

IN COLLABORATION WITH



Département d'économie  
appliquée de l'ULB

**RSAEM**

RESEARCH SEMINAR IN APPLIED ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

**ADRIAN NIETO**

# LEARNING BEYOND SCHOOL: PUBLIC LIBRARIES, INEQUALITY AND LONG-RUN ACHIEVEMENT

Using Swedish administrative data linked to granular 1-by-1 km residential grid variation in library availability and services, we investigate how access to local public goods shapes academic inequality and long-run achievement. Exposure to a library closure during compulsory schooling reduces achievement in mathematics and Swedish, as well as overall performance, with effects highly concentrated among students from disadvantaged households and neighborhoods and those attending lower-quality schools. These early learning losses persist into postsecondary choices, reducing enrollment in selective university programs among students from less advantaged backgrounds. Mechanism evidence shows that reductions in library service intensity—opening days and instructional activities—drive the results, highlighting public libraries as a compensatory input in human capital formation that narrows achievement gaps and unequal educational trajectories.