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Public Access Points and their Importance
for the Use of the Internet

Since it became apparent that internet services such as WWW and email would become relevant for everyday life in terms of buying, bookings and reservations as well as administrational contacts the threat of access barriers and the so-called digital divide became a relevant issue. Politics and economy reacted with programmes in order to promote media competence and public access points. These PIAPs (Public Internet Access Points) are very heterogeneous in their realization and are running through a permanently transformation with respect to their contribution to internet use. Since the year 2001 the Digital Chances Foundation in Germany (Stiftung Digitale Chancen) offers an internet database with information on public access points. Currently, almost 9000 institutions are included. In this presentation these institutions are differentiated with respect to target groups, offers and providers. Based on the concept of the access rainbow the basic access barriers are presented. It will be highlighted which of them might be overcome by means of public access points. After this the shifting of barriers for the remaining non-users (offliners) will be discussed from a time-dynamic perspective. As a result, it is suggested that the so-called digital divide corresponds to the general education gap and generally disadvantaged groups in society. This is intensified by not-usage of internet services. Measures to overcome the digital divide which are also called digital integration have to be integrated in programmes aiming at the integration of the target groups concerned. Thus, there is a change in the meaning of public access points. There is recent statistical evidence that 10 to 20 % of the internet users who have access at home also use internet cafes for particular forms of use. Moreover, internet cafes can offer a place for organizers of target group specific projects. These forms of co-operation will probably be the future for the public access points which could be supported by corresponding information systems.