As a user of public transport, I consider myself responsible in giving my opinion so that we can improve comfort, speed and other aspects. These improvements can be for me today, but will also be for my children tomorrow and for the rest of the population. I think that the opinion of people of various age groups is important because it allows different points of views on different areas.”

This is a response that Lisbon’s public transport operator CARRIS received when asking clients about their motivation to provide feedback. Passengers appreciate being heard and CARRIS has implemented the ENERQI tool – a quality monitoring system which is uniquely based on regular observations by local passengers.

The ENERQI Quality Monitoring System

In the IEE² (Intelligent Energy Europe) co-funded ENERQI project (2010-2013) a quality monitoring system has been developed with contributions from public transport operators and authorities. It allows continuous monitoring of public transport and identifies appropriate measures to improve quality. The impact of new measures on quality perception can also be evaluated and links to communication campaigns are easily established.

According to the European Standard EN 13816:20021, there are four sub-categories of ‘quality of service’: desired; delivered; perceived; and expected.

It is the perceived quality of service that is related to customer satisfaction and therefore

with the willingness to use public transport in the future. The ENERQI methodology concentrates more closely than any other methodology on measuring the quality of service perceived by the users.

The backbone of the ENERQI system is a web-based application to register observers, develop questionnaires, create and manage assignments, allocate them to observers, analyse data and generate reports which give input to the management of the operator or local administrations. This allows for the development of quality improvement actions. An innovative feature of the tool is the possibility of ‘alert questions’ which serve as a complaint management tool that fosters timely interaction with the operator.

Quality observations in eight European cities and regions

The ENERQI methodology is currently used by public transport operators in eight European countries to monitor and improve the quality of service and customer satisfaction. These sites are Arriva West Brabant in Noord-Brabant (NL), Carris in Lisbon (PT), Hebrós Bus in Plovdiv (BG), Holding Graz Linien in Graz (AT), OASA in Athens (GR), STP in Alba Iulia (RO), Tisséo in Toulouse (FR) and Transdev Burnley, Pendle in Lancashire (UK). Additional operators across Europe have expressed interest in the methodology and are currently examining its local suitability.

In Athens, it is the first time that the customers themselves evaluate services on a continuous and regular basis. The national energy agency of Greece, the Centre for Renewable Energy Sources and Saving (CRES), has implemented the ENERQI methodology in cooperation with the Athens Urban Transport Organisation OASA since February 2012. Athens, along with the other ENERQI sites, apply the methodology in order to:

- Create a database of passengers willing to voluntarily evaluate public transport
- Create a new feedback channel for passengers to report on their travel experience
- Understand the quality perception of their customers
- Identify key areas for improvement
- Monitor the effect of quality improvement actions.

A new feedback channel for passengers

Where ENERQI is in place, volunteers have regularly completed questionnaires on their experience on a particular trip. Observers evaluate criteria such as punctuality of the bus, attitude and performance of the driver, the overall quality of the bus and the bus stops. The operator, in return, obtains precious information to work on to achieve high level of service in the eyes of its users. The process gives volunteers a new feedback channel and results can be very effective for the public transport company or authority.

The help of customers is fundamental and a decent number of observers are essential in generating a good sample of customer responses. Recruiting observers has not always been an easy task. The use of social media channels and direct mailings proved to be most effective. A Facebook campaign has been running in Graz for example, which more than

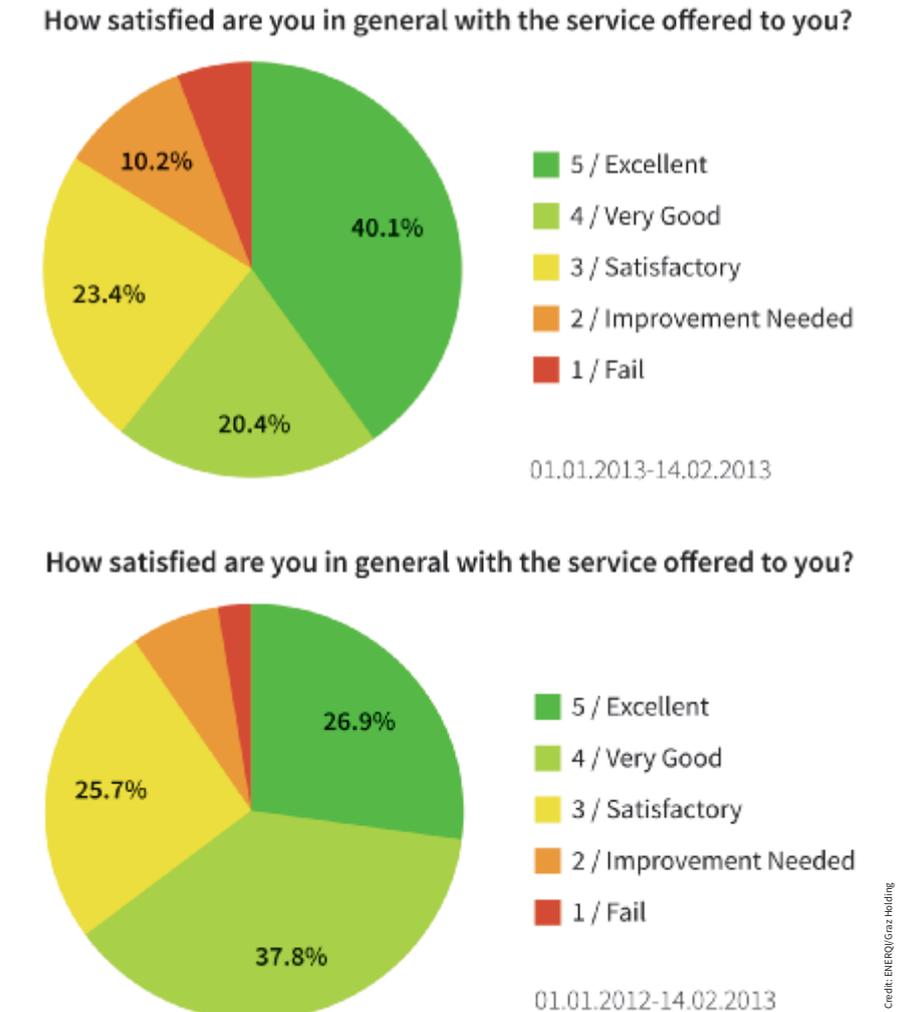


Figure 1 Survey results from Graz in January/February 2013 compared to results from the same months in 2012

doubled the number of observations undertaken – nearly 2,000 observations have been submitted by almost 500 observers since ENERQI has been implemented in Graz. Lancashire in the UK overcame initial difficulties to engage enough observers with the introduction of incentives to acknowledge observers’ efforts – everyone registering and taking part in at least two observations has the chance to win a month’s free bus travel. Since February 2013, an iPad Mini can be won in return for completing at least five observations in an end-of-project prize draw.

Tisséo in Toulouse relied on dedicated recruitment campaigns and users’ relationship follow-up to increase the number of active observers. To emphasise the special role of volunteers and to create a sense of ‘community’, Tisséo introduced the appealing term “Correspondants Tisséo”. Through two main recruitment campaigns, the number of active observers has grown from 350 (March

2012) to 1,700 (April 2013), who submitted 5,600 observations. Toulouse also launched a ‘special assignment’ to collect volunteers’ feedback on the ENERQI questionnaires, with overwhelming results – 91% of the observers supported the initiative and 100% asked Tisséo to continue.

STP, the public transport of Alba Iulia in Romania decided to distribute paper questionnaires instead of asking observers to directly insert their findings into the online database. “Because internet use of public transport users in Alba Iulia is limited, local university students have become mediators,” explains Ovidiu Hategan from STP. “Under supervision of their professors, each student coordinates a group of about 30 observers. They meet on the bus and exchange paper questionnaires which can be filled out during the trip.” It has been found that completing surveys on the spot increases response rates.

Results and quality feedback

Graz Holding in Austria analysed survey results in February 2012 and identified services that were perceived as 'good quality'. To improve satisfaction, dedicated driver training sessions were carried out later that year, additional ticket vending machines were installed and internal workshops were held to reduce the time needed to inform passengers about the disruption of services. The survey also helped to identify the most crowded routes on the network on which buses and trams have been replaced by new vehicles with a larger capacity. The operator's Passenger Service Point moved office and now works directly from Graz Holding's radio control station. "This way, the service team has direct access to current network information and within seconds provides information on disruptions a customer might call in for," says Gerhard Amtmann, Graz Linien's Sales and Network Manager.

The following cycle of observations in January and February 2013 brought results – driver behaviour in Graz was rated much higher (60% perceived it as 'very good' compared to 51% in 2012), and also satisfaction with information on disruption of service increased significantly (50% 'very good' compared to 20% in 2012). The overall satisfaction rated as 'very good' increased from 27% to 36%. "Our second round of ENERQI observations showed a huge increase of passenger satisfaction with travel information. The effect of our measures proved to be much wider than expected," says Gerhard.

Together, all eight participating operators have engaged with almost 20,000 observers over

	Price	Level of crowding	Safety and security	Condition of the stops	Condition of the vehicles	Punctuality	Reliability	Frequency	Comfort	Behaviour of the driver	Information provision	Handling of incidents and disruptions	Pre- and after trip customer service
NB, NL	13%	12%	5%	0%	4%	18%	13%	16%	6%	7%	3%	1%	2%
TL, FR	18%	6%	9%	2%	4%	17%	12%	21%	2%	2%	3%	4%	0%
LS, PT	15%	10%	8%	2%	5%	20%	8%	11%	15%	4%	2%	0%	0%
GZ, AT	15%	6%	7%	3%	5%	20%	17%	13%	4%	6%	2%	1%	1%
AT, GR	12%	12%	3%	4%	5%	22%	17%	15%	3%	2%	3%	1%	0%
LA, UK	12%	5%	6%	1%	11%	14%	19%	16%	8%	6%	0%	1%	1%
AI, RO	13%	9%	10%	8%	13%	9%	3%	12%	12%	3%	4%	2%	2%
PL, BG	17%	9%	14%	6%	13%	13%	7%	8%	7%	3%	2%	0%	2%
Total	15%	8%	9%	4%	6,9%	17%	10%	14%	8%	4%	3%	1%	1%

Figure 2 Ticket price, punctuality and frequency of the service are perceived the most important by Europe's public transport users

the past three years. A set of common questions have been integrated in the surveys undertaken within the ENERQI project, allowing benchmarking across sites to identify local strengths and weaknesses. The conclusion – all across Europe the costs of tickets are considered most important by public transport users, followed by punctuality and frequency of the service.

Working with the customers pays off

High value for money, low requirement of resources and capturing the travellers' perception rather than technical analysis of service quality is why operators applied ENERQI. "Applying the ENERQI methodology is a very cost effective approach, while the data presentation is simple to understand and relay to management and other interested parties," said Andrew Varley from Lancashire County

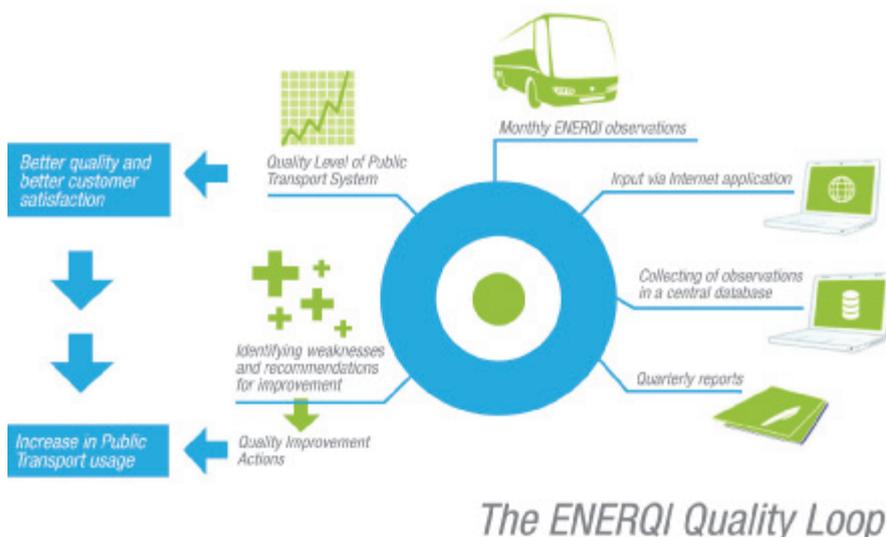
Council. "It gives an on-going true impression of the services on offer as reported by real customers. This differs from many other monitoring processes as they are often single or annual events – they therefore do not pick up on the day-to-day issues that can be received through ENERQI."

"For Graz Holding, applying the ENERQI methodology really paid off," says Gerhard Amtmann. "It can be very difficult to work with customers at times, however, understanding our passengers' perception of quality gave great results, objective quality improvements and an improved emotional relationship between customer and company."

There is a challenge, though, that remains – results and findings must find their way to decision-makers at all levels – because, essentially, the passenger is always right!

References

1. <http://enerqi-online.eu>
2. <http://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/>
3. www.polisnetwork.eu



Dagmar Röller works for Polis³, the network of local and regional authorities for more sustainable transport. With a degree in geography and communication obtained in Leipzig, Stellenbosch and Madrid, Dagmar has been involved in several European projects addressing the economic, social and environmental dimension of transport. This includes cleaner fleets, better transport services at large events and reducing transport noise. Dagmar is also involved in implementing the European Commission's Sustainable Urban Mobility Campaign – 'Do the right mix'.