# Chapter 2
# Who Uses Public Access Venues?

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## ABSTRACT

*Who are the customers of public access venues, where do they come from, and what are their needs? In order to better understand the situation – success or failure – of public access venues, and how to move forward with policies, funding, and further research, it is crucial to better understand who uses public libraries, telecenters, and cybercafés. While there have been studies in different countries about users of individual telecenters or libraries (Becker et al., 2010; Gurol & Sevindik, 2007; Tiwari, 2008), it is difficult to fully answer these questions, even in a study of the magnitude of this one, which represents roughly 250,000 venues in 25 countries around the world. Nonetheless, we can use the data collected in this study to paint broad brushstrokes that give a better overall picture of the types of users of public libraries, telecenters,, and cybercafés. In this chapter, we discuss the main findings in relation to the users of public access venues, particularly in relation to gender, age, education, and income, as well as location (urban or non-urban)[1] of the different types of venues. By understanding who is using public access venues, the providers of the access, be it a public library, a telecenter, or a cybercafé, can more accurately direct resources to better serve their current audience, as well as identify ways to reach out to other marginalized sectors of the population that are being left out, in order to maximize the benefits of public access.*

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## GENDER DIFFERENCES

The first demographic variable we looked at was gender. Past experience, and other studies of public access venues, especially studies of telecenters (Abbasi, 2007; APC WNSP, 2009; Gurumurthy, 2004; Kuriyan & Kitner, 2009; Obayelu & Ogunlade, 2006; Ramilo & Cinco, 2005), indicate a significant gender gap in public access venues. The venues are, reportedly, visited and used primarily by men. Upon analyzing our data, we were surprised to find that in the countries and venues we studied, the gender differences that emerge are not as pronounced as the literature had led us to expect. As shown in the following figure, our study indicates that overall trends in the gender distribution of users of the different types of public access venues tend to be quite similar among men and women around the world, with small differences that we will discuss in detail below.

Public libraries appear to have the smallest difference in gender distribution of users, with a slightly higher proportion of women visiting libraries than men (Agosto, Paone, & Ipock, 2007; Applegate, 2008). Telecenters and cybercafés, on the other hand, tend to be visited more frequently by men than women. While the gender difference is smaller in the case of telecenters, in the case of cybercafés the difference may be more important (16 percentage points for cybercafés vs. 9 percentage points for telecentres). This data confirms that an access gaps still exists with regard to gender, but women were clearly using all of the public access venues we surveyed, and their use is not insignificant.

Commenting on an earlier version of this chapter, Francisco Proenza (personal communication) rightly noted that the apparent gender balance does not take into consideration the fact that 1) cybercafés are far more numerous than other venues (even if the numbers are exaggerated) and 2) public access venues are more concentrated in urban settings. Our data is not robust enough to analyze the urban/non-urban divide and how it relates to gender or other variables among users, but if we take into consideration the relative weight of the number of cybercafés vs. the number of libraries and telecenters, the gender difference in use of

*Figure 1. Gender differences in users by venue type (based on aggregated data from 25 countries in the landscape study; totals do not add up to 100%)*