



**Outcomes based measurement of public access computing in public libraries:
comparative analysis of studies in Latvia and Lithuania**

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Capturing impact is one of the most ambitious fields of performance measurement of libraries’ services. In the fight for public resources and funding it becomes vital to prove the benefits users gain from the interaction with libraries services. The same applies to the public access computing (PAC) in public libraries. The benefits that users can gain from using PAC in public libraries include access to ICT, technology training and assistance, expanded employment opportunities, conducting commercial transactions, access to and assistance with local, state and federal government electronic services, support to learning, communication and personal identity. The paper presents a methodology of measuring the outcomes of public access computing as well as acquaints with main results of studies conducted in Lithuania and Latvia.

The **purpose** of the paper is to share the methodology and practice of impact focused and outcomes based research into PAC in public libraries in two neighboring countries – Latvia and Lithuania. The paper describes an approach and framework and gives an overview of methods used in impact focused research into PAC in public libraries applied in studies that were done within projects “Third Father’s Son” in Latvia and “Libraries for Innovation” in Lithuania both supported by Global Libraries program of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Both studies are exploring both positive and negative downstream impacts in the areas of employment and income generation; educational levels; civic life and engagement; government transparency and democracy; cultural preservation and improved health. The **central questions** of studies are:

- What are the social and economic impacts of PAC in public libraries on peoples’ lives?
- What is the magnitude of these benefits?
- How do these benefits reach people who do not otherwise have access?

Findings from studies in Latvia and Lithuania show both similarities and differences in PAC infrastructure in public libraries as well as user activities and perceptions of social and economic benefits received. The studies prompt some very positive findings about:

- **The social role of library PAC:** experience of PAC users include improved social relations, better access to education and healthcare resources, enriched leisure and cultural life.
- **It’s economic impact:** PAC users report saved finances, increased earnings, jobs found, increased opportunities to buy things and services online;
- **The educational role of library staff towards diffusion of ICT’s:** ability to get support from staff is important factor for choosing PAC in the library, especially for low-skilled users.
- **Improved equal access towards users without alternative access and hard-to-reach groups:** Library PAC provides access and support to people from hard to reach groups such as unemployed, rural inhabitants, children from social risk families and other. Significant part of PAC users has no any other alternative access.