

## Real life impact of Public Access Computers' Centres in Global Libraries Romania

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**Abstract:** After about five months of operations some of the Global Libraries Public Access Computers Centres started to show positive impact on people life. Building an Impact Assessment Framework and implementing it in an effective and efficient way is looking like a tough and rewarding challenge.

**Keywords:** metric, interview, result oriented approach, customer focus

### *1 Introduction*

The Global Libraries program in Romania is being implemented by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). This program started in November 2007, with 12 pilot sites; the learning from these will be rolled out to much more extensive country implementation. Over 1,500 public libraries are expected to receive computers, software, intensive training and assistance in delivering customers focused services. During the pilot phase, IREX tested several implementation mechanisms and one of the most important was the Impact Planning and Assessment (IPA) process. Several important questions for full-program roll-out are now closer to being answered:

- What will a successful Public Access Center (PAC), in a public library, look like? What does 'satisfied users' mean? What metrics should be used to track progress?
- What topics are most important for public library users, which can be addressed through tailored services in public libraries?
- What tools and processes to use in order to collect this information? How the management of information will look like?
- How to ask librarians to cooperate in impact related data collection, in order to not to ask too much of them, and help them feel comfortable with data collection? How much is 'too much' when asking librarians to collect impact related data on PAC activity?

In order to answer these questions IREX organized a Library Capacity Analysis in a sample of 208 Romanian libraries, and Citizens Needs Assessment through interviews with 1,066 citizens. Both were done by a professional survey company. Together with the survey company we decided to select samples for the two surveys based on next criteria:

1. Library Capacity Analysis to be implemented only in localities under 15,000 inhabitants. About 97% of Romanian public libraries are located into such localities. All the Internet providers agreed in localities with higher inhabitants' number the broadband infrastructure is present. Also Romanian Librarians Association confirmed localities over this threshold most probably have adequate resources to contribute to program implementation.
2. Citizens Needs Assessment to be implemented all over Romania being, focused on topics of interest for citizens. Library users and non users were equally important for the survey. IREX considered is important to understand non users' needs, with the hope will succeed to attract new customers for public library services.

The main conclusions from the two surveys are as follows:

- 99% of the interviewed communities considered that they need a PAC
- Citizens reported interest in the following topics: (% out of total options)
  1. Healthcare for all (medical advice, finding the closest practitioner, clinics, pharmacies) - 94.6%
  2. Information regarding local government - 94.1%
  3. Information as to how to access funds or credit for small businesses - 90.8%
  4. Job placement 88.2%
  5. Funding sources for community development - 87.5%
  6. Communication on-line: creating an email address, talking on Skype - 86.9%
  7. Developing a business plan - 85.8%
  8. Information regarding accessing EU funds - 85.6%
  9. Banking information - 85.6%
  10. How to write a CV, and job interview skills - 85.6%

Those conclusions have been helpful to design results oriented activities and to draft the representative metrics to be observed during implementation.

In parallel with the Citizens Needs Assessment survey, Global Libraries Romania ran community meetings with all pilot sites to better understand their priorities and expectations. Those findings were checked against the Citizens Needs Assessment, and the overlap was almost perfect. Also from the statistical data is known about 8% of Romanian citizens are using public libraries services. This figure has been confirmed through Citizens Needs Assessment. This has been used as a triangulation method to control risk in assessing target group needs.

## **2 Metrics measurement: tools and processes**

IPA for pilot phase tested several methods and processes for data collection in order to better understand how to have a customer focus and results oriented approach. The metrics tested were either quantitative or qualitative in order to have relevant controls on processes.

Some of the most important metrics which were tested during the pilot phase:

1. Number of PAC individual users (registered users, active over a period of time)
2. Number of PAC total visits
3. Number of PAC users which reported personal objective achievement after using services
4. Librarians' confidence with the new PAC related responsibilities
5. Customers' satisfaction with new PAC services

During 2008, Global Libraries Romania organized quarterly meetings with the 12 pilot library sites. Each contained IPA sessions which were organized based on some simple criteria:

1. To use only friendly terms (plain Romanian) and customer focused approach in order to help librarians understand data collection
2. To introduce the librarians step by step into data collection and reporting, allowing gradual learning and making a tight connection between new PAC services, data collection and satisfying user needs
3. To try to collect only relevant data for the PAC activity and avoid data 'over-collection'
4. All sessions were planned and delivered through informal sessions/brainstorming rather than formal training. Everyone was asked to offer opinions and their feedback was always positive and constructive. The whole group felt they actively participated in the data collection design.

The first quarterly meeting was focused on what data should be collected and how, including carefully defining with the libraries what successful PAC services would look like. Now it was brainstormed possible definitions for 'satisfied user' to be used during future measurements.

The second quarterly meeting focused on questionnaires to be used in data collection. The assembled librarians commented on questionnaire strengths and weaknesses, and greatly improved the data collection tools. The main focus was to define metrics following pretty similar logic with actual libraries metrics.

During the third quarterly meeting, Global Libraries Romania heard the first successes! A citizen in a rural area, with difficulty accessing specialized medical practices, had successful kidney surgery. A lady found out about a good Urology practice in a big city, and made an appointment with the help of the librarian within the PAC. Also, we learned about the first people who asked for librarian help to fill out an on-line CV and complete a job application, and some of these later obtained new jobs. Hearing these success stories helped us define how often and with what content librarians would report back to Global Libraries Romania on the PAC services.

After this meeting Global Libraries Romania decided that it is useful to have a separate Librarian survey after one year of pilot project and also a further survey (handled by the librarians) to collect PAC users feedback. This was supposed to collect mainly qualitative data in order to understand how PAC helped users and how Global Libraries Romania affected librarians professional and personal life.

### **3      *Impact evidence and information for future action***

The last quarterly meeting offered the opportunity to analyze the above-mentioned surveys, and describe how the data collection and IPA work will be done in future.

At this point we had a good understanding of what a satisfied PAC user can look like, what data the librarians can collect and how they will report. We also learnt about other PAC success stories: people finding good information and guidance for themselves or for their kids; a driving licence test passed after practicing with on line tests; IT small business development using a PAC; or communicating with relatives abroad. The user survey questioned 1,217 PAC users, who answered questions relating to their perceived PAC benefits, see Fig.1.

#### **4 Lessons learned from the user surveys**

- *There is a lot of interest in PAC*
- *There is a group of library patrons ready and eager to use more sophisticated services*
- *There is a group of library patrons able to take action based on information they receive from PAC; probably we should pay more attention to encouraging this proactive attitude*
- *Content management, or delivery services, proved to be very helpful*
- *Success stories of users solving personal problems using PAC services appeared very soon after PAC services were implemented*
- *In some places library patrons volunteered to assist librarian or other patrons with hardware/software issues; this is a great resource for program implementation.*

#### **5 Lessons learned from the librarian surveys**

- *Librarians easily surpassed implementation barriers if they understood the final objectives*
- *Librarians are eager to modernize their services*
- *Most of the librarians understand that they have to create alternative services in order to keep their patrons' interest and maintain public funds for their activities*
- *Not all librarians easily leave their comfort zone to do new activities (travel, attend training, interact with new people)*
- *Some of the librarians need to see a more structured process in operation in order to consider implementing it themselves*
- *Some of the librarians seem to be very effective and efficient in data collection and reporting; if we explained the use of the information and provided them with conclusions, the process ran very smoothly.*

28 librarians working in the 12 pilot sites answered the survey after one year of pilot implementation. They were asked only two questions: "What were Global Libraries Romania strong points?", and "What were Global Libraries Romania weak points?" See Fig. 2 and Fig.3

This data was helpful to design the **Librarian Satisfaction Index** which will be one of the important metrics to follow. It will include details on how comfortable is the librarian in new PAC job, what further assistance needs the librarians have, what are the most important topics addressed by users questions, what other services PAC can offer

## **6 Conclusions applicable to broad program roll-out**

1. IPA should be handled in cooperation with librarians, using easy to understand terms and processes that are simple to manage
2. Satisfied PAC users (success stories) can appear in as short time as six months of efficient PAC management; this provides important early advocacy opportunities
3. If IPA is developed based on librarians' and users' needs, and results are consistently shared, librarians will take ownership quite fast. Is important to always use real-life examples to describe the connection between data collection and processing and the PAC activity
4. The Romanian Librarians' Association (ANBPR) has already expressed a wish to add the IPA indicators that Global Libraries Romania is collecting into their official data collection practice
5. Early Global Libraries Romania success stories look exactly like some of those from the Martin Luther King Public Library in Washington DC: there is a strong focus on finding employment and on education/alternative education methods (observation done during study visit in March 2009).
6. All these qualitative and quantitative findings are useful for advocacy purposes, to design new customer focused services within PAC or public libraries, or to improve the present services.

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**Fig. 1 PAC users reporting personal objective achievement and their weight into users looking for corresponding subject**

Subject	%	No of users
National minorities issues	4.76%	2
Flight reservation	6.67%	3
Project funding	7.61%	4
Environment	9.09%	7
Online tax payment	18.57%	8
Find a job	18.91%	45
Business development	23.33%	28
Bank loans	23.46%	19
Agriculture	23.91%	22
Working with government	27.18%	28
Tourism	28.23%	35
Professional training	33.02%	35
E-commerce	41.30%	38
Legal information	48.11%	89
Education	63.93%	358
Health related	65.05%	67
Communication with abroad relatives	76.99%	358

Based on these findings IREX identified the metrics and processes to be used for performance measurement during broad program implementation. It will be a **Customer Satisfaction Index** which will include: field of interest, success in finding the right information, success in achieving a professional or personal goal by using PAC services, how supportive is the librarian operating PAC, what other information or service can be delivered through PAC, what other information or service can be delivered through the public library, how easy is to find a free computer within PAC.

**Fig. 2 What did you appreciated during Global Libraries Romania pilot phase implementation? (max score 5)**

Internet based services	4.96
New services for library patrons	4.96
We learnt how to create a modern library	4.90
Computers donation	4.82
Knowledge acquired	4.79
Advocacy training	4.72
Relationship with IREX team	4.47
Better image within community	4.44
PAC Management	4.40
Networking with other librarians	4.38
IT training	4.36
Improved relationship with local organizations	4.28

**Fig.3 What was your biggest challenge during Global Libraries Romania pilot phase implementation? (max score 5)**

Long time to receive software	2.91
Whole process too bureaucratic	2.88
Too much travel	2.74
Long time to receive hardware	2.59
Too many trainings	2.53
Unclear working procedures	2.44
Too many persons asking information	2.29
Not enough networking with other librarians	2.18
Bad communication with IREX team	1.61
Library's users not interested on complex services	1.39
IREX team not prepared well enough	1.24