



CoP Public Infrastructure and Social Services

Example of Good Practice

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Library e-services - e-library and online databases

Living Lab Tukums, Latvia

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1. Introduction

Library e-services concern the use of various digital tools to provide the inhabitants of Tukums municipality access to books and publications even if their local library does not carry them. Associated tools also allow people to access various Latvian online resources, such as the databases and catalogue of the National Library of Latvia. While some of these services are provided by the municipality, others are maintained by state institutions, but they are available free of charge. These services can assist in maintaining connections between urban and rural areas despite limited public transport options and poor-quality roads, but their benefits are not limited to urban-rural synergies.



Figure 1: Administrative division of Latvia (Tukums in orange)



Figure 2: A road near Džukste, Tukums

This example illustrates the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the provision of public services to minimise expenses while still ensuring that people have access to certain amenities.

2. Project Intention / Background information

Tukums municipality was established in 2009. It is located in the Western part of Latvia. It is part of the Zemgale historical and cultural region and the Pierīga statistical region. The total number of inhabitants (as of 1 January 2020) is 29 943. However, the number of people living in more remote parts of the municipality of Tukums has declined, and this has made the maintenance of infrastructure and provision of public services in these areas costly and inefficient. Nonetheless, one of the goals outlined in the municipality’s sustainable development strategy is to maintain connections between, and provide services to, communities located in different parts of the municipality irrespective of whether they live in cities or any of the parishes.

Compared to other municipalities in Latvia, Tukums has been active in the deployment and use of ICTs in official contexts. A survey carried out in 2016¹ found that just under half of all respondents (45%) used the official website to obtain information about the work being done by the municipal government, and a similar share of respondents (49%) noted that they would be happy to receive public services online (SKDS 2016). According to representatives of the municipality, the e-library service is widely used by the residents of Tukums to access various online resources.



Figure 3: Website of Tukums municipality

Furthermore, it saves times because people no longer have to go to the library to manage their account, and they can do most things remotely. As this is a combination of different services and networked databases, there are various sources of funding, though most of the

¹ This was a statistically representative survey. A total of 405 inhabitants of Tukums above 15 years of age were interviewed about the way they interact with the municipality.



funding comes from the state and the municipality, and some projects are also financed with EU funds.

3. Main Description

The e-library is a bundle of various services that allow the residents of Tukums to gain access to a wide range of literature, databases, and mass media publications online. An account is not necessary to use the search engine, but books can only be borrowed if you have an account. An account can be created free of charge, but this has to be done in person so that the person’s identity can be confirmed. The service is free for users, but individual libraries have to pay a fee as the online facility is maintained by a private company. It is also possible to access paid databases free of charge, but this requires the user to go to the library as access is tied to specific IP addresses.

The library (i.e. book lending) function is underpinned by the library management system *ALISE*, developed by the University of Latvia, which allows searching for publications based on several criteria, reading and abstract for the publication and placing an order for a hard copy. The history of *ALISE* dates back to 1992, and it is widely used in municipal libraries in Latvia. The e-library also provides a way to access other databases that hold, for example, digital copies of older publications.

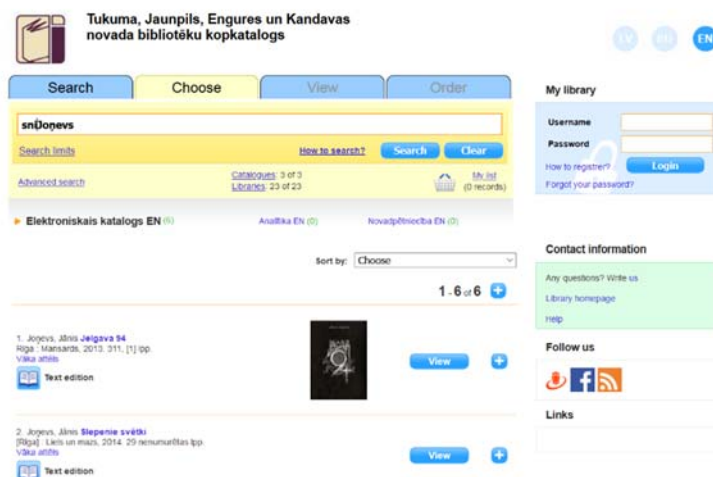


Figure 4: Tukums e-library interface
<https://tukums.biblioteka.lv/Alise/en/home.aspx>

There have been no significant obstacles to the implementation of this tool. Nonetheless, a possible limitation is that, while it is intended to improve access to cultural and intellectual resources, the possibilities of the people who live in more remote parts of Tukums have to be borne in mind, as not everyone has the necessary tools or skills to make use of the online facilities. In other words, the people who could benefit from this service most likely lack the skills and technologies to make use of them. Furthermore, our interviews suggest that the

equipment at the libraries themselves is quite old and needs to be replaced, but there is not enough funding for this purpose.

Nonetheless, this service has the potential to contribute to social and fiscal sustainability in the municipality of Tukums. Specifically, it allows the municipality to tackle the information divide by providing access to various cultural and intellectual resources. In terms of fiscal sustainability, it allows the municipality to ensure the availability of certain services despite limited infrastructure and public transport options. However, the wide range of e-services offered is partly dependent on a robust network of services provided by the central government of Latvia, which should be borne in mind when attempting to transfer this practice to another municipality.

4. References

SKDS (2016) Apkopoti iedzīvotāju aptaujas rezultāti (2016), [A summary of the results of the survey], available at:

http://tukums.lv/images/stories/2016.gads/Aktu%C4%81li/SKDS_aptaujas_rezult%C4%81ti.pdf

