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Publishing House:
Wydawnictwo Stowarzyszenia Bibliotekarzy Polskich
00-335 Warszawa, ul. Konopczyńskiego 5/7
tel.: (+48 22) 827-52-96
e-mail: przeglad.biblioteczny@uw.edu.pl

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ACCESSIBILITY OF LIBRARIES FOR VARIOUS USER GROUPS

Public benefit organizations, such as libraries and community centers, play an extremely important role in building strong, inclusive and cohesive communities. By offering a wide range of services and resources, they support education, culture, and social integration. Therefore, they have a huge impact on the quality of life of residents, also contributing to improving their socioeconomic status. The usefulness and sense of existence of these institutions result from several key factors, among which their functionality and availability are particularly important.

It means the possibility of using goods, services, and information, participation in cultural life by all people on equal terms, regardless of their age, gender, race, ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or their financial situation, is a fundamental value for these public institutions and influences their success. This concept is broadly understood as both physical accessibility, free from all kinds of barriers including communicational, psychological, and informational barriers, and a program and offer adapted to the needs of the local community and its various resident groups.

It should be remembered that access to cultural institutions such as libraries is a human right. It is not only a matter of meeting legal standards, but above all an expression of concern for all community members and striving to create a space where everyone feels comfortable and can fully use the services and resources offered.

To achieve this, it is necessary for libraries to seek to identify these needs. It is worth recalling that libraries, by meeting the expectations and needs of their current users and striving to attract new ones, can fully implement their mission, thus confirming the sense of their establishment and activities.

This special issue of "Przegląd Biblioteczny" (Library Review) is devoted to the accessibility of libraries for people with special needs. The

topic of library activities for special groups of users has appeared in Polish literature for a long time. This time, attention was paid to various aspects of accessibility, showing the benefits it brings to society as a whole and to these specific groups, but the authors also show that accessibility is a continuous process, requiring constant involvement of library staff and searching for improvements.

And although the texts do not directly refer to Total Quality Management (TQM), the interpretation of the concept of library accessibility presented by the authors corresponds to the criteria used by users to assess the quality of services, understood as the degree to which the requirements of the client-user are met, both in relation to the quality of the product and to the service consisting in its delivery. In the context of TQM, the basic set of quality determinants includes:

- service availability – convenient location of branches, appropriate opening time, short waiting time for the service, information about services that is formulated correctly and accessible to every buyer,
- competencies of the service provider, which are obtained thanks to professional preparation and training,
- politeness of the service provider – that is, treating the customer with kindness, respect and a sincere smile,
- trust – credibility of the institution, in this case the library, and its employees, care for the interests of customers,
- reliability – correct and accurate provision of services,
- responsibility of the service provider – quick and professional action taking into account the expectations of buyers,
- type of material means used – elements of the service visible to the buyer, such as the condition and equipment of the facility,
- knowledge of user needs – the service provider should try to understand the needs and expectations of customers,
- security – ensuring that the service and product delivered are risk-free (both physical and false content)¹.

The current special issue of “Przegląd Biblioteczny” presents changes that have taken place in legal provisions regarding the service of special user groups (Magdalena Cyrklaff-Gorczyca: *Communication and library services for people with special needs in the light of new legal regulations and specialist recommendations*). The needs of user groups that have not been taken into account so far in this approach are shown, such as pregnant women and people with small children (Dorota Grabowska: *Pregnant women and people with small children in public libraries in Poland*); seniors

¹ Joanna Michalska-Ćwiek: *Doskonalenie zarządzania jakością usług*. “Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Seria: Organizacja i Zarządzanie” 2015, v. 79, p. 193.

(Dariusz Grygrowski: *Libraries' activities to support and activate seniors*); blind and visually impaired people (Emilia Śmiechowska-Petrovskij: *Public libraries as an information space for blind and visually impaired people. Material and immaterial artifacts of access*); or people on the autism spectrum (Aleksandra Sztajerwald: *Library available for people on the autism spectrum*).

These articles are complemented by a review of the literature published in the last two years referring to the topic of this special issue.

We hope that the presented articles will meet your interest and that reading them will become an inspiration to improve your own work and the activities of your libraries.

Elżbieta Barbara Zybert
Editor in Chief
"Przegląd Biblioteczny"

MAGDALENA CYRKLAFF-GORCZYCA
Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń
e-mail: magdalena.cyrklaff@umk.pl
ORCID 0000-0002-4062-1966

INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION AND LIBRARY SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE LIGHT OF NEW LEGAL REGULATIONS AND SPECIALIST RECOMMENDATIONS



PhD Magdalena Cyrklaff-Gorczyca is the assistant professor in Institute of Information and Communication Research at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (NCU). She is library and information specialist and psychologist. Her research is focused on media, information, communication and library services for people with special needs, inclusivity in libraries, accessibility, media education and fact-checking. She is the chairwoman of the Information Verification and Cyberpathology Prevention Clinic at NCU. She is member of YUFE's Work Package for align support for people with different needs across YUFE partner institutions. She is member of the Polish Society of Social Communication, International Society for Knowledge Organization and the secretary of the Management and Marketing Committee of the Polish Librarians Association. She is the author of several dozen articles and several books, including "Bibliotherapy in education in the field of addiction prevention and health promotion" (2014) and "Media in the environment of people at risk of social exclusion" (2016). For the book "Interpersonal communication and psychological aspects of work with people. From cultural institutions to business" (2023) she received the Adam Łysakowski Scientific Award of the SBP in 2024.

KEYWORDS: Communication. Inclusive communication. Information and communication accessibility. People with special needs. Library services. Inclusive library.

ABSTRACT: Thesis/purpose of the article – The aim of the article is to determine the barriers to and opportunities for people with special needs in the context of effective communication with library services. First, the terminology and provisions of the *Act on ensuring accessibility for people with special needs* of 2019 are discussed. Then, general and detailed rules for communicating with selected groups of readers are distinguished and examples of adapting some library services to their needs are given. Finally, attention is paid to the integrative role of the library and to universal tips for effective interpersonal communication which increase the chances of effective communication in the library among both healthy people and those with difficulties. **Research methods** – The method used is analysis and criticism of sources and of literature on the subject. **Key results/conclusions** – People with special needs are a very diverse group. The basis for their effective use of library services is the identification of barriers and opportunities in the field of communication and reception of information. The recommendations prepared in the text enable free communication with various people, and thus increase their level of satisfaction with the service in the library.

INTRODUCTION

The changes that have been introduced into human life with the expansion of globalization processes are constantly deepening. They are supported by progressive technological development and the transformation of the industrial economy into a system based on information and knowledge. On the one hand, we have increasingly better access to the Internet, products, and services, and on the other, in some regions of the world and communities, divisions and inequalities are deepening leading to exclusion. Exclusion results from belonging to different social groups occupying different social positions or with difficult access to valued goods (Sztompka, 2006). This may, for example, be the social exclusion of some disabled and poor people resulting from the inability to participate in important aspects of social life (see, e.g., Giddens, 2004; Fedorowicz-Kruszewska, Cyrklaff, 2016). It may also be digital exclusion, for example of seniors and rural residents who do not have regular access to digital and information technologies and/or cannot use them effectively (see, e.g., Batorski, 2009; Cyrklaff, 2016; Fedorowicz-Kruszewska, Cyrklaff, 2016).

The pandemic and the resulting lockdown contributed to the weakening of mental, physical, and social conditions, and as a result to deepening exclusion in many areas of personal and professional life (Consumer Federation, 2021; *Human Power Report*, 2020; *Mental condition...*, 2021). Unstable conditions of functioning in the modern world, constant exposure to disasters, diseases, and warfare increase people's sense of threat and fear. Information redundancy, overstimulation, disorders resulting from prolonged online exposure and growing social and professional demands contribute to an increase in stress levels and greater susceptibility to the

occurrence of disorders. The World Health Organization warns that in 2019, 970 million people around the world suffered from mental illness (every eighth person). These people most often suffered from depression and anxiety disorders (*World mental health...*, 2022). Therefore, not only somatic disease or disability, but also a decline in mental health results in more and more people needing support and special conditions that support their functioning in various situations.

Over the last few decades, legal acts have begun to appear in many countries that draw attention to the difficulties of various groups of people in meeting their life needs, in particular improving their situation in terms of access to products and services and increasing their participation in education, culture, and professional activity. In Poland, only recently, in 2019, the *Act on ensuring accessibility for people with special needs* appeared, which is an important step in equalizing opportunities and ensuring access to goods on an equal basis with people who do not have difficulties in this area. Therefore, the aim of this article is to determine the barriers and opportunities of people with special needs in the context of their effective communication with library services. The starting point here will be the above-mentioned act, followed by the rules of communicating with selected groups of readers who require adaptation both of verbal messages or their substitute, as well as of technological equipment. Finally, attention is paid to several important elements of effective, integrative and inclusive communication. In preparing the text, the method of analysis and criticism of sources and literature on the subject was used, mainly guidelines on alternative or inclusive forms of communication with people with special needs.

PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LAW IN POLAND

The existing law in Poland had not comprehensively addressed the issue of accessibility to products or services for people with various difficulties. However, there have been laws and regulations devoted specifically to people with disabilities, who are most exposed to various types of exclusion (see, e.g., *the Act of August 19, 2011 on sign language...*). In 2012, Poland ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 9 of this document concerns accessibility, which means providing people with disabilities with "access, on equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communication, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public". (*Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities...*, 2012, p. 7).

A comprehensive approach to the topic of accessibility was introduced in Poland only in 2019. Two important legal acts were published then: *the Act of July 19, 2019 on ensuring accessibility for people with special needs* and *the Act of April 4, 2019 on the digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities*. The issue of accessible communication is clearly mentioned in both documents, but in the latter mainly in the context of digital accessibility. However, in this article it is worth devoting some space to the issues raised in the first document, which introduces the concept of people with special needs. According to the act, a person with special needs is one “who, due to his or her external or internal characteristics, or due to the circumstances in which he or she finds himself or herself, must take additional actions or apply additional measures to overcome a barrier in order to participate in various spheres of life on an equal basis with other persons” (*Act of July 19, 2019 on ensuring accessibility...*, 2019, p. 1). The group of people with special needs will include people with disabilities, chronically and temporarily ill people, and those with physical, mental, and social difficulties. Everyone can be a person with special needs at different stages of their life. An example is a person traveling with a heavy suitcase. She has difficulty moving and has a particular need to use the elevator rather than the stairs. People with special needs will therefore include:

- people with mobility disabilities who move for example in a wheelchair or on crutches,
- people who have other difficulties in moving, e.g. people pushing a stroller with a child, carrying large luggage, etc.,
- people with visual disabilities,
- people with hearing disabilities,
- people with intellectual disabilities,
- chronically ill people whose symptoms may cause health and communication difficulties,
- people with mental disorders,
- people who have difficulty communicating,
- people of unusual height,
- seniors,
- children,
- pregnant women,
- people traveling with heavy luggage (*How to use the law...*, 2022).

“Accessibility is the ability for everyone to use services, products, information and places equally and at all times. Accessibility makes people with special needs independent from others. They can also fully participate in social life. Their age, fitness or illness doesn’t matter”. They can, like others, use, for example, a health clinic, library, school, or office (*How*

to use the law..., 2022, p. 8). Accessibility can be ensured through universal design, i.e. designing products, services, and environments so that they are to the greatest possible extent useful for everyone, not only people with special needs (*Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities...*, 2012). To ensure accessibility, you can also use the so-called reasonable accommodation standard, i.e. adaptation by introducing changes to products, services, or the environment without imposing an excessive burden (*Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities...*, 2012).

Pursuant to the Act, public entities are obliged to provide people with special needs with architectural, informational, communicational, and digital accessibility, meeting at least the minimum guidelines in this regard. In the context of this article, the issues of information and communication accessibility are important, as they influence the nature of contact and communication with a person with special needs. A very diverse range of measures can be used in the process of taking into account the accessibility of communication for people with disabilities and other groups of people with special needs. The provision in Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities indicates such means as: “languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large font, accessible multimedia, as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means, and formats of communicating in writing including accessible information and communication technology” (*Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities...*, 2012, p. 4)¹.

In the context of ensuring minimum information and communication accessibility, public entities, including libraries, are legally obliged to ensure at least:

1. customer service via e-mail, SMS, MMS or otherwise using the Internet; video connection via the Internet; an available website or the use of an online sign language interpreter;
2. installing devices necessary to serve hard of hearing people, e.g. an induction loop or FM system which make it easier to hear and distinguish speech for people wearing hearing aids;
3. placing information on the scope of its activities on the website of the public entity: this may be a file with machine-readable text, a recording in Polish Sign Language, and/or information written in an easy-to-read text;
4. ensuring communication in the form required by the client who will submit an application in this matter to a given entity with justifica-

¹ For more information on media and technologies supporting the communication process of people with special needs, see: Małgorzata Fedorowicz-Kruszewska and Magdalena J. Cyrklaff (2016), *Media w środowisku osób zagrożonych wykluczeniem społecznym*. Toruń: Wyższa Szkoła Bankowa w Toruniu.

tion (*Act of July 19, 2019 on ensuring accessibility...*, 2019; *How to use the law...*, 2022).

Libraries, like other public entities, are obliged to provide the above forms of support for the communication process. However, it is also important to train library staff in direct communication with people with special needs, especially those who may have great difficulties in understanding the content or form of both verbal and non-verbal statements. In order to facilitate this process, the next part of the article lists general and specific tips that can help librarians better understand the needs and capabilities of their readers.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE AND SERVE PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE LIBRARY

Readers with special service needs will include a very diverse group of people. With some of them, verbal and non-verbal communication will not be difficult because they will only need, for example, support in moving from one place to another (e.g. in the absence of an elevator – help carrying heavy luggage to the floor). When contacting other people, for example people with disabilities, it will be important to adapt in terms of verbal and non-verbal communication. Communication with one's surroundings, especially for people with disabilities, may be difficult due to, for example, the intensity of the disability, as well as failure to participate in rehabilitation, difficulties in treatment, or difficulties in the process of education and activation. Due to the social and digital exclusion of some people with disabilities, they have difficulty accessing specialized equipment that facilitates the use of information and communication. (Cyrklaff-Gorczyca, 2023). Regardless of the etiology, or the approach to one's disability, disorder, or temporary indisposition, every person deserves equal treatment and an inclusive form of communication. The following tips may help with this². The starting point will be general recommendations for contact with people with special needs:

1. Do not use outdated and pejorative terms such as "cripple", "retarded", "differently abled", "invalid", "psycho", etc.
2. You can use the expression "disabled person" rather than the adjective "disabled", etc.

² This part of the article is a shortened and edited fragment of the guidelines from the author's book, which contains more extensive characteristics of the functioning of people with special needs and more detailed guidelines for effective communication with them; see Magdalena Cyrklaff-Gorczyca (2023), *Komunikacja interpersonalna i psychologiczne aspekty pracy z ludźmi; od instytucji kultury do biznesu*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe i Edukacyjne SBP.

3. Negative terms such as “suffering” or “diseased” should be avoided. You could say, for example, “person with Down syndrome” instead of “person suffering from Down syndrome”.
4. It is worth following the rule: Before helping – ask. Sick and disabled people cope well in an adapted and friendly environment and want to be treated as independent people. However, when you see that the person may need support, you can ask how to help and follow their instructions.
5. Use moderation and tact when initiating physical contact. You cannot suddenly grab a person or touch their things, including a stroller, because it is part of their personal space.
6. It’s worth thinking before you say something. A conversation with a sick or disabled person should be conducted as with a healthy person, i.e. address them directly and not, for example, their assistant or translator. Additionally, you must respect the person’s privacy and not ask about their disability unless they bring up the subject themselves.
7. Respond politely to requests from people with disabilities. There are situations when someone asks for adjustments to be made for them. Usually it’s not a complaint, just information that they feel comfortable enough in someone’s company or place that they start talking about their needs. It is then worth reacting positively, and such a person will certainly return to the institution and encourage others to use it (see Cohen, 2024, pp. 6-8).
8. “Towards every person – healthy, sick, disabled, with disorders, or those who look unusual – you must behave politely, do not make fun of them, and try to live in harmony. That’s all there is to it, but in many situations it’s a lot” (Cyrklaff-Gorczyca, 2023, p. 163).

COMMUNICATION WITH PEOPLE WITH VISUAL DISABILITIES

People with visual disabilities cannot use standard sources of information. Blind people analyze things through the auditory channel (e.g. by listening to audiobooks) or tactile channel (e.g. by reading Braille texts with their fingertips). Visually impaired people require appropriate editorial preparation of the text (e.g. texts printed in an enlarged font) or technical devices supporting reading (e.g. electronic enlargers) (Fedorowicz-Kruszewska, Cyrklaff, 2016). When communicating with a person with a visual disability, it is worth remembering the following rules:

1. You should feel free to use idiomatic expressions such as “See you later”, as it is natural for such people. They themselves often use this type of expression.

2. Always warn a blind person before attempting physical contact with him/her. It is best to mention your name at the beginning of the first meeting, and in a professional situation also your function, for example "I am Marta. I am an employee of the Lending Agency". If you see that a person wants to sit down, you can, after informing them, guide their hand to the back of the chair.
3. When walking with a blind person, describe the surroundings you will pass and indicate potential obstacles, such as stairs (it is worth specifying whether they are "up" or "down" stairs). You should warn about an obstacle in a specific way, because just shouting "watch out!" won't let a blind person know what to do. You need to give them specific directions that don't require visual orientation, for example, instead of saying, "Turn right at the office supplies shelf", you could say, "Go straight to the end of the aisle, then turn right".
4. Blind people sometimes use a guide dog or a white cane. The guide dog must not be distracted, e.g. touched, stroked or given treats. If you are walking together, walk on the opposite side from the dog. As for the cane, it is part of personal space and must not be touched or moved.
5. It is recommended that labels and markings be written in clear letters that contrast with the background. Visually impaired people find it easiest to read text written in capital white letters on a black background.
6. Bright light may be a hindrance for visually impaired people, so it is worth positioning it so that it does not hurt the eyes and does not reflect on, for example, shiny objects.
7. When communicating with people with visual disabilities, remember to clearly indicate verbally that you are addressing them. Eye contact or non-verbal expression must be replaced with clear verbal messages.
8. A person with impaired vision should be provided with an alternative form of reading materials if they request such a thing during training or in the process of using a library. This may include, for example, increasing the font size in the text, providing a magnifying glass, using computer equipment with software that enlarges the text on the computer monitor, or inviting an assistant.
9. Blind and partially sighted people are helped by recording in longer formats (e.g. lectures). You should be open to this type of possibility, while emphasizing that such recordings, in accordance with copyright law, should be used only for personal use.
10. Blind people often use portable devices such as notebooks, watches, or phones where there is a "text to speech" option or a "read aloud" option. You should not point out to the person that you can some-

times hear the software reading the text, because very often this is the only way for them to quickly find the information they need. Reading is often done at an accelerated pace because people with visual impairments “read” faster and more effectively this way.

11. During training or other meetings, you must read aloud what is written on the board or what is in the printed materials distributed. You can also make an electronic version of the materials available to participants in advance (Cohen, 2024; Fedorowicz-Kruszewska, Cyrklaff, 2016).

COMMUNICATION WITH PEOPLE WITH HEARING DISABILITIES

There are mainly two groups among people with hearing impairments: those who are deaf and those who are hard of hearing. This division determines not only the depth of hearing damage, but also biological, rehabilitation, family and social factors. Hard of hearing people are those who have mastered the national language (e.g. Polish), can read lips and writing in their native language, and often also speak. Deaf people, on the other hand, usually have a profound or significant level of hearing impairment and have great difficulty lip-reading. They communicate mainly in sign language because they usually do not speak or their speech is incomprehensible to those around them (Domagała-Zyśk, 2014). When communicating with a person with a hearing disability, it is worth remembering the following rules:

1. Deaf people do not consider themselves disabled people, but as a separate linguistic and cultural group with their own language (in Poland, Polish Sign Language, or PJM) and their own culture, tradition, and customs. They want the noun Deaf to be capitalized.
2. The term “deaf and dumb” should be avoided because it is interpreted as stigmatizing, as it indicates a person who is deaf, unable to speak, and has no language of their own.
3. Most people who have lost their hearing relatively recently usually do not use sign language and use devices such as hearing aids or writing devices in everyday communication. These people often inform their interlocutors what form of communication they prefer.
4. In the case of a complicated, demanding conversation, the most effective way to communicate with a person using sign language is the support of a sign language interpreter. In simple situations, writing messages on a piece of paper should be enough.
5. It is worth telling a person with a hearing disability directly if you do not understand what they are saying. However, if they signal that they do not understand a sentence, it should not be repeated in the same form, but paraphrased.

6. When a sign language interpreter is present during a conversation, you should look at the deaf person, not at the interpreter. It is worth maintaining eye contact with a person with a hearing disability and addressing them directly (e.g. "What would you like to drink?") and not to the interpreter ("Please ask what she would like to drink").
7. You must talk to a person with a hearing disability with your face turned towards them. This will make it easier for them to read lips if you can do so. It is also better to talk in a quiet, well-lit room than in a large crowded hall. You should also remember to avoid standing near a light source, for example a window, the glare of which may make the interlocutor's face blurry. This then makes lip reading impossible.
8. You should speak clearly, which helps in reading the context of the statement in the paragraph. You should not chew gum, smoke a cigarette or cover your mouth.
9. You should not shout at a person with a hearing disability. If they wear a hearing aid, it is certainly adjusted to receive normal voice levels. A raised voice or shout will be perceived as distorted.
10. Information addressed to deaf people, especially for whom Polish is a foreign language, must be written in a simple, easy-to-understand language. You can use sentence equivalents for this (Cohen, 2024; Cyrklaff-Gorczyca, 2023, pp. 174-176).

COMMUNICATION WITH PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL AND OTHER DISABILITIES

Motor disability covers a very broad spectrum of problems related to moving, maintaining proper body posture, and performing various activities with hands. As in other disabilities, we distinguish congenital and acquired disorders of the musculoskeletal system. People with mobility disabilities can use, for example, prostheses, crutches, canes, or manual and electric wheelchairs to move around more easily. It is important to adapt public spaces to their needs, which means, first of all, eliminating architectural barriers, and even better, designing the space according to the principles of universal design (Cyrklaff-Gorczyca, 2023, pp. 177-179). When communicating with a person with physical disabilities, it is worth remembering the following rules. Many of them will also be useful in contact with other people, for example short people.

1. Ramps and doors that are adapted for disabled people's traffic should always be open and free from any obstacles, for example waste bins.
2. People using a wheelchair often cannot reach things, so it is important to place as many items as possible within their reach or eliminate obstacles that make access to them difficult.

3. When talking to a person in a wheelchair, it is a good idea to sit on a chair or stand at a short distance so that they do not have to strain their neck while making eye contact with a person standing.
4. If the counter in an institution is high, it is worth stepping out from behind it to serve a person in a wheelchair. It is also a good idea to offer a pad for filling out documents or signing, if necessary.
5. It is worth marking the best adapted route to and inside the library building, so that people using wheelchairs, canes, or crutches can use the most convenient way to get there.
6. It is worth training the building staff so that they are aware of how to help people with mobility disabilities or provide them with information.
7. People walking with crutches or canes should not be grabbed by their arms, as they use them to maintain balance. You should also not open a door from behind a person with mobility difficulties, as they may lean on it to open it. Opening the door may cause them to fall.
8. Inform verbally or with warning signs that the floor is wet. In the fall and winter, when floors are often wet, it is worth putting out doormats.
9. There are people who, at first glance, do not notice that they may have mobility problems. At an exhibition, in a long hall or in other spaces, it is worth providing seats/benches so that people with, for example, circulation problems can rest on them.
10. People with hand or wrist problems should be asked if they want help in reaching or lifting objects, opening doors, or operating some equipment (e.g. scanner, coffee machine) (Cohen, 2024; Cyrklaff-Gorczyca, 2023, p. 179-180).
11. It is worth familiarizing yourself with the so-called assistive technologies, e.g. with an alternative keyboard (with large keys), an alternative computer mouse (trackball) or an arm rest for people who have difficulty keeping their hands in one position for a long time. Sometimes it may be a good idea to rent such equipment from an institution that has already purchased it and check for free system solutions within the laptop, such as protection against entering additional characters by accidentally pressing the keyboard (Cyrklaff-Gorczyca, 2023, p. 181; Fedorowicz-Kruszewska, Cyrklaff, 2016, pp. 122-125).

COMMUNICATION WITH PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

According to the American Psychiatric Association's classification of mental illnesses, intellectual disability includes difficulties in three areas:

- mental abilities, including, for example, language skills, mathematics, reading and writing,
- social skills, including empathy, interpersonal communication skills and the ability to establish and maintain friendships,
- practical skills, e.g. self-management in the field of personal care, work, money management and recreation (American Psychiatric Association, 2023).

When communicating effectively with people with intellectual disabilities, it is worth remembering the following rules:

1. Address them in specific, simple sentences, without using abstract concepts. When translating more complex issues, it is worth dividing them into a series of short statements.
2. Adults with intellectual disabilities cannot be spoken to in a condescending, dismissive, childish manner, using the familiar form "you". You should adapt the pace, complexity, and vocabulary to the person you are talking to.
3. In the case of an adult person with intellectual disabilities who can make decisions on their own, their opinion and choice should be respected. In the case of a dependent person, their decisions should be consulted with their guardians, as they may pose a threat to their safety (e.g. leaving the library to go home on their own).
4. Clear signage with pictograms can help you find your way around the facility. It is worth supplementing descriptions or markings inside the building with such signs.
5. People with intellectual disabilities need an established and familiar order in their everyday functioning. Any change in this order or environment should be communicated to them well in advance.
6. It is worth giving people with intellectual disabilities more time to perform tasks, and introducing instructions in several stages. You should use many examples and take into account the cognitive capabilities of a given person (Cohen, 2024; Cyrklaff-Gorczyca, 2023, pp. 184-185, 189).

Pursuant to the 2019 Act on ensuring accessibility for persons with special needs, a public entity should provide information about its activities in an easy-to-read text on its main website. Easy-to-read materials are publications that are both easy to read and understand. They present, for example, literary texts, guides, and handbooks in a simple and accessible way. They appear in the form of printed text, electronic text, audio, or text on a website (Fedorowicz-Kruszewska, Cyrklaff 2016, p. 100; Cyrklaff-Gorczy-

ca, 2023, p. 185). These books are addressed to two groups. The first group includes people with permanent health deficits, e.g. people with intellectual disabilities, people with dyslexia, deaf people (especially those who lost their hearing before acquiring the ability to use a phonic language), people with ADHD, people with autism, and people with dementia. The second group includes people with limited language and reading skills who are assumed to use this type of materials only temporarily, i.e. immigrants, linguistic minorities, and people with a low level of education. Easy-to-read texts should be written concretely and logically, avoiding abstract language. You cannot introduce too many characters and metaphorical expressions that may be misunderstood by the reader. It is worth encouraging writers and illustrators to get to know the recipients of their works, meet them and expand their knowledge about reading problems. You should also test the material before going to print and make sure it suits your potential audience. Illustrations are important in easy-to-read materials because images help understand the content and often explain the message being conveyed. The appropriate graphic design of the work, font size, and paper are also important (Fedorowicz, 2002, pp. 49-51, 87-89). Equipping the library with easy-to-read materials and using this form of content on a website is an example of a universal action that will benefit many of the previously mentioned recipients.

CONCLUSIONS – TOWARDS COMMUNICATION AND AN INCLUSIVE LIBRARY

In the difficult times we live in, Poland has noticed the need to adapt products, services, and environments to the requirements of people with special needs. Each of us can be among these. Therefore, it seems that one of the most important functions that libraries currently perform is an inclusive function, involving and integrating various individuals. Sensitivity to the quality of being together means systemic thinking about communication, in which a group of individuals is responsible for its quality, and not just someone who has visible problems in this sphere (Schulz von Thun, 2001). In effective, integrative, and inclusive communication it is worth remembering:

1. The essence of understanding various needs that result from the nature of dysfunctions or difficulties experienced by a person.
2. Individualizing the communication process, because each person is an individual who differs in some way from others.
3. Using appropriate technologies to support the communication process.
4. Adaptation of the physical environment, i.e. the internal and external space of the library.

5. Clear marking and description of the information and communication space.
6. Constantly improving the level of knowledge, skills, and competencies in the field of accessibility.
7. And finally, approaching the issue with empathy, patience, and openness.

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MAGDALENA CYRKLAFF-GORCZYCA
Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu
e-mail: magdalena.cyrklaff@umk.pl
ORCID 0000-0002-4062-1966

WŁĄCZAJĄCE USŁUGI KOMUNIKACYJNE I BIBLIOTECZNE DLA OSÓB ZE SPECJALNYMI POTRZEBAMI W ŚWIETLE NOWYCH REGULACJI PRAWNYCH I ZALECEŃ SPECJALISTÓW

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Komunikacja. Komunikacja inkluzyjna. Dostępność informacyjno-komunikacyjna. Osoby ze szczególnymi potrzebami. Obsługa biblioteczna. Biblioteka inkluzyjna.

ABSTRAKT: Teza/cel artykułu – Celem artykułu jest określenie barier i możliwości osób ze szczególnymi potrzebami w kontekście efektywnej komunikacji z nimi i obsługi bibliotecznej. Omówiono najpierw terminologię oraz postanowienia Ustawy o zapewnianiu dostępności osobom ze szczególnymi potrzebami z 2019 r. Następnie wyodrębniono ogólne i szczegółowe zasady komunikowania się z wybranymi grupami czytelników oraz podano przykłady dostosowania niektórych usług bibliotecznych do ich potrzeb. Na koniec zwrócono uwagę na integracyjną rolę biblioteki i uniwersalne wskazówki do sku-

tecznej komunikacji interpersonalnej, które zwiększają szanse na efektywne porozumienie w bibliotece zarówno wśród osób zdrowych, jak i tych z trudnościami. **Metody badań** – Wykorzystano metodę analizy i krytyki źródeł oraz literatury przedmiotu. Najważniejsze **wyniki/wnioski** – Osoby ze szczególnymi potrzebami to bardzo różnorodna grupa. Podstawą ich efektywnej obsługi bibliotecznej jest identyfikacja barier i możliwości w zakresie komunikacji i odbioru informacji. Przygotowane w tekście rekomendacje umożliwiają swobodne komunikowanie się z różnorodnymi osobami, a co za tym idzie zwiększają poziom ich zadowolenia z obsługi w bibliotece.

DOROTA GRABOWSKA
Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies
University of Warsaw
ORCID 0000-0002-2727-6942

PREGNANT WOMEN AND PEOPLE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN POLAND



DOROTA GRABOWSKA, PhD, works at the Department of Research on Libraries and Other Cultural Institutions at the Faculty of Journalism, Information and Bibliology of the University of Warsaw. Her research interests focus around issues related to the organization and operation of public and school libraries. She is particularly interested in the forms and methods of working with the user in the library. Since 2013, she serves as the secretary of the “Przeгляд Biblioteczny” (“Library Review”). Since 2003, she has been the secretary of the “Poradnik Bibliotekarza” (“Librarian’s Guide”), as well as part of the editorial team of the “Biblioteczka Poradnika Bibliotekarza” (“Librarian’s Guide Library”) series. She is the author of articles: “Ewolucja zadań nauczycieli bibliotekarzy w dydaktyce szkolnej” (“The evolution of librarian teachers’ tasks in school teaching”) *Studia o Książce i Informacji (Studies about the book and information)*, 2018, No. 37, pp. 93-105. *Animacja kultury w bibliotekach publicznych w Polsce (Cultural animation in public libraries in Poland)*. W: *Litteris et Amicitia*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe i Edukacyjne Stowarzyszenia Bibliotekarzy Polskich, 2023, s. 289-300; *Biblioteka jako podmiot uczestniczący w procesach marketingu terytorialnego (A library as subject participating in territorial marketing processes)* W: *Marketing w działalności bibliotecznej (Library marketing)* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe i Edukacyjne Stowarzyszenia Bibliotekarzy Polskich, 2023, s. 574-585.

KEYWORDS: Poland. Public libraries. Pregnant women. Children up to 3 years old. Activity. Mom clubs. Dialogic reading.

ABSTRACT: Thesis/purpose of the article – The aim of the article is to draw attention to pregnant women and people with small children (up to 3 years old) as potential library users who need to be treated in a special way, as people with special needs. **Research methods** – The analysis of publications, legal acts and websites allowed us to characterize libraries as institutions that can involve pregnant women and people with small children in their activities. This requires adapting the space and activities to the needs of this group of users. **Results/conclusions** – Pregnant women and people with small children have special needs related to using libraries. In addition to adjusting the arrangement of space and collections, libraries also run support groups and mothers' clubs. The animated nature of the activities undertaken has a positive impact on users and on clarifying strategies for meeting their needs. Examples of good practice in this area can be found in Polish libraries, but it requires further intensification.

Public libraries, as the name suggests, are for everyone. Jacek Wojciechowski notes that universal availability is a myth (Wojciechowski, 2010, p. 201), but these institutions try to ensure that as many people as possible can use their services. It is not possible for them to propose what is acceptable to everyone and provide strategies for satisfying their need for self-fulfillment (Koźmiński & Piotrowski, 1999, p. 402), but they try to involve as many residents of a given local community as possible in using their services. Potential users also include people with special needs, among whom special attention is paid to disabled people (deaf, hard of hearing, hearing impaired), but also seniors, as well as pregnant women and people with small children. The Act of July 19, 2019 on ensuring accessibility for persons with special needs (Act of July 19, 2019) specifies such persons as those who “due to their external or internal characteristics, or due to circumstances in which they find themselves, must take additional actions or apply additional measures to overcome a barrier in order to participate in various spheres of life on an equal basis with others” (Act of 19 July 2019). The adjustments will concern “architectural, digital, and information and communication accessibility”. As part of ensuring accessibility for people with special needs, actions are taken to (Act of July 19, 2019):

1. removing barriers and preventing their formation;
2. taking into account their needs in activities planned and conducted

PREGNANT WOMEN IN THE LIBRARY

Pregnancy is a period when women need to be treated specially. They often get tired more easily, cannot stand for long periods of time, and find it difficult to perform various activities. They must take special care of their health and prepare for the birth of a child.

Libraries can be a space where pregnant women can meet, talk and learn about the issues that concern them most. Sharing your thoughts is an

important support element. Anita Nogal emphasizes that “the last months before the birth of a child and the first months after birth are a previously unknown reality for women. Among many changes, new emotions and responsibilities, loneliness and weariness often appear. Informal mothers’ clubs organized in cities and communes are a good solution and support at this time” (Nogal). The last months of pregnancy are the time to absorb knowledge about the newborn child. Future mothers read guides, blogs, and prepare layettes. I have a club at the library – it’s a good opportunity to meet and talk to other women, exchange experiences, ask questions, and even meet a midwife or lactation consultant.

It is worth using animation activities. Ewa Bobrowska, in the article *Social subjectivity and animation, treats animation as “a method of working with people that is based on certain assumptions of one’s own and refers to a specific set of values”* (Bobrowska, 2021, p. 18). She draws attention to three features of animation: giving up institutional authority, building social capital, and creating relationships between people in the public sphere. With this understanding, animation interacts with dissemination, which, however, is a much narrower process. Łukasz Hajduk emphasizes that “the animator strives to ensure that members of a given community make their own choices and decide whether and how to initiate contacts with culture. The essence here is the meeting itself, not what will result from it. What is more important than the culture that is outside will be what people have inside – their skills, passions, dreams” (Hajduk, 2015, p. 101).

When the emphasis shifts from dissemination to animation, it becomes important to build from the bottom up, based on what is in people. The librarian knows their users, knows what their needs are and what problems they have. Using their knowledge and skills, they allow users to encounter not only the book, but above all themselves. Thanks to this, people start taking action. It is important to select the appropriate methods and content for particular age groups, in this case women who are adapting to the new reality.

It is worth informing future mothers about the role of reading. In each guide you can find a lot of information that shows the “magic of reading aloud”, after all, looking at picture books begins long before the child utters his first word. Reading aloud before bed strengthens the parent-child bond. “Oxytocin is released in such quiet moments with a beloved attachment figure. This prepares the child’s brain for learning – especially things related to emotions, i.e. the activity of the amygdala” (Retz & Bongertz, 2022, p. 161).

Topics worth discussing and guests worth inviting will most likely appear at the first meetings. Everything is initiated by the participants. The most important thing is to provide space to have a good time and get emo-

tional support from each other. Preparing collections with this group of users in mind and displaying them is, of course, necessary.

PEOPLE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN IN THE LIBRARY

REMOVING BARRIERS – ARCHITECTURAL ACCESSIBILITY – SPACE IS IMPORTANT

The most important thing when organizing meetings for people with small children is appropriate space. The IFLA Guidelines for libraries serving infants and young children (up to 3 years old) (Guidelines, 2009, p. 23) clearly emphasize that children and their caregivers should perceive the library as an accessible, safe, attractive and stable place.

Barriers to accessing the library should be eliminated. A section accepting such small children cannot be located on a floor without an elevator; In addition to people, the elevator should accommodate baby strollers. Doors that are too heavy, stairs or thresholds that are too high may also be an obstacle. Space for strollers is needed in the hall in front of the entrance.

Guardians and children should feel comfortable in the library. A separate room or a cozy corner is best for meetings. Libraries organize so-called “baby corners” – quiet, intimate spaces where there are no other library users hanging around.

For this to happen, the space must be safe. It is best if children who are crawling or starting to walk are provided with a place designated for them, equipped with safe furniture adjusted to their height. The floor should be absolutely clean, with carpets for children to play on. A carpet or rug, poufs, pillows or seat mats will work well. You should also include a place for adults who accompany children. The arrangement of the space must enable the child and caregiver to remain in contact. You should secure sockets and other electrical devices, as well as anything that a child could pull down and harm themselves with. Books and toys must also be safe and clean. It is also important to prepare a place where you can feed the baby, heat milk in a bottle, and, if necessary, change the baby’s diapers or even wash the baby. It’s good for mothers to be able to drink tea or coffee. In the case of the youngest library users, consistency is also important. Children feel safe in an environment they know and which is not constantly changing. It is important that it is warm, without bright light that may disturb sleeping babies. The library becomes attractive thanks to its appearance, space arrangement, but also by providing the right atmosphere.

COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT

When cooperating with both pregnant women and parents or guardians, substantive knowledge as well as communication skills are important. It should be remembered that caregivers are a diverse group, representing different backgrounds and ethnic and cultural communities (Thomas & Skage, 1998, p. 15). For this reason, it is necessary to maintain a certain sensitivity in contacts resulting from respect for cultural customs and other issues important to the participants. This becomes very important, especially when immigrant families appear. Very often, meetings in the library take on the nature of support groups, where you can talk to people in a similar life situation, exchange experiences and help.

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT NEEDS IN PLANNING AND CONDUCTING ACTIVITIES

Raising awareness of the role of reading – educating parents/guardians

The specific tasks of libraries include informing parents (guardians) about the essence of reading. It certainly helps to join the Bookstart program (<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-and-campaigns/bookstart/>), which has been implemented in England since 1992 and can be found in various modifications in over 10 countries, including Poland. The starting point is the belief that it is never too early to read books with your child. In England, this is a program run by Booktrust, an independent organization set up to encourage people from all cultures and all ages to read books. The program runs thanks to financial support from the Department of Education and the governments of Northern Ireland and Wales, as well as generous donations from over 25 children's publishers. It is coordinated and supported by local public institutions, employees of health centers and libraries. Bookstart offers:

- free books for children,
- support and help in encouraging children to read with their parents,
- an opportunity to take part in meetings and events organized by Bookstart, together with other families,
- the website <http://www.bookstart.org.uk> contains many materials that can be used when playing with your child – books, stories, rhymes.

The set prepared for children from the age group up to twelve months includes an eco-bag with the project logo, two books (with hard cardboard covers and colorful illustrations) and an illustrated leaflet on how to encourage a child to read, how to read with a child, etc. (the leaflet can be edited in different languages). The sets are modified depending on age, but the idea remains the same – instilling a love of reading in children,

so that they can then have an easier start in life. Packages have also been developed for children with disabilities, e.g. deaf, hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired. Kits are also offered for children whose first language is not English. They include, for example, books in the following languages: Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese (traditional and simplified), Croatian, Czech, Persian (Farsi), French, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Nepali, Punjabi, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese. Brochures for parents are also translated. You can choose different books, depending on age and interests (e.g. about animals, family, everyday activities, tolerance and different cultures). On the project website you can read their reviews and the opinions of parents. Kits can be picked up in hospitals, clinics, nurseries, kindergartens, community centers, but also at the local library.

Moreover, hundreds of meetings and events for families with children are organized every year as part of this program. In fact, everyone will find something for themselves. Interesting ideas implemented as part of Bookstart include:

THE RHYME CHALLENGE

This program is intended for children from 0 to 5 years old and their parents. Children and their parents or guardians learn poems and nursery rhymes together. At the end, they receive a special diploma. Poems and nursery rhymes teach children how to play with words, which helps them later when they start learning. "Rhyming" together is also a good way to build bonds between children and parents. They help develop children's love of rhymes, stories, and books.

Thanks to competition, children learn through play, develop early language skills and have the opportunity to communicate with peers and adults. Additionally, participation in it improves the child's phonological awareness and communication between the young child and the parent. Another advantage of such rhymes is that they can be sung anywhere. You don't need any instruments or special musical skills.

Storytimes (Reading fairy tales aloud)

Reading sessions are organized in local nurseries, libraries and children's centers. Meetings are organized for various age groups. Families listen to classic fairy tales, new stories and, together with others, discover the fascinating world of books.

"A SMALL BOOK – A GREAT MAN" – BOOKSTART IN POLISH

In Poland, in December 2017, the Book Institute launched the social campaign "A small book – a great man" ([https:// wieki-czlowiek.pl/](https://wieki-czlowiek.pl/)), co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage as part of the National Reading Development Program. The idea of the project is based on the assumption that reading begins in the cradle, long before the day a child learns to compose letters on its own. Well-selected books develop their mind and emotions, shape their linguistic competencies, awaken their imagination and root them in culture. Reading together can become not only a great pleasure, but above all an opportunity to build closeness and strong and lasting family bonds. The program emphasizes that every parent/guardian, through reading, influences the child's future and helps him or her achieve success.

During the nationwide campaign, parents in maternity wards receive unique Reading Kits: a book intended for children aged 0-3 in terms of form and content and an information brochure for caregivers, showing the invaluable role of books in their child's development.

The layette for the youngest consists of the book *Pierwsze wiersze dla ...* (First Poems for...), which includes songs by, among others: Jan Brzechwa, Julian Tuwim, Wanda Chotomska, and Joanna Papuzińska, with illustrations by Ewa Kozyra-Pawlak and Paweł Pawlak, as well as a brochure for parents *Książką połączeni, czyli o roli czytania w życiu dziecka* (Joined together by a book, or about the role of reading in a child's life). The book for caregivers contains a lot of information about reading to the youngest children. Grzegorz Leszczyński in the text *Radość czytania* (Joy of reading) emphasizes that books for children cannot be boring. Michalina Gajewska briefly discusses the role of reading in individual stages of child development – Contact with books and the needs and competencies of young children (0-3 years), preschool children (3-6 years) and school-age children (6-10 years). Lyrics of nursery rhymes, lists, and short songs are also included. The text "10 reasons why it is worth going to the library" is intriguing. Monika Kiczorowska draws attention to: accessibility for everyone; free library cards, thanks to which you can not only borrow books, films, magazines, games and other library materials, but also use them to benefit from discounts at cultural institutions; comfortable conditions; librarians who know (almost) everything about books; the fact that libraries are cultural centers; that there are not only books there; they enable access to the Internet; you can find information about your town there; using the library will develop your child's sense of responsibility and that going to the library is simply worth it. The next text in the booklet *Tropem dobrych książek* (On the Trail of Good Books) draws attention to six tracks that can be followed to find a good book for a child (a publishing house; experts who write about books; experts who don't write but talk about them; par-

ents who have tried new publications on their own children; awards; recommendations). As befits a guide, it also includes a list of recommended books (Grabowska, 2019, p. 15).

On the project's website – <http://zdrowie-czlowiek.pl/> you will find much more information and materials about the action itself and the role of reading. There is, for example, a "Knowledge Base" (<https://Wielo-czlowiek.pl/baza-wiedzy/>), where you can find a lot of interesting information about books and reading for children.

Libraries' involvement in international and nationwide campaigns makes it easier to reach potential library users and at the same time increases the attractiveness of the institutions themselves.

WHY IS IT WORTH READING FROM AN EARLY AGE? – WHERE TO FIND ARGUMENTS FOR READING

Librarians should reach out to parents (guardians) of young children and make them aware of the importance of reading. When carrying out this task, they can refer to the words of pediatrician Dr. Miriam Stoppard. In her book *Examine Your Child. How to discover and develop a child's hidden capabilities*, she stated: "If I had to indicate only one way to enrich a child's experience and stimulate his proper development, I would advise keeping books at home" (Stoppard, 1992, p. 135).

The author gives a lot of advice to parents. Librarians can also successfully use these to convince guardians of the important role of books and reading in a child's development. Here are some of them (Stoppard, 1992, pp. 135-137):

- If you like reading, make it clear to your child and talk to them about it, and then they will like books too.
- Books are one of the great joys of life and are irreplaceable if a child is to learn words to express feelings, thoughts and ideas. Books explain the world around a child – they describe relationships between people, various situations and characters. Books stimulate imaginative play, provide new ideas and provide great pleasure.
- If you read books, your child will read them too.
- It will be easier for your child to develop a desire to read if reading is an experience adapted to his or her abilities and is pleasant.
- Try to read to your child every day or at least several times a week and at the same time develop the habit of reading to them.
- Choose books tailored to the child's interests, nice and with good illustrations. Children like illustrations depicting their favorite characters, places, and events. They also like images of animals. They are fascinated by fairy tales. Fairy tales help the child to understand the

surrounding world in a painless way and distinguish the real world from fantasy. Fairy tales stimulate abstract and creative thinking.

- A child's first books should be short and contain only a few pages. A child has a narrow attention span. Illustrations should be large and simple. Many children like books with only pictures and no words.
- Make sure your child can understand the words in the book.
- A child is more willing to listen to a book being read when the atmosphere is nice and cozy.
- While reading, trace your finger under each word, but do not force your child to look at the words or follow your finger.
- Encourage your child to pay attention to the details in the pictures or to guess what will happen next. Praise them if they guess right.
- At your child's request, read the same books repeatedly. You can read your favorite book many, many times. The best test of whether a child is interested in a given topic is how often they talk about it and whether they willingly return to their favorite book.
- When they are ready to read on their own, give them familiar, favorite books that they can "read" even if they know all the words by heart. Later, the child will recognize these words in other books and start reading them.
- Give your child new books and then tell them a fairy tale in which a thread is often repeated and the same words appear over and over again.
- Even when your child learns to read on their own, don't stop reading. The child will continue to enjoy the luxury of time spent together in an intimate atmosphere.
- Teach your child to respect books, keep them clean and in good condition, without scribbling.
- Keep books on low shelves in the children's room. The child will then look through them by themselves.

Thanks to the ABC XXI Foundation All of Poland Reads to Children, librarians have an easier task. Fewer and fewer parents need to be convinced about the importance of reading in a child's emotional development, because 90% of Polish society has heard about the foundation's campaign and knows the slogan: "Read to your child for 20 minutes a day, every day". I. Kuźmińska and E. Olszewska in their publications *Z dzieckiem w świat wartości* (With a child into the world of values) (Kuźmińska & Olszewska, 2007) and *Wychowanie przez czytanie* (Upbringing through reading) (Kuźmińska & Olszewska, 2010) point out that reading to a child every day for pleasure is a truly magical activity, as it satisfies all the child's emotional needs, perfectly supports his or her mental, intellectual and social development, is one of the most effective parenting strategies, and at the

same time brings the child great joy and leaves wonderful memories. The advantages of reading aloud include the fact that it is an easy activity, does not require preparation, is pleasant and inspiring also for the reader, and does not cost anything when using the library or exchanging books with other parents. Attention was also paid to the fact that a child who is read to every day feels important and loved. This builds his strong self-esteem, inner strength, and self-confidence, which influence the quality of their life at least as significantly as a healthy spine or healthy eyes. Daily reading aloud builds a strong bond between parent and child. The bond with the closest person is one of the most important developmental needs of a child, a condition for it to grow into an emotionally healthy and mature person. The authors state that if parents do not find time for their child, putting their career, earning money or their own pleasures ahead of his or her needs, they unknowingly jeopardize their entire future. Other advantages of reading aloud include linguistic and mental benefits. Children who read learn to use rich and beautiful language, will have the ability to conduct interesting conversations, and will be able to express themselves in public in a clear, logical, and vivid way – values that are very important in social life.

Employees of the Faculty of Pedagogy at the University of Warsaw (Danutą Świerczyńska-Jelonek and Małgorzata Kopczyńska) prepared “Listy o literackim wychowaniu dzieci” (“Letters on the literary upbringing of children”) (Walczewska-Klimczak, 2004, p. 3). The letters were addressed to parents of children in three age groups: up to two years old, three to six years old, and also to parents of children of preschool age. Two versions (shortened and extended) of rules of conduct have been developed, the application of which may help to develop children’s positive attitude towards books and reading. It is worth mentioning here those addressed to parents of children aged up to two years:

“Dear Parents!

Did you know that children who read well:

– learn faster and better,

– have a greater chance of graduating from a good school and obtaining an education.

Even though your child is still small, it is worth taking care of them now to ensure that they speak well and read willingly and well in the future.

Tell your little baby that you love them. When you change them or bathe them, talk about what you are doing. Your voice will make the child feel safe and happy with your presence.

Sing to your child. When they get a little older, remember the “finger games” from their childhood (e.g. “O sroczka, co kaszkę warzyła” – the magpie was brewing porridge; “O raku nieboraku” – a crayfish comes,

poor fellow) and poems (e.g. "W pokoiku na stoliku stało mleczko i jajeczko..". – In the room there was milk and an egg on the table...) together with your child. Encourage them to sing and talk. Praise them when they do it "their way".

A child can receive their first picture book – colorful and safe for the child, e.g. washable, with rounded corners – when they can sit alone. The pictures should be clear and in nice colors, so that they encourage viewing. You can look at and read such a book with your child. (...)

If you would like to talk about books in raising your child, it is worth going to the nearest library. The librarian will be happy to provide advice and assistance.

1. Conversation is mutual communication between partners: you and your child.
2. Talk to your baby from the moment he or she is born.
3. Don't use the formal "we" when talking about your child's activities.
4. Your statements to your child are not a conversation.
5. Always try to find time to talk to your child.
6. Don't dismiss or ignore your child's questions and answers.
7. Talk to your child the way you would like to be talked to.
8. Conversations with you cannot be replaced by media, computers or things.
9. Talk to your child about everything – serious, difficult, seemingly unimportant matters.
10. Tell each other fairy tales – those you know and those you create yourself.
11. Remember that your child hears statements that are not intended for them.
12. "Speak to your child seriously, correctly, warmly and cheerfully. If, what and how you speak determines if, what and how your child will speak" (Walczevska-Klimczak, 2004).

The letters contain a number of arguments that will certainly appeal to parents and guardians of children.

The ABECADŁO multimedia library for children in Olsztyn has published a brochure in an attractive form (it has the shape of a teddy bear's head), which includes an appeal from librarians to parents ("In your town, look for a LIBRARY, a magical place where your child will find lots of wonderful books. The librarian will tell you what to read to a toddler and how to interest him in a book. You will certainly also find an interesting offer of educational activities there. We invite you"), arguments in favor of reading to a child, tips on when to start reading and what to read, information on how to read to children, books recommended for children (aged up to one year, from one to two and from two to three years old). Everything in an accessible, funny form with Wisława Szymborska's mot-

to: "Reading books is the most beautiful fun that humanity has invented". Here we also find a number of arguments that will surely convince parents and guardians (if they are not yet convinced) why reading to a child is worth it. There is also interesting short information for parents and guardians about when to start reading to a child and what to read. The following convention was adopted for a young child addressing his or her parent or guardian:

"Mom, I'm in your tummy. I like it when you sing me songs and say little rhymes. I'm getting used to your voice.

I'm already a baby. I don't fully understand what you are reading, but it is very pleasant. I love how you hold me in your arms and hug me. I feel safe when we try to turn the pages of a book together. You show me colorful pictures and explain their meaning.

I like how we read dialogues, how you modulate your voice and pretend to be someone other than you are, and how we imitate animal voices together. You ask me questions about the illustration, and I point to the answer with my finger.

I'm already 3 years old and I'm very big. I like it when you read short stories to me, but I get bored with long ones. Recently you read to me 'Mr. Kitten was sick.' Tomorrow I will ask you to read it to me again. And when I grow up, I will become a doctor and treat my cat".

The adopted convention, straight from the film "Look Who's Talking", may not suit everyone, but this short text contains the most important tips that parents and guardians can and even should use (Grabowska, 2013, pp. 252-255).

HOW TO READ?

It is important to provide information about the role of reading and also to give instruction on how to read to children from the earliest days. There are many ideas for increasing the effectiveness of reading to children. Małgorzata Cackowska writes about one of the methods promoted by Gover J. Whitehurst and his colleagues (Whitehurst, 2000, pp. 9-13) in the article *O czytaniu dialogowym z wykorzystaniem książek obrazkowych* (On dialogic reading using picture books) (Cackowska, 2023, pp. 16-19). This theory emphasizes the importance of the child's reading environment, which is assigned the greatest role for his or her development, language learning, understanding concepts, text, and images, and early reading competencies, which translates into school success. The method is a kind of practical instruction in interactive reading with a child, called dialogic reading. It was found that traditional reading to children, which involves making children listeners looking at pictures, does not bring the same results in the development of children's language resources (vocabulary,

sentence structure) as does inclusive reading, during which the roles are reversed and adults are made listeners of children's stories provoked through questions, which increases the stimulation of children's language through interactive reading (Whitehurst, 2000, pp. 9-13).

This translates into the PEER technique, i.e. sequences of short interactions (language games) between adult intermediaries and the child while reading a book together. It consists of the following steps:

– P [prompt], encouraging (inclining, prompting, stimulating) a child to say something about a book he or she has read and viewed;

– E [evaluate], assessing (more properly appreciating) the child's answer, praising them for their presented idea and willingness to express themselves;

– E [expand], extension – encouraging the child to expand their answers by reformulating them and adding new information;

– R [repeat], repetition of prompts to make sure that the child has acquired new competencies (vocabulary, thinking, concepts, etc.) (Cackowska, 2023, pp. 16-17).

Various encouragement techniques are also presented:

– C (completion prompts) – encouraging them to finish a sentence, most often coming from a phrase in the text of the book you are using;

– R (recall prompts) – encouragement achieved through questions recalling events from the plot of the book, both text and visual;

– O (open-ended prompts) – asking open questions that encourage the child to talk about the books he or she has read, especially about the details presented in the illustrations, allowing the child to develop the fluency of thinking and expressing;

– W (“wh”-prompts) – prompts initiated by the question whether? and its complements – what? which? to whom? why? whom? how?, which trigger children's imagination and open up the field of creativity.

It is worth directing parents' attention to how they read, because it affects the child's skills.

CONSULTATIONS WITH ADVISORS

Young mothers may find it valuable to talk to a sling consultant, dietician, physiotherapist, learn Shantala massage, or even talk to an expert in strollers or car seats. Such guests may be invited by the library or by mothers themselves on their own initiative. It's not just about the experts. Just being among a group of women with similar problems is a great support. A momentary break from everyday duties, leaving the house, talking to other adults is important and necessary at this time. “Eco-shopping”, i.e. an exchange of used items – clothes, toys, books – will also work. In the case of children who are several months or one year old, their first peer

contacts also become interesting. Having fun, reading together, making music.

MOMS' CLUBS IN THE LIBRARY

The beginnings are always difficult, but most often after inviting the first people word of mouth begins to work. It is worth hanging posters in clinics, posting information on Facebook or other social media, or in local press and in stores selling children's products. These are places where the offer should appear.

Agata Walczak-Niewiadomska conducted research in branches of Polish public libraries for children and youths (Walczak-Niewiadomska, 2019), the aim of which was, among other things, to examine the services provided to carers and children aged (0-5). It shows that almost all libraries provide services for the youngest (0-2 years old), and most provide services for children 3-5 years old. They provide collections (picture books, cardboard books, toy books), while their most common activity is cooperation with kindergartens. Librarians use reading aloud and artistic activities. Half of the libraries surveyed have a "toddler's corner", which is equipped with tables and chairs adapted to children of this age, a selection of books and toys, and drawing and painting supplies. Few libraries declared that they had an offer for parents, as well as access to amenities (changing tables, comfortable sofas, couches, armchairs, etc.). The smallest offer applies to the youngest children and their guardians (Walczak-Niewiadomska, 2019, p. 154). Parental education is a somewhat neglected form of work in Polish libraries: one fifth of the surveyed libraries declared preparing materials for guardians on the subject of introducing children to reading, with one quarter organizing workshops (Walczak-Niewiadomska, 2019, p. 155). The research results have shown that involving this group of users in library activities is an important task, not always appreciated by librarians.

You can also find good practices. The Poznań Regional Public Library and Animation Center in Jeżyce runs a Moms' Club, which advertises itself as a place of development and recreation for mothers and their children. Meetings are held every Thursday. The club was established thanks to the project "Library for everyone. Different. Equal. Important", which is implemented by the Information Society Development Foundation in partnership with Save the Children International. (<https://wbp.poznan.pl/biblioteka/aktualnosci/klub-mam-w-naszej-bibliotece/>).

The Władysław Stanisław Reymont Municipal Public Library in Wierchosławice implemented the project "We – moms from the library" co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage from the Culture Promotion Fund as part of the "Partnership for a book" ("Partnerstwo dla

książki”) program (<https://www.biblioteka.wierzchoslawice.pl/zajecia-Gordonian-at-the-end-of-the-project/>). It was carried out from June to December 2023. Meetings were held with specialists in pediatrics, psychology, and child pedagogy. Care was also taken to deepen relationships with children thanks to a play group run in the library. The meetings were held twice a month. During fourteen two-hour meetings there were lectures by experts with the possibility of individual advice for participants and an integrative exchange of experiences. One of the meetings was centered on the Gordon method and was led by Ewa Judasz-Jakubiak. This method involves shaping a child’s innate musical predispositions. The aim of Gordon classes is to create conditions for a child that will enable him or her to develop further musically. Another one, led by Monika Brożek and Patrycja Gąsiorek, presented the Montessori educational method, created by the Italian doctor Maria Montessori, which is intended to help in the comprehensive development of a child. A holistic approach to the child is intended to help the child achieve their full potential in all areas of life.

The Zygmunt Łazarski Public Library of in the Mokotów District of Warsaw founded the Moms’ Club in the Multimedia Library together with the Family Alliance Association (Stowarzyszenie Przymierza Rodzin), to which moms from Mokotów and the surrounding area were invited with their children. The library encouraged people to come by stating: “let’s create a place together where each of us can find a moment of respite from the everyday routine. A space for inspiration, exchange of experiences, coffee and gossip, as well as for interesting workshops and lectures” (<https://www.bpmokotow.waw.pl/bpmok/index.php/2474-klub-mam-w-lutym>) -in-the-multimedia”next-library). The topics of the meetings were diverse, e.g.:

- Recruitment for kindergarten and nursery devoted to the emotions accompanying these situations. The talks concerned dilemmas that bother parents and guardians.
- “Different love languages”. At this meeting, an attempt was made to answer the question: what helps relationships in the family. During the meeting, one could also make a scented Valentine’s Day heart.
- A meeting inspired by Gary Chapman’s book: *The Five Love Languages. The concepts presented in the book were discussed.*
- A meeting about carnival costumes accompanied by a photo session.
- “Cupping therapy. Truth and myths about cupping” – a lecture with practical workshops. The meeting was led by Ewa Ambroziak, an herbal medicine specialist who promotes natural ways of supporting health, who presented the history of cupping. She presented their types and mechanism of action.
- Simple ideas for handmade toys and creative ways to spend time with your child.

The classes were free, but registration was required.

The W. J. Grabski Public Library of the Ursus District of Warsaw organized the Moms and Toddlers Club, which is to be a space for conversations and exchange of experiences. Animation activities were prepared for children, and psychologist support for caregivers in difficulties related to motherhood (<https://portal.bpursus.waw.pl/klub-mam-i-maluchow/>).

Moms' clubs in the library also operated, among others, in the Public Library of Michałowice County (<https://wmichalowicach.pl/klub-mam-w-bibliotece/?v=9b7d173b068d>), The Waclaw Werner Public Library of Brwinów (<https://biblioteka.brwinow.pl/dla-doroslych/klub-mam>), The Municipal Public Library in Gdynia (<http://archiwum.bibliotekagdynia.pl/wydarzenia/klub-mam-gdynia-w-library-karwiny/>), The Municipal and County Public Library in Polkowice (<https://www.mgbp.pl/strona/nasze-dzialania-dla-doroslych/2347-klub-mam>), The Zbigniew Herbert Regional and Municipal Public Library in Gorzów Wielkopolski (<https://www.wimbp.gorzow.pl/klub-mam-w-bibliotece-pana-kleksa-103625/>).

On libraries' websites you can find interesting and inspiring ideas that should encourage the establishment of mothers' clubs in libraries.

SUMMARY

Public libraries, as institutions "for everyone", should ensure that everyone can find their own space and interesting activities in them. Among people with special needs, pregnant women and people with small children constitute an important group. As part of ensuring accessibility, care should be taken to remove barriers, especially architectural and communicational ones, and to take into account the needs of these users in the planned and conducted activities. It is recommended that they run mothers' clubs, toddler clubs, and in the case of pregnant women, support groups. The animating nature of these activities works well as it involves participants who decide what will be discussed and who will be the guests of subsequent meetings. In addition to realizing the impact of reading on children's development, it is worth teaching caregivers how to do it; the dialogic method is one of the ways. In Polish public libraries you can find interesting, inspiring activities for this group of users, but there is still a lot to do. Involving pregnant women and caregivers of small children (up to 3 years old) in activities still requires development. The role of the library should not be limited to providing collections and offering traditional activities.

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DOROTA GRABOWSKA

Wydział Dziennikarstwa, Informacji i Bibliologii

Uniwersytet Warszawski

ORCID 0000-0002-2727-6942

KOBIETY W CIĄŻY I OSOBY Z MAŁYMI DZIEĆMI W BIBLIOTEKACH PUBLICZNYCH W POLSCE

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Polska. Biblioteki publiczne. Kobiety w ciąży. Dzieci do 3 lat. Działalność. Kluby mam. Czytanie dialogowe.

ABSTRAKT: Teza / cel artykułu – Celem artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na kobiety w ciąży i osoby z małymi dziećmi (do 3 lat), jako potencjalnych użytkowników bibliotek, których trzeba traktować w szczególny sposób, jako osoby o specjalnych potrzebach. Metody badań – Analiza publikacji, aktów prawnych, stron internetowych pozwoliła scharakteryzować biblioteki jako instytucje, które mogą włączyć kobiety w ciąży i osoby z małymi dziećmi w swoje działania. Wymaga to dopasowania przestrzeni i działań, pod kątem potrzeb tej grupy użytkowników. Wyniki/wnioski – Kobiety w ciąży i osoby z małymi dziećmi mają specjalne potrzeby związane z korzystaniem z bibliotek. Poza dopasowaniem aranżacji przestrzeni i zbiorów, sprawdza się w bibliotekach prowadzenie grup wsparcia i klubów mam. Animacyjny charakter podejmowanych działań korzystnie wpływa na użytkowników i na doprecyzowywanie strategii zaspokajania ich potrzeb. W bibliotekach polskich można odnaleźć przykłady dobrych praktyk w tym obszarze, ale wymaga to dalszej intensyfikacji.

DARIUSZ GRYGROWSKI
Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies
University of Warsaw
ORCID 0000-0003-2155-2931
e-mail: dargry@uw.edu.pl

LIBRARIES' ACTIONS TO SUPPORT AND ACTIVATE SENIORS



Dariusz Grygrowski is a lecturer in the Department of Research on Libraries and Other Cultural Institutions at the University of Warsaw. Member of the Editorial Team in the journal "Przeгляд Biblioteczny" as the executive editor. Member of the University of Warsaw Library Council. The author of the books: "Dokumenty nieksiążkowe w bibliotece" (Non-book Materials in the Library), (Warsaw, SBP Publ. 2001), "Biblioteki i pieniądze" (Libraries and Money), (Warsaw, SBP Publ. 2015).

KEYWORDS: Aging society. Life expectancy. Elderly people in the library. Seniors in the library. Forms of cultural animation. Work with adult readers.

ABSTRACT: **Thesis/goal** – The aim of the article is to attempt to identify and formally and thematically organize the forms of cultural animation used in work with the oldest library users, and to indicate examples showing good practices in this area. **Method** – the method of literature analysis was used combined with the analysis of sources in the form of statistical summaries and library websites. **Conclusions** – Demographic forecasts for developed countries predict a gradual increase in the percentage of people over 60 in the general population. This is due to the gradual improvement of living standards and advances in medicine. Library statistics confirm the higher percentage of seniors among library users observed in recent years. Therefore, there is a justified need to take greater account of services and activities addressed to seniors when developing library work programs.

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of its operation, the American Center for the Future of Libraries (CFL), established by the American Library Association (ALA) in 2014, has pointed out the growing importance of older people in the group of library users. The CFL website indicates trends and phenomena important for today's world that may influence the activities of libraries and which libraries should take into account when designing their offer. Currently this website, called "Libraries of the Future", discusses over 40 trends, but even at the very beginning of its development when there were half as many, one of the most important trends identified was 'Aging Advances', which can be understood as progress in aging, but generally meaning increasing life expectancy. It is therefore an indication that the progressive aging of Western societies is a serious challenge for all institutions organizing social life, including libraries. This means that the profile of the average library user will change, and this description will increasingly include older people, especially those already in retirement. This, in turn, indicates the need for appropriate profiling of library collections so that older people can find items that interest them. Moreover, it is not only about the thematic criterion – it does not only mean collecting specific genres of fiction and non-fiction books especially preferred by seniors (as shown by reading research) – but increasingly it means that taking into account the needs of older people should also have an impact on collection policy from a formal perspective, when it comes to so-called large print books or audiobooks and devices that make reading easier for seniors. Moreover, as CFL specialists point out, when planning library programs and organizing various meetings, training courses, workshops, etc., libraries will increasingly be indicating older people as the addressees of this offer and potential participants. Finally, it is no less important to recognize seniors as potential volunteers who, while maintaining good health during retirement, can serve libraries with their time and skills (*Aging Advances*, 2024, May 10).

SENIORS IN DEMOGRAPHIC FORECASTS

Authors of publications about older people, their life situation, various problems, needs, activities, interests, etc. very often try to establish an age limit for this category of people from the start. On the one hand the determination seems simple, because the senior group does not generally include people under 60 years of age, hence the emblematic entry "60+" that appears quite often in various statements to briefly introduce this topic. Also, various institutions, organizations and research centers dealing with social issues, demography, health situations, etc. mostly agree on adopting 60 years of age as the senior age limit. For example, on the World Health

Organization WHO website containing a list of the main health topics (a kind of thematic glossary: see <https://www.who.int/health-topics/ageing>), under the entry aging, older people are referred to as those who are 60 years old and over.

On the other hand, however, there is a problem that in some studies and statistical compilations the conventional age limit for seniors is 65, which makes the comparison of some statistical data methodologically difficult. This difference in approach to senior age clearly results from differently defined retirement ages. In EU countries, the regulations regarding the statutory retirement age most often include the age of 65, sometimes without any difference resulting from the division into women and men. Such countries include, for example, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, Luxembourg and Slovenia. There are countries where this limit is slightly lower and is set at the age of 62-64 (e.g. Lithuania, Malta and Slovakia). However, there are more EU countries where the retirement age is higher and set at 66 (e.g. Denmark, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands) or even at 67 (e.g. Greece, Italy) (*Ageing Europe...*, 2023, Nov 15). Moreover, some economists and demographers indicate the need to further increase the statutory retirement age, even to 68. These are not just postulates, such a solution has already been adopted by the Danish Parliament, setting the retirement age at 68 years from 2030 and at 69 years from 2035 (*Pensions at a glance...*, 2024, march 22). It can also be added that some forecasts go even further in this respect. For example, experts quoted by the British daily "The Guardian" state that in the 2040s there will be a need to raise the retirement age to 71 (Hill, 2024).

The growing share of older people in the general population and the resulting growing interest in the problems of this group have meant that since 2018, the Central Statistical Office in Warsaw has also published, among various statistical summaries, an annual under the general title "The situation of older people in Poland". So far five annuals have been published in which the category "people aged 60 and over" was adopted for the purposes of analysis. The first year also included a forecast for 2050, stating that the population over 60 years of age could then amount to approximately 13.7 million people, which would constitute approximately 40% of the total population (*Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 roku*, 2024, march 22, p. 13)!

Later forecasts by the Central Statistical Office are not so worrying, but according to these in three decades the percentage of Polish seniors in the general population will clearly exceed 30%. According to the 2022 annual of the Central Statistical Office¹, at the end of 2021 there were already 9.7

¹ Unfortunately, in the Statistical Annual for 2023, the Central Statistical Office refrained from providing data on the total population in individual age categories, including those 60-64, 65-84 and 85 and over.

million (9,730,000) people aged 60 and over in Poland, which constituted 26% of the total population of Poland of 37.9 million (37,908,000) people. Five years earlier, at the end of 2016, the population of Poland aged 60 and over was 9.1 million people, which constituted 24% of the total number of 38.4 million (38,433,000) people. However, 10 years earlier, at the end of 2011, there were “only” 7.8 million (7,796,000) people aged 60 and over, which in percentages amounted to 20% of the total number of 38.5 million (38,538,000). Therefore, both in absolute numbers and in percentages, the number of seniors in Poland is constantly increasing, and this trend is expected to continue in the coming decades. With the overall population of people living in Poland decreasing, the percentage of people over 60 will increase. According to the demographic forecasts of the Central Statistical Office, the number of people in post-working age² in 2035 will amount to 9.6 million people, which would constitute 26.7% of the total population of 36 million. In 2045, there will be 10.7 million people of post-working age, which would mean that the percentage of these people would increase to 31.5% of the total number of 34 million inhabitants of the country. However, in 2055 the number of people of post-working age will increase to 11.3 million, so the corresponding percentage would be 35% of such people in the then expected total population of 32 million³. These numbers are both fascinating and disturbing. Fascinating, because if the forecasts come true, it will mean that thanks to advances in medicine, greater efficiency of the health care system and a healthier lifestyle, the average life expectancy in developed countries will significantly increase. However, this is accompanied by obvious concerns, particularly regarding the efficiency of the pension system. There is also no shortage of statements in which the aging process of Western societies is described as a “demographic time bomb”⁴.

Data from Poland fits in with the pan-European data in this respect, as the constantly growing number of senior citizens is also shown by Eurostat data⁵. The pace of this growth is illustrated by a comparison of the latest data on the presence of older people in individual EU countries with data from a decade ago. Just a decade ago (2013) the percentage of people aged 65+⁶ in EU countries, exceeding 20% of the total population, was re-

² For the category of people of post-working age, the Central Statistical Office adopts a division according to the retirement age, which means men aged 65 and over and women aged 60 and over.

³ According to the same forecasts, in 2060 the number of people of post-working age would decrease to just below 11 million, but since the total population would also decrease, the percentage of older people would still exceed 35%. *Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2023*. GUS 2024, p. 226.

⁴ See for ex. Cunningham S. (2010). “Demograficzna bomba zegarowa” czy “Apokaliptyczna demografia”? Wielka debata o przyszłości emerytur. In: *Polityka społeczna. Teorie, pojęcia, problem*. Difin, pp. 275-304.

⁵ Eurostat – European Statistical Office – <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

⁶ Unlike the Polish Central Statistical Office data discussed above, in summary demographic analyses, Eurostat advances the senior age limit and uses a simplified division into three age groups: 0-14 years, 15-64 years and 65 years and more.

corded only in three countries – Germany, Greece and Italy. In 2023, it was already in 18 countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden. As you can see, Poland is not included in this ranking, because in 2023 this indicator was slightly lower for Poland and amounted to 19.9% of people 65+ in the total number of inhabitants (*Population structure and ageing, 2024, march 28*). However, it can be taken for granted that in the Eurostat data summarizing the year 2024, Poland will be among the EU countries in which people 65+ constitute at least one fifth⁷ of the general public. It is worth adding that although Poland is not among the European leaders in terms of the share of seniors in the population of individual countries, it is still a leader in one category. That is, in the decade of 2013-2023, among the 27 countries making up the EU, Poland was the country with the fastest growth rate in the percentage of people over 65 years of age, amounting to 5.5 percentage points in Poland during this period (*Population structure and ageing, 2024, march 28*). In short, Poland is not yet the “oldest” in the EU⁸, but it ages the fastest (*Population structure indicators..., 2024, march 28*).

CONDITIONS FOR THE WELL-BEING OF SENIORS

In the literature on the elderly, the term “people of an advanced age” is also used, but it often has the connotation of people who are chronically ill, infirm, and have somatic and mental problems. Therefore, using this term to describe a broad category of people aged 60+ or even 65+ would be unjustified, because in this category there are people who are completely fit and without any serious health problems.

Despite the widespread belief in the permanent shortcomings of the health care system, it should be admitted that the progressive increase in the percentage of 60+ people in the general population of developed countries is the result of the longer-lasting good condition of seniors, which in turn is the result of greater availability of effective drugs and medical treatments and greater awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. But elderly people, in order to maintain good physical and mental shape, in addition to basic conditions such as a calm lifestyle, balanced nutrition, appropriate medical care and support from their loved ones, also need a certain dose of activity. It is therefore important that older peo-

⁷ Long-term forecasts also show that from the current one-fifth (21% to be precise) as the average share of people 65+ in the European population, this indicator will increase further to 30-32% in the second half of the 21st century and only at this level will it stabilize until the end of the century.

⁸ In the category of average age in the EU, Italy is in the lead, with the median age for the average Italian approaching 50 years (in 2023 it was 48 years), and Poland is still in the middle zone of the EU countries with a median of 42 years.

ple, who may naturally have general problems with fitness, concentration and memory, have an opportunity to develop their interests, demonstrate commitment and maintain their mobility. Such people have a greater chance of postponing the most difficult period in the lives of seniors, when vital forces weaken, fatigue increases, activity decreases, motivation to act weakens, and apathy and resignation appear.

Some seniors decide to extend their professional activity beyond the statutory age if they have the opportunity and their health allows. Those who wish to or have to retire can, on the one hand, devote more time to their family (e.g. grandchildren), but they can also use more time for themselves and spend it, for example, on traveling and establishing new contacts. They can also use the time gained for their further development by taking part in various educational activities, developing current and new interests, taking advantage of a wide cultural offer, presenting their own artistic achievements, engaging in volunteering, reading, etc.

When it comes to educational, artistic, and sometimes physical activity, libraries – especially public libraries – can offer seniors a wide range of activities apart from just reading. For those older people who, after retirement, intend to take advantage of various forms of cultural activity more often, but also for those who sometimes feel lost after this significant change in their current lives, the public library, being an institution that is rather close (especially in larger or medium-sized towns) and above all free of charge, is a perfect place to engage in the life of the local community and provides seniors with many educational, information and entertainment needs.

SENIORS IN LIBRARY STATISTICS

The projections resulting from an analysis of demographic data stating that libraries will, in a sense, be the beneficiaries of the process of increasing life expectancy and longer activity of older people are already being confirmed. Library statistics show that the number of people just before retirement or already of retirement age is gradually increasing. According to nationwide data published by the Central Statistical Office, in 2022 the percentage of people over 60 years of age using public libraries was 17.5% (*Biblioteki publiczne w 2022 roku, 2024, march 22*), while 5 years earlier it was 14.4% (*Stan bibliotek w Polsce 2018, 2024, march 24*), and in 2007 it was only 5.6% (*Biblioteki publiczne w liczbach 2007, p. 41*). This allows us to conclude that the percentage of people from the highest age category in the total number of public library users has tripled over the last 15 years. Data published by individual provincial libraries, without exception, show a constant increase in the percentage of people over 60 in the total number

of people using libraries, and it is a reason for increased optimism that voivodeships that usually present the lowest indicators of library activity of seniors can also boast significant improvement in these indicators. One example is the Subcarpathian Voivodeship (Podkarpackie). The 2007 Central Statistical Office report showed that Subcarpathia was the region with the lowest percentage of older people using public libraries. At that time, people aged 60+ in Subcarpathia constituted only 4.1% of all public library users (*Biblioteki publiczne w liczbach 2007*, p. 91). However, in the following years successive increases were recorded. The annual report published by the Provincial and Municipal Public Library in Rzeszów shows that in 2013 people from the 60+ category already constituted 7.4% of all users of public libraries in Subcarpathia. Five years later this indicator increased to 11.1%, and in 2022 the percentage of people over 60 years of age using libraries in Subcarpathia was 14.2% (*Biblioteki publiczne województwa podkarpackiego...*, 2022, p. 12). This means also that in Subcarpathia the presence of people over 60 in public libraries has tripled in percentage over the last 15 years. Although it is worth noting that in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, which comes first in this ranking, this percentage has already exceeded 20% and in 2022 it was even 21.5% (*Informacja o sytuacji osób starszych...*, 2023, p. 25).

Gradually improving indicators of library activity of older people, although they are a reason for some satisfaction, cannot hide the fact that this activity, compared to the number of older people in the entire population, is quite low. In 2018, there were 855,000 active readers aged 60+ registered in public libraries, but this represented only 9% of the total number of people in this age group (*Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 roku*, 2024, march 22, p. 14). In 2022, public libraries already had a total number of 889,000 active readers of senior age, but due to the increase in the total number of older people, the indicator of active library users in this age group did not change and remained at the same quite low level of 9% (*Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2022 roku*, 2024, march 22, p. 12). The lack of general satisfaction in this area is further deepened by data showing the decreasing activity of seniors in projects known as Universities of the Third Age (Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku – UTW). It is true that libraries are not mentioned among the institutions that offer such forms of activity to seniors. Most often, they are organized by various associations, universities, cultural centers and non-governmental organizations. But the Central Statistical Office in the list of institutions conducting such classes (*Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku...*, 2024 march 12, p. 12) takes into account also libraries⁹. However, interest in this form of activity among

⁹ An example is the UTW organized by the Municipal Public Library in Bytów (Pomeranian Voivodeship). It is worth emphasizing that the organizers report an increase in reading rates among

older people is unfortunately slowly decreasing. According to data from 2018, there were 640 such courses in Poland, and the number of students was 113,000 (*Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 roku*, 2024, march 22, p. 14). In 2022, the number of UTWs decreased to 552, and the number of their attendees decreased to 87,000 (*Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2022 roku*, 2024, march 22, p. 12).

The question arises what to do to not only maintain the satisfactory statistical growth of the presence of older people in libraries, and thus to maintain a specific bond with people who already use the libraries' collections and participate in the events organized by them, but also to attract many of these still absent seniors who know nothing about the libraries' offers for the elderly or are not convinced of their attractiveness. The fact that there are relatively speaking many such people is proven by the results of research conducted by Renata Aleksandrowicz among students of the University of the Third Age run by the University of Wrocław. The results showed that as many as 82% of respondents stated that they did not participate in events for seniors organized by public libraries, explaining this by among other things the lack of appropriate information or lack of interest in this form of activity (Aleksandrowicz, 2020, pp. 64-65, 162-163). However, Aleksandrowicz's research was conducted in the years 2008-2010, and, as previously stated, since then the percentage of people over 60 in the activities of public libraries has tripled. Therefore, it should be assumed that at the same time the percentage of seniors who are uninformed about or reluctant to use the animation offer of libraries has decreased accordingly.

The demographic phenomena described earlier, included under the heading "aging advances", are of course the primary cause of and explanation for the growing presence of older people in libraries (presence understood in two ways – both through the use of lending facilities and through participation in library events)¹⁰. But there is also a secondary reason, which is the appropriate response of libraries – especially public ones – to these phenomena. Noticing the gradual increase in the activity of seniors, libraries began to structure their offer and plan programs of library events in such a way that their main addressees were older people. So while it was not so obvious two decades ago, today when you visit the website of a random public library you can expect with great certainty that somewhere, either on the home page or in the submenu, there will be information with the title "Offer for seniors" or something similar.

UTW "library" students. See. Prądyński J. (2020) Nietypowy Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku przy Bibliotece Miejskiej w Bytowie. *Poraadnik Bibliotekarza*, p. 36.

¹⁰ Although the word "event" often appears in a colloquial and ludic context, this term is also used in the National Library's reports on the condition of libraries in Poland to describe various forms of animation found in libraries. Therefore, in this article this word is also used in the appropriate context.

This applies not only to provincial and district libraries, but also to smaller city-municipal and commune libraries. A review of "good practices" presenting the diverse, interesting and original program offer of public libraries addressed to seniors will be included on the following pages of this article.

The slogan "beyond the library walls", often perceived as a metaphorical description of library activities using electronic channels, does not have to refer to activities using the Internet. This slogan can also be interpreted quite literally as extending the library offer beyond the physical library building. So, of course, you should wait with open doors for older people who want to visit the library, but you can also reverse the direction and visit older people who, for some reason, cannot go to the library but who would be happy to participate in various forms of library animation and bibliotherapeutic activities. Some libraries therefore cooperate with social welfare homes that do not run their own libraries and cannot afford to employ a person with bibliotherapeutic competencies (Pytlos, 2017, p. 32).

When organizing library meetings attended by seniors, it is advisable to establish cooperation with local centers supporting older people in advance, which will be beneficial for both parties because both institutions have a common goal in this respect – intellectual and physical activation of seniors. Establishing cooperation with a local senior support center increases the chance of significant participation of these people in projects implemented by libraries. This is confirmed by the originators of the project entitled "Now e-reading, or how to become a smart senior" organized by the Municipal Public Library in Opole. The organizers admit that cooperation with the Information and Educational Center "Senior in Opole", and especially their assistance in recruiting participants, made the Library's event particularly successful in terms of attendance: Nearly 220 seniors took part in 19 meetings organized as part of this campaign by MPL in Opole (Baranowski & Pawluk, 2020, p. 21). Similarly, it may be beneficial for libraries to establish cooperation with local institutions organizing Universities of the Third Age and adult day care centers.

A process unfavorable for the cultural activity of older people is the gradual decline in the number of libraries, including public ones, which has been observed in Poland for over 30 years. This affects not only seniors living in rural areas, but also city residents. Older people obviously become less mobile with age and are less willing to travel longer distances. As M. Niezabitowski wrote, among the factors deepening the social exclusion of older people are "traffic difficulties" and "limitations in social contacts of seniors outside the housing estate" (Niezabitowski, 2018, p. 302). Therefore, the liquidation of a local branch of the local public library may cause seniors' contacts with this institution to weaken.

GOOD PRACTICES

The library offer addressed to older people can be divided most simply into two areas: On the one hand, there are forms that are directly related to the promotion of reading books and magazines. On the other, there are forms that are sometimes referred to as reading-related which are not directly tied to reading, but which may result in people becoming interested in books on topics related to the various workshops, exercises, meetings, training courses, clubs and other library events in which they participate.

FORMS OF ACTIVITIES AND LIBRARY SERVICES IN THE AREA OF READING

Research by the National Library in Warsaw (BN) shows that the reading activity of people over 60 years of age is increasing. In the analysis of the data obtained during the research this category of respondents was further subdivided into people aged 60-70 and people over 70. Research results published in 2024 show that, compared to results from five years ago, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of active readers in both of these subcategories. In the 60-70 age category, 34% of respondents declared in 2019 that they were reading books, and in 2023 it was already 40%. In turn, in the category over 70 years of age, 21% of respondents in 2019 declared they were reading books, and in 2023 the number was 32%. The authors of the study explained these significant increases by stating that among others things “generations that are relatively well-educated, and therefore familiar with reading, are starting to age” (Zasacka, Chymkowski, Koryś, 2024, p. 11). At the same time, it should be noted that older people are still not very willing to use books in electronic form. The BN study from 2023 showed that in the group of people aged 60 and over, only 2% of surveyed women declared they were using electronic books and only 1% of surveyed men (Zasacka, Chymkowski, Koryś, 2024, p. 20). This leads to the conclusion that the traditional public library – with its predominant offer of books in printed form – remains an attractive source of free reading for seniors who are active in reading. This is certainly not the primary source, because respondents more often indicate their own purchases, borrowing from family and friends, or receiving a book as a gift as a source of reading material. But 13% of surveyed people aged 60 and over indicate the public library as a source of reading, which is a similar indicator to the result recorded for the entire group of respondents without division by age (14%) (Zasacka, Chymkowski, Koryś, 2024, p. 26).

The BN study also shows that the types of books most often chosen by people over 60 years of age are historical and social novels, contemporary high-art literature and documentary literature (biographies, memoirs, ar-

ticles, essays, journalism, historical monographs and reports) as well as books on religious themes (Zasacka, Chymkowski, Koryś, 2024, pp. 76-79).

However, the currently low interest in e-books among people aged 60+ in Poland, shown in the above-mentioned study, should not cause libraries to give up trying to profile the e-book offer in terms of the preferences of older people. It is true that sometimes generalizing statements are made, saying that older people are largely digitally excluded because even if their financial status does not result in the lack of access to a smartphone, laptop, and home Wi-Fi, they do not have sufficient IT skills to function efficiently in the digital environment – for example, to service a bank account online, fill out an official form, make an online purchase, check a timetable available online, order an e-prescription, or simply to contact someone via the Internet not only by e-mail but also by videophone using some Internet messenger. Refraining from profiling a library's e-book offer according to the interests of seniors would, however, be an unjustified confirmation of the opinion that seniors are digitally excluded and have no interest in using information technologies. It should rather be assumed that the currently low rates of using e-books by Polish seniors will gradually improve, approaching the 2-digit rates recorded in more developed countries¹¹.

In this regard, the approach of the Central Statistical Office in Warsaw is puzzling: in annual reports published since 2012 under the general title "Information society in Poland", the division for individual age categories has been 16-24, 25-54 and 55-74¹². In other words, there is no 75+ category, as if the use of the Internet by the oldest people for contacts with public administration, banking operations or online shopping were statistically negligible¹³. Let us note that 30 years ago, i.e. in the early 1990s, when the first websites appeared and PC devices became standard household equipment, people who are 75 years old today were just over 40 years old. Therefore they were professionally active and often had the opportunity to develop their IT competencies at work or at home. So even if people from the 75+ group are not enthusiastic about TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media tools today, people from this age category should absolutely not be classified as electronically illiterate and omitted from statistical compilations.

¹¹ For example, a 2021 study by the American Pew Research Center showed that as many as 18% of American respondents over the age of 65 reported using e-books.

See: *Three-in-ten Americans now read e-books* (2024, may 27). Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/06/three-in-ten-americans-now-read-e-books/>

¹² See for ex. *Spółeczeństwo informacyjne w Polsce w 2023 roku*. Główny Urząd Statystyczny. https://stat.gov.pl/download/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5497/2/13/1/spoleczenstwo_informacyjne_w_polsce_w_2023_r..pdf

¹³ The Central Statistical Office is not alone in this respect, because the European Statistical Office Eurostat, in its tables presenting the popularity of the Internet in EU countries, also limits the highest age category to people aged 65 to 74.

BOOK DISCUSSION CLUBS

The most common form of cultural animation in the libraries' offer related to the promotion of reading are Book Discussion Clubs (*Dyskusyjne Kluby Książki* or DKK). In a sense, this idea is an extension of a format that libraries have long used, which involves organizing author meetings. The difference, however, is that a well-known and widely read author might not participate in the DKK meeting. A library moderator is needed to organize the meeting and to encourage participants to talk about interesting reading material. Since 2007, the main promoter of book discussion clubs has been the Book Institute (*Instytut Książki*) in Krakow, a national cultural institution established in 2004. The Book Institute also provides financial support in this area, allocating funds for this purpose from a grant from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The total amount to be distributed included in the ministry's budget is 2 million PLN. The direct beneficiaries of the DKK program are provincial libraries, which use the funds obtained to purchase books for clubs operating in a given voivodeship and to organize club meetings. The Book Institute also runs an information service for DKK organizers and arranges training for meeting moderators¹⁴. Although generally people of all ages can participate in DKK meetings, some public libraries organize club meetings especially for seniors. An example is the Public Library in the Żoliborz District in Warsaw, which established its first DKK in 2017, and in 2022 created a second club called the Senior Book Discussion Club¹⁵.

BOOKS BY PHONE

This service makes it possible to order books home for those who, for various reasons, cannot go to the library themselves: It is aimed at older people among others, although it should be clarified that not only older people can use it but also people with disabilities or bedridden illnesses. The service is, of course, free of charge and is most often offered under the conventional name "books by phone", although it should be clarified that according to library regulations, in addition to telephone contact e-mail is also accepted as a method of placing an order for books. It is worth noting and appreciating that some library regulations for the "book by phone" service specify a fairly large number of volumes that can be borrowed at one time. For example, the Municipal and District Public Library in Racibórz (Silesian Voivodeship) allows one to borrow eight books as part of

¹⁴ *Program dotacyjny dla DKK* (2024 may 23). Instytut Książki. <https://instytutksiazki.pl/kluby-ksiazki,6,program-dotacyjny-dla-bibliotek-wojewodzkich,11.html>

¹⁵ *DKK Dyskusyjny Klub Książki* (2024 may 27) Biblioteka Publiczna w Dzielnicy Żoliborz. <https://bpzoliborz.pl/bpzoliborz/index.php/dyskusyjny-klub-ksiazki-dkk/>

this service¹⁶, and the Municipal Public Library in Ełk (Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship) allows up to ten volumes at a time¹⁷.

Libraries also offer the same service under other similar names, such as “books for the home” (see e.g. Oleśnicka Biblioteka Publiczna, Lower Silesia Voivodeship)¹⁸, “book delivery” (see e.g. Public Library of the Grodzisk Mazowiecki County, Masovian Voivodeship)¹⁹, “mobile book” (see e.g. Cultural Center and Library in Przytyk, Masovian Voivodeship)²⁰ and others.

Library regulations sometimes specify the age of people who are entitled to use this form of borrowing, but they are not consistent in this respect. For example, the Public Library in Sianów (West Pomeranian Voivodeship) states in the regulations of the “mobile book” offer that it can be used by people over 60 years of age²¹. By contrast, the Public Library in the Bemowo District of the Capital City of Warsaw has determined that the service is addressed to people over 70 years of age²², while the Public Library in Rembertów states in its regulations that the service is only available to people over 75 years of age²³. Apart from a possible discussion about which of the adopted age criteria is the most accurate, it is enough to suggest that sometimes it is worth being flexible in certain situations and adapting the service to individual cases.

LARGE PRINT BOOKS AND AUDIOBOOKS

A solution that can make older people use library collections more often and willingly is to use various devices to support people who have problems reading texts with small fonts. Among others, the Provincial Public Library in Łódź decided to purchase devices that make it easier for seniors and people with visual impairments to communicate with text.

¹⁶ *Książka na telefon* (2024 may 13). Miejska i Powiatowa Biblioteka Publiczna w Raciborzu. <https://www.biblrac.pl/pl/site/index/2-abc-czytelnika/101-regulaminy-cenniki/117-ksiazka-na-telefon.html>

¹⁷ *Książka na telefon* (2024 may 13). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Ełku. <https://biblioteka.elk.pl/oferta/ksiazka-na-telefon/>

¹⁸ *Książka do domu* (2024 may 13). Oleśnicka Biblioteka Publiczna. <https://biblioteka.olesnica.pl/dla-czytelnika/ksiazka-do-domu>

¹⁹ *Książka z dostawą* (2024 may 13). Biblioteka Publiczna Gminy Grodzisk Mazowiecki. <https://biblioteka.grodzisk.pl/nasze-uslugi/ksiazka-z-dostawa/>

²⁰ *Mobilna książka* (2024 may 13). Centrum Kultury i Biblioteka w Przytyku. https://przytyk.pl/artukul-1718-mobilna_ksiazka.html

²¹ *Zamów książki, a my je dowieziemy!* (2024 may 13). Sianowskie Centrum Kultury – Biblioteka. <https://scw.com.pl/zamow-ksiazki-a-my-je-dowieziemy/>

²² *W BB można zamówić książki z dostawą do domu* (2024 may 13). Biblioteka Publiczna w Dzielnicy Bemowo m.st. Warszawy. <https://bibliotekabemowo.pl/w-bibliotece-na-bemowie-mozna-zamowic-ksiazki-z-dostawa-do-domu/>

²³ *Regulamin usługi książka na telefon* (2024 may 13). Biblioteka Publiczna w Dzielnicy Rembertów m.st. Warszawy. https://www.bprembertow.waw.pl/images/Regulamin/regulamin_ksiazka_na_telefon.pdf

These are, for example, special scanners that, after copying a book page with the optical character recognition (OCR) function enabled, send the scan to a hands-free module. In turn, in the reading room of this library, older people can rent an electronic magnifying glass, which simultaneously enlarges and highlights the text being read (Markiewicz & Zwierzyńska, 2021, p. 26).

Taking into account the needs of older people resulting from the deterioration of visual acuity, some libraries try to profile their collections with seniors in mind, collecting books with larger print. An example is the Public Library in Radomice, which has prepared a “Shelf for Seniors” for this purpose, where readers will find books printed in large fonts²⁴.

Older readers who, due to impaired eyesight, will be more interested in books on tape will also find something suitable in the library offer. Despite the ongoing evolution in access to audiobooks, which involves moving from physical media to online access, library collections still include many audiobooks on CDs and even cassettes. Many libraries also offer the option of renting a device called *Czytak*. There are libraries that even have several such devices, and of course they lend them free of charge. *Czytak* is an easy-to-use and small audio player manufactured in Poland, allowing you to play both MP3 files as well as uncompressed audio and audio in the format of your choice. The large capacity of the internal memory (which can also be expanded with an external flash card) means that dozens of audiobooks can be saved on the device. Although *Czytaks* are recommended as devices intended mainly for blind or visually impaired people, it is emphasized that they are also a good solution for seniors who have problems with reading. However, some libraries specify in their regulations for making Readers available that they can be borrowed only upon presentation of a certificate of visual impairment.

READING-RELATED FORMS

EDUCATIONAL AND INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS

Among the classes offered also to seniors, language and computer courses are the most embedded in library practice. Calling them “reading-related forms” is justified because participants of such classes also have the opportunity to use the library’s collections and borrow language learning materials or books on computer use.

It is true that there is a fee for participating in a library language course, so it is even more important to emphasize and appreciate that in many

²⁴ *Półka dla seniora – nowa oferta Biblioteki Publicznej w Radomicach* (2024 may 28). Gminna Biblioteka Publiczna w Radomicach. <https://uglipno.pl/wiadomosci/192416/polka-dla-seniora-nowa-oferta-biblioteki-publicznej-w-radomicach>

libraries these courses are free of charge. And although the offer is dominated by English, there are also courses in other languages (e.g. a German language course organized by the Public Library in Słubice, Lubusz Voivodeship)²⁵.

In turn, library computer courses are becoming more and more topic-oriented. When computers were not yet such an easily accessible element of household equipment, and the skills of older people in this area were low, computer courses for seniors were of an elementary nature, teaching the basics of using a computer, using web browsers and using e-mail. Today, when the basics of using a computer are not a particular mystery for many seniors, the library's offer also includes computer courses for more advanced users, such as using social media and application programs, e.g. graphics (see for example the computer course in the Public Library in the Wola District of the capital city of Warsaw)²⁶.

The issue of safe behavior on the Internet comes up more and more often during library computer classes for seniors. The media still provide information about Internet fraud and extortion, the victims of which are often older people, so information in this area supported by practical exercises is undoubtedly needed (see, e.g., the presentation entitled "Senior safety online" at the Municipal Public Library in Szprotawa, Lubuskie province)²⁷.

Over the years, the educational and information offer of public libraries began to expand. Library information meetings and lectures on topics related to everyday life problems and safety broadly understood may be of particular value to older people. These might be, for example:

– meetings with lawyers, which may concern housing matters, pension benefits, tax settlements, testamentary provisions, etc. (see, e.g., the Free Legal Aid Point at the Municipal Public Library in Morąg, Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship)²⁸;

– meetings with police officers who, for example, explain what to do to avoid becoming a victim of criminals using the "grandson" or "policeman" method (see, e.g., meetings under the slogan "Don't give in to criminals!" at the Municipal Public Library in Kołobrzeg, West Pomeranian Voivodeship)²⁹;

²⁵ *Kurs językowy dla seniorów* (2024 may 28). Biblioteka Publiczna Miasta i Gminy w Słubicach. <https://biblioteka.slubice.pl/n,kurs-jezykowy-dla-seniorow>

²⁶ *Kurs komputerowy dla seniorów* (2024 may 28). Biblioteka Publiczna w Dzielnicy Wola m.st. Warszawy. <https://www.bpwola.waw.pl/2024/04/18/kurs-komputerowy-dla-seniorow/>

²⁷ *Senior bezpieczny w sieci* (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Szprotawie. <https://www.mbpszprotawa.pl/index.php/uzytkownicy/seniorzy-w-bibliotece/1564-senior-bezpieczny-w-sieci>

²⁸ *Nieodpłatna pomoc prawna* (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Morągu. <https://www.bibliotekamorag.pl/inne/nieodplatna-pomoc-prawna/>

²⁹ *Nie daj się przestępcom! Bądź czujny!* (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Kołobrzegu. <https://biblioteka.kolobrzeg.pl/index.php/2024/04/09/nie-daj-sie-przestepcom-badz-czujny/>

– meetings with dietitians who will advise on how to provide the body with energy with a properly balanced menu, avoid weight gain, problems with hypertension and high glucose levels (see e.g. “Time for a senior”

– meeting with a dietitian at the Municipal Public Library in Czechowice-Dziedzice, Silesian Voivodeship)³⁰;

– meetings with a psychologist, which may also take the form of psychological workshops, during which participants will undergo memory training, learn how to deal with stress, and take care of their mental health (see, e.g., Psychological workshops for seniors at the Provincial and Municipal Public Library in Gdańsk)³¹.

The libraries’ offer also includes other examples of meetings interesting for seniors: meetings with city guards, firefighters, representatives of local government authorities, consumer advocates, etc.

ART AND HANDICRAFT WORKSHOPS

Art and handicraft classes are beneficial to maintain the intellectual and manual skills of older people. Library curricula include a whole spectrum of such activities, from drawing and painting workshops, through crocheting, embroidery and macrame courses, classes using sculpture and paper art techniques, to decoupage, linocut and origami. Participants of such classes may also gain additional satisfaction when the library presents their finished works in the form of an exhibition (see, e.g., photo report from the exhibition of seniors’ works at the Municipal Public Library in Knurów, Silesian Voivodeship)³².

This category also includes cooking workshops run by libraries. On the one hand, this may raise some doubts when products are used in the library space that are not normally found in a reading room. However, preparing salads or sweet desserts together in a limited and moderate manner should not pose a particular threat to library collections (see, e.g., culinary workshops “Speciality of the House” at the Municipal Public Library in Bielsk Podlaski, Podlaskie Voivodeship)³³.

³⁰ “Pora na seniora” – spotkanie z dietetykiem (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Czechowicach-Dziedzicach. <https://mbp.czechowice-dziedzice.pl/pora-na-seniora-spotkanie-z-dietetykiem-2/>

³¹ Warsztaty psychologiczne dla seniorów w bibliotece (2024 may 28). Wojewódzka i Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Gdańsku. <https://wbpg.org.pl/warsztaty-psychologiczne-dla-seniorow-w-bibliotece/>

³² Wystawa prac plastycznych (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Knurowie. <https://bibliotekaknurow.pl/wystawa-prac-plastycznych-seniorow-z-osrodka-wsparcia-w-knurowie/>

³³ Międzypokoleniowe gotowanie – warsztaty “Specjalność zakładu” (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Bielsku Podlaskim. <https://biblioteka-bielsk.pl/miedzypokoleniowe-gotowanie-warsztaty-specjalnosc-zakladu/>

ARTISTIC AND ENTERTAINMENT EVENTS

Libraries have long been organizing evenings of poetry and music or of music alone as part of meetings with interesting artists, inviting soloists and bands performing a variety of musics – chamber, ballad, folk, sung poetry, but also simply popular music including small jazz ensembles. Some such concerts are addressed directly to older people, and an additional value at such events comes when listeners can join in singing together.

A form that combines entertainment and relaxation elements that is beneficial for the well-being of seniors is spending time together with other seniors playing various social games – from chess, through various board games, to card games including bridge (see e.g. learning to play bridge and bridge games in one of the branches of the Municipal Public Library in Gliwice, Silesian Voivodeship)³⁴.

MOVEMENT AND EXERCISE CLASSES

Activities organized in libraries that require a bit of physical exercise from the participants can help keep the elderly in good shape. Libraries that have a multifunctional building with a separate room for physical classes are in a better situation when organizing such classes. However, there are plenty of examples online of libraries that organize all kinds of fitness classes in appropriately arranged reading spaces. These may be more relaxing exercises (e.g. yoga, tai chi), as well as general movement and gymnastic classes, or more advanced and rather dance-oriented exercises such as Zumba (see e.g. Gymnastics for seniors at the Public Library in Miastko, Pomeranian voivodship)³⁵. Speaking of dancing, on the websites of libraries with offers for seniors we can also find many announcements about ballroom dancing courses and invitations to dance evenings (see, e.g. Dance party for seniors at the Municipal Public Library in Gliwice, Silesian Voivodeship)³⁶.

The examples presented do not exhaust the wide spectrum of library activities aimed at elderly users. Librarians who are beginning to work with seniors should therefore follow the work programs of other libraries, as well as reports from successful events already held, while searching for interesting and original ideas adapted to the organizational capabilities of libraries of various types and sizes. Most of the comments and examples presented in the article concern the offer addressed to seniors by public libraries. It should be emphasized, however, that other libraries also have

³⁴ *Seniorze, przyjdź na zajęcia do biblioteki!* (2024 may 28). Miejski Serwis Internetowy – Gliwice. <https://edukacja.gliwice.eu/aktualnosci/miasto/seniorze-przyjdź-na-zajęcia-do-biblioteki>

³⁵ *Gimnastyka dla seniora* (2024 may 28). Biblioteka Publiczna w Miastku. <http://bpmiastko.naszabiblioteka.com/n,gimnastyka-dla-seniora>

³⁶ *Potańcówka dla Seniorów* (2024 may 28). Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Gliwicach. <https://biblioteka.gliwice.pl/potancowka-dla-seniorow/>

a certain offer in terms of educational, artistic and entertainment activation for older people – primarily pedagogical³⁷ and scientific libraries³⁸.

SUMMARY

Activating seniors in libraries does not have to consist solely in trying to interest them in what libraries have to offer and encouraging them to participate in various meetings. It is worth considering a situation where seniors are not only passive participants and listeners, but can also be speakers and moderators of such meetings. Therefore, when organizing all activities with seniors, and especially meetings with specialists in various fields, it is worth considering a solution in which these specialists will also be seniors themselves. In this way, you can use various competencies and professional qualifications of people with extensive experience, but not necessarily professionally active. Moreover, it is not only about obvious professionals in the field of, for example, medicine, psychology, security or law. You can use the sometimes considerable competencies of seniors in seemingly mundane areas such as cooking, gardening, or tailoring. Such knowledgeable seniors can be credible and persuasive speakers for other seniors, and by participating in library events as hosts, they can become more involved in volunteering for libraries.

Not all seniors are lucky enough to live in multi-generational families, surrounded by kindness and loved ones. Some people may be lonely, so they will look for contact with others – in different places and in different situations. A library employee may also be a potential interlocutor, and sometimes, above all, a listener. It is important that the librarian, with whom a senior can seek contact and try to start a conversation, is open, empathetic, trustworthy and eloquent. The benefit may be mutual, because a well-treated and listened-to elderly person will leave the library in a good mood, and therefore may become its user for a longer time. That is why training for librarians in working with adult and older readers, organized by substantively superior libraries, is so important. It is also worth mentioning training for librarians conducted by the National Library in Warsaw under the slogan “Library for seniors”, during which librarians obtain information about the needs of older people and forms of working with seniors (*Biblioteka dla seniora*, 2024 may 22).

³⁷ See for example: *Oferta dla seniorów* (2024 may 28). Biblioteka Pedagogiczna w Tarnowie. <https://bpt.edu.pl/index.php/nasza-oferta/oferta-dla-seniorow>

³⁸ The possibilities of such activities in scientific libraries were presented by Renata Felińska and Teresa Górniak using the example of the Library of the University of Łódź. See Felińska R., Górniak T. (2015). Miejsce Biblioteki Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego w życiu osób starszych. In: *Biblioteka w społeczeństwie wiedzy : informacja, edukacja, profesjonalizm : konferencja naukowa Biblioteki Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego : materiały konferencyjne*. Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, pp. 128-149.

Organizers of group classes with older people must demonstrate the ability to appropriately balance the difficulty of tasks and the requirements placed on participants, in activities of an intellectual nature and especially those that involve manual work or general mobility. First of all, less able participants of such classes should not feel inferior and unnecessary. As Aleksandra Guziątek from Municipal Public Library in Katowice notes, "art works can become troublesome when some participants struggle with trembling hands, visual impairment or the belief that they lack talent" (Guziątek, 2020, p. 24). Participants in meetings absolutely should not feel that they do not meet expectations or feel frustrated due to the inappropriate manner and pace of performing tasks. Therefore, the author cited above proposed ten rules for organizing classes for older people, including the following two: "Remember that seniors visit the library for entertainment" and "Do not require participants to exceed their limits. Participation in all activities is voluntary" (Guziątek, 2020, p. 26).

Finally, it is worth repeating that when we talk about older people and their gradually strengthening relationship with libraries, which is confirmed by the statistical data cited earlier, this relationship should not be described one-sidedly, in the sense that the library presents its offer to seniors, that it gives them something. It is important to recognize the potential two-way nature of this relationship, when seniors can also give something to the library themselves. As Monika Kosowiec-Placek noted, "the intellectual capital of older people in our country is not properly used and is simply wasted" (Kosowiec-Placek, 2010, p. 329). Yet some older people who have knowledge and specific professional experience or have interesting skills or achievements in various fields can share them with other library users. They may also simply be useful volunteers who want to devote their free time to working in the library – for everyone's mutual benefit.

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DARIUSZ GRYGROWSKI

Katedra Badań nad Bibliotekami i Innymi Instytucjami Kultury

Uniwersytet Warszawski

e-mail: dargry@uw.edu.pl

ORCID 0000-0003-2155-2931

DZIAŁANIA BIBLIOTEK NA RZECZ WSPARCIA I AKTYWIZACJI SENIORÓW

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Starzenie się społeczeństwa. Średnia długość życia. Osoby starsze w bibliotece. Seniorzy w bibliotece. Formy animacji kulturalnej. Praca z czytelnikiem dorosłym.

ABSTRAKT: **Teza/cel** – Celem artykułu jest próba wskazania i formalno-tematycznego uporządkowania form animacji kulturalnej stosowanych w pracy z najstarszymi użytkownikami bibliotek oraz wskazanie przykładów pokazujących dobre praktyki w tym zakresie. **Metoda** – zastosowana została metoda analizy piśmiennictwa w połączeniu z analizą źródeł w postaci zestawień statystycznych i stron internetowych bibliotek. **Wnioski** – Prognozy demograficzne dla krajów rozwiniętych zapowiadają stopniowy wzrost odsetka osób w wieku powyżej 60 roku życia w ogólnej populacji. Wynika to z sukcesywnej poprawy standardów życiowych i postępów w medycynie. Statystyki biblioteczne potwierdzają obserwowaną w ostatnich latach większą procentowo obecność seniorów wśród użytkowników bibliotek. Zachodzi więc uzasadniona potrzeba, by w opracowaniu programów pracy bibliotek w większym stopniu uwzględniać w nich usługi i działania adresowane do seniorów.

EMILIA ŚMIECHOWSKA-PETROVSKIJ
Faculty of Pedagogical Sciences
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University
Warsaw
e-mail: e.smiechowska@uksw.edu.pl
ORCID 0000-0002-6522-3817

PUBLIC LIBRARIES AS AN INFORMATIONAL SPACE FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH BLINDNESS AND VISUAL IMPAIRMENT. MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL ARTIFACTS OF ACCESS



Emilia Śmiechowska-Petrovskij – PhD in the discipline of pedagogy, special educator (teaching and supporting of persons with blindness and low vision), and master of polish study. She is an assistant professor in the Department of Special Education at the Faculty of Education at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, a Braille teacher, and an instructor of technology and spatial orientation for the blind and visually impaired people. She specializes in the adaptation of educational, diagnostic, and other materials into Braille and large print. Her main research interests

include supporting people with disabilities, particularly visual impairments, in the areas of education, social integration, and access to cultural goods, as well as visual education and the use of technology in education and rehabilitation. She is the author of over 40 scientific and popular science publications in the field of typhlopedagogy.

KEYWORDS: Access artifacts. Inclusive libraries. Informational inclusion. Blind and visually impaired individuals.

ABSTRACT: Thesis/Objective – The main aim of the paper is to determine the material and immaterial artifacts of access for blind and visually impaired indi-

viduals to public libraries as informational spaces, and to present the historical and legal context of library services for these groups in Poland. **Research Methods** – Analysis of existing data (legal acts, statistical data), literature review, and an inventory of implementation practices. **Results** – Material artifacts of access for blind and visually impaired individuals include the adaptation of physical space to the needs of people with visual impairments (tactile plans, tactile markings, spatial markers – beacons, high-contrast markings) and the collection of library materials in accessible formats. Technological advancements significantly impact accessibility conditions: there is a preference for creating materials in digital formats, equipping libraries with assistive technologies, and utilizing spatial markers (beacons, NFC, and QR codes for orientation information transfer). Immaterial artifacts of access include the competencies of librarians in working with visually impaired users, which can be enhanced through governmental and commercial programs, as well as diverse forms of user service. These enable public libraries to build an inclusive operational model, legitimizing the “universal right to access resources” and “universal accessibility” for all readers, including those with visual impairments, as stipulated in the Library Act.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, public libraries have been facing the challenge of including people with disabilities among the active readers of their facilities. In order to become an information space for blind and visually impaired people, who at the level of sensory perception function differently from other groups of users of books and library materials, they must meet a number of conditions. This article addresses the issue of material and immaterial artifacts of access to libraries and their resources for blind and visually impaired people. In the beginning section the historical and legal context of library services for people with visual disabilities in Poland is also presented, which proves that although this group of users has always been in the field of view of legislators, for over half a century public libraries were practically excluded from the obligation to provide services to them. Only recent years have brought significant changes. Socio-cultural conditions contributed to this: the normalization paradigm and the perception of disability from the point of view of human rights (which results in accessibility requirements as necessary conditions for the realization of the rights of every human being). The second key change is technological development, thanks to which library materials for visually impaired recipients are not limited to Braille formats, making it easier for public institutions to build resources in digital form and equip libraries with technologies supporting reading materials that have not been specifically adapted to the needs of blind and visually impaired people, as well as enabling effective use of other materials. At the legal level, the following are of key importance for these changes: The Act on ensuring accessibility

for persons with special needs of July 19, 2019 (Journal of Laws of 2022, item 2240, of 2024, item 731), in accordance with which public entities are obliged to meet minimum requirements to ensure accessibility in terms of architectural accessibility, digital accessibility, information and communication accessibility, and the Act on digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities of April 4, 2019, as amended resulting from the amendment of 2023 (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 1440).

THE HISTORICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT OF LIBRARY SERVICES FOR BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE

According to statistical data, there are 7,638 public libraries and branches in Poland, with a total book collection of 124.4 million volumes. In 2022, 5.1 million readers borrowed books (*Public libraries in 2022, Central Statistical Office 2023*). According to the National Library's report, in 2023 14% percent of surveyed readers¹ obtained books through loans (Zasycka, Chymkowski, Koryś, 2024, p. 27).

In accordance with Polish legislation (Act of June 27, 1997 on libraries, as amended, Journal of Laws of 2022, item 2393): “libraries and their collections constitute national wealth and serve to preserve the national heritage”, they are to “organize and provide access to resources of Polish and world scientific and cultural achievements”, and “the right to use libraries is universal”. The basic tasks of libraries are: collecting, developing, storing and protecting library materials, serving users, primarily providing access to collections and conducting information activities, in particular providing information about their own collections, those of other libraries, museums and scientific information centers, as well as cooperating with archives in this respect. Moreover, libraries may conduct bibliographic, documentation, scientific and research, publishing, educational, popularization and instructional-methodological activities. As for public libraries, their main goal is to meet the educational, cultural and information needs of the general public and to participate in the dissemination of knowledge and culture. Library materials are, in particular, documents containing a recorded expression of human thought, intended for dissemination, regardless of the physical medium and method of recording the content, and in particular: graphic documents (written, cartographic, iconographic and musical), sound, visual, audiovisual and electronic documents.

Despite emphasizing the universal right to use library resources and the fact that libraries meet the needs of the general public, the inclusiveness of libraries and their universal availability were not secured. The above-mentioned act includes a separate chapter 9 called “Service for special user

¹ N=2012, nationwide representative sample.

groups". Two articles specify the method of serving blind people (Article 25 – it is indicated that the Central Library for the Blind provides library services for the blind and coordinates the activities of related libraries and institutions) and other special user groups (Article 26 – the possibility of creating libraries is indicated, among others in medical facilities, social welfare homes, prisons, district educational centers, correctional facilities and shelters for minors). In the latter case, it was also indicated that separate regulations would determine the manner of cooperation of public libraries in providing services to special groups of recipients.

Therefore, it can be said that in order to ensure access to reading resources for people with visual difficulties, public libraries have been literally "exempted" from activities related to providing services to people with visual disabilities. This happened primarily because at that time the basic format of books for the blind were Braille materials, and from the 1960s also talking books (recorded first on reels and then on audio cassettes) – materials that required special processing. Since the 1950s, the Polish Association for the Blind has determined the organizational structure, range, scope and dynamism of the publishing, library, and reading activities of blind people (Czerwińska, 1999, p. 65). Interestingly, although the above-mentioned act mentions the Central Library for the Blind, an entity with such a proper name has never existed. In 1952, the Central Library of the Polish Association for the Blind (BC PZN) was established and operated until 2012 under the auspices of that association. In 2013, by order of the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, it was incorporated into the Main Library of Labor and Social Security as the Department of Collections for the Blind (DZdN), continuing the activities of BC PZN and undertaking further development initiatives. According to the statute of the Main Library of Labor and Social Security (annex to Order No. 28 of the Minister of Labor and Social Policy of September 25, 2013), the following objectives of DZdN GBPiZS were formulated: the aim of the library is to carry out library and information activities and provide reading to blind and visually impaired people in the scientific, specialized, and widely available aspects. The library is to collect, develop, store and make available universal library materials, including fiction, in forms available to blind and visually impaired people, as well as informative and scientific materials on visual disabilities.

It should be noted that there is a discrepancy between the provisions of the Libraries Act and the implementing acts and documents regulating the organization of the library – BC PZN and then DZdN GBPiZS provide library services to visually impaired people, but do not coordinate the activities of related libraries and institutions. Although the Libraries Act has been amended several times (2012, 2018, 2019, 2022), Chapter 9 has not been modified.

School libraries at special educational centers for blind and visually impaired students were also specialized institutions in the field of editing, librarianship and Braille reading – here a special place belongs to the Braille Department of the Society for the Care of the Blind in Laski. A separate group of institutions included specialized libraries, established by the Reading Section for the Sick and Disabled (since 1981, previously the Section of Hospital Libraries in the Polish Librarians' Association), such as the Reading Center for the Sick and Disabled at the Provincial Public Library – Copernicus Library in Toruń, and many others – they provided comprehensive services to people with disabilities, and also offered alternative collections, including Braille and talking books. (Kruszewski, 2009; Fedorowicz, 2010).

Another important legal act that separated the area of library services for the blind is the Act of November 23, 2012, Postal Law (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 1640, of 2024, item 467, repealing the Act of June 12 2003 – Postal Law, Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 171, item 1016), which defines the concept of “mail for the blind” in order to exempt it from postal fees. In order to indicate to which entities such a shipment could be sent free of charge, it was necessary to specify a list of such libraries and organizations by regulation. A “parcel for the blind” is correspondence or print, weighing up to 7000 g, in which the information is recorded in embossed writing or on another medium accessible to the blind or visually impaired, posted in a way that allows the content to be checked. It is exempt from postage if the sender is a person with a certificate of significant or moderate degree of disability due to visual impairment and the recipient is a library or an organization of blind or visually impaired people or an organization whose statutory goal is to act for the benefit of blind or visually impaired people, or vice versa; as well as if the parcel is sent by or addressed to a blind or visually impaired person and contains only information recorded in embossed writing (Art. 26).

In accordance with the annex to the regulation of the Minister of Labor and Social Policy and the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of September 6, 2013, updated in 2023 (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 1902), there are 18 libraries in Poland whose statutory purpose is to act on behalf of blind or visually impaired persons referred to in Art. 26 section 1 of the Act of November 23, 2012 – postal law, as well as 45 organizations of blind or visually impaired persons and organizations whose statutory purpose is to act for the benefit of blind or visually impaired persons, referred to in Art. 26 section 1 of the Act of November 23, 2012 – postal law.

The systematization of entities acting for the benefit of blind people's reading was dictated by positive premises resulting from the understanding of the needs of this group in terms of offering them alternative reading formats. At the same time, however, it resulted in public libraries insuffi-

ciently implementing the mission of universal access to library materials. The research conducted by Małgorzata Fedorowicz-Kruszewska (2010), the only nationwide systematic research to date analyzing the service provided to people with disabilities in public libraries, showed that the degree of preparation of Polish public libraries for comprehensive service of users with disabilities at the end of the first decade of the 21st century was not satisfactory. There was no national library strategy in this area, no documents regulating the activities of libraries towards people with disabilities, and no research was undertaken to identify the needs of the local environment. Public libraries were rarely equipped with assistive technologies; few libraries had speech synthesizers, Braille displays, enlargers, or auto-readers – equipment necessary for blind and visually impaired people. Actions taken for people with disabilities were not common, were episodic, uncoordinated and not obligatory. Libraries' websites did not meet accessibility requirements, and librarians felt poorly prepared to serve blind and partially sighted people and those with other disabilities.

On a scientific and advisory basis, conditions are indicated that enable independent and effective use of public libraries by people with various types of limitations related to functioning in various social spaces. Despite many suggestions and recommendations, only the Accessibility Acts and the Accessibility Plus program resulted in more visible changes in the functioning of public libraries. The Act on ensuring accessibility for persons with special needs of July 19, 2019 (Journal of Laws of 2022, item 2240, of 2024, item 731) specified that public entities are obliged to meet the minimum requirements to ensure accessibility in terms of architectural accessibility, digital accessibility, and information and communication accessibility, while the Act on digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities of April 4, 2019, as amended pursuant to the amendment of 2023 (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 1440) introduced regulations regarding ensuring the functionality, compatibility, perceptibility and understandability of the content of websites and mobile applications.

Monitoring changes taking place in public libraries is not yet systematic. However, in statistical studies from recent years there is a section called "Facilities for people with special needs". As of the end of 2022, public libraries had 605 stands adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. The blind, visually impaired, and seniors could use devices enabling the use of talking books – *Czytاک* (libraries had 1,337 devices). Public libraries had nearly 6 million library materials constituting special collections, of which 3.4 million were audiovisual materials (Public libraries in 2022, Central Statistical Office 2023).

Summarizing the analyses, it can be stated that the segregated model of library services for blind and visually impaired people, run by specialized units, is changing. Drawing on exemplary solutions and in cooperation

with entities acting for people with visual disabilities, public libraries can build an inclusive model of their functioning. The “universal right to use resources” and “universal accessibility” enshrined in the Libraries Act finally have a chance to gain a tangible and intangible dimension.

MATERIAL AND INTANGIBLE ARTIFACTS OF ACCESS TO LIBRARIES AND THEIR RESOURCES FOR BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE

The following sections of the article will show how contemporary libraries build (or can build) the “information space” of blind and visually impaired people using material and non-material access artifacts. Following M. Kisilowska (2016), it can be said that the information space is “a multidimensional, dynamic, open set of content (data and information), their carriers and users” (cited in: Czerwińska 2018, p. 35). The category of access artifacts will be used in accordance with the understanding proposed by researchers Beata Borowska-Beszta (2021), writing about material access artifacts, and Małgorzata Czerwińska (2018), analyzing material information artifacts and intangible linguistic and behavioral artifacts. Access artifacts of a material nature are products – products of a given culture, enabling people with disabilities to participate in the activities of a given institution. They allow full use of its goods and participation in cultural practices. These are material adaptations and amenities of physical and information space (Borowska-Beszta 2021). In turn, intangible access artifacts are behavioral artifacts (behaviors) and linguistic and communicative acts that constitute the specificity of servicing people in the library (Czerwińska 2018).

MATERIAL ACCESS ARTIFACTS FOR BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE – PHYSICAL SPACE

Blind people use compensatory mechanisms to acquire information about their surroundings. These mechanisms are based on the integration of impressions coming from the sense of touch (somatoperception, close-range), the sense of hearing (telereception, far-reaching), the sense of smell, taste and the kinesthetic-motor sense (Majewski 2002). Any visual representations must be replaced by representations available to non-visual sensory modalities. Methods of providing non-visual representations of images, e.g. of the environment, include non-graphic interfaces: audio interfaces and haptic and tactile interfaces (Śmiechowska-Petrovskij 2017a).

In turn, visually impaired people using visual or visual-auditory-tactile techniques will rely on optical information to learn about reality, which, however, should be modified to ensure better visibility and readability (e.g. by enlarging the text, using an appropriate contrasting color palette, lighting modifications, or the use of magnifying aids).

In order to use the library as an information space, the condition of accessibility of physical space for blind and visually impaired people must first be met. In accordance with the minimum requirements for architectural accessibility, communication spaces in buildings should be free from horizontal and vertical barriers to ensure independent and safe movement with a white cane or a guide dog. In addition, it is necessary to provide information about the building plan visually, tactilely or audibly. A person with special needs should also have access to all rooms of the building (except technical rooms), access with an assistance dog and the possibility of evacuation.

Many public libraries, taking advantage of co-financing programs for initiatives for people with disabilities, decide to install touch boards containing typhlographic plans of objects. "A typhlographic plan is a universally designed, proportionally reduced drawing presenting in a convex form, readable by touch and sight, the arrangement of rooms in a building or the organization of space. Its role is to provide people with visual impairments with the necessary cognitive information and/or supporting spatial orientation and building a mental map of the surroundings". (*Design Recommendations...*, 2023).

Typhlographic maps and plans reflect the layout of the area by emphasizing content elements (use of convex point, linear and surface signs) and verbal representation (title, legend, scale). Typhlographic maps and plans can be colored and use plain printing – then they are used for visually impaired people. A well-prepared typhlographic map/plan has appropriate information density, obtained thanks to proper generalization and editing of the map. Maps and plans can be additionally provided with sound – enabling the information to be heard. All elements/content of the typhlographic plan should be described in Braille and enlarged print. An additional element may be the use of NFC and QR codes.

NFC, i.e. near-field communication, is a high-frequency, short-range radio communication standard enabling wireless data exchange at a distance of up to 20 centimeters. The NFC code on the label allows you to listen to the encoded information, e.g. using a phone or watch. In turn, QR codes are two-dimensional graphic codes containing information in the form of dark and light squares. They can be read by special readers or smartphones using an appropriate application, although currently the camera built into a smartphone is often sufficient.

NFC and QR codes can also be used to mark spaces, not only typhographic plans. However, it is necessary to mark the labels tactilely so that the user knows that such a code is within reach and can scan it.

Another solution used in libraries are space markers or short-range systems (micronavigation). Short-range systems are useful for blind people in that, when placed at fixed points in space, they emit a signal received by a blind person using a special receiver and this signal is then converted into a voice message. Beacons – radio signal transmitters – are most often used inside buildings. They emit signals received by a smartphone application when they come within range of the device.

Tools useful for verifying whether the library space meets accessibility criteria or whether additional adjustments need to be made include:

The Environment Assessment Sheet included in the study by the Polish Association of the Blind: *Blind and visually impaired people in public spaces. Recommendations, regulations, good practices* (2009);

The Facility Accessibility Checklist by M. Fedorowicz (*Disabled person in the public library*, 2010).

It is also possible to use expert accessibility audits, i.e. an analytical process aimed at determining the scope of investments increasing the accessibility of buildings for people with special needs, on the basis of which a detailed report is created. However, it should be remembered that accessibility audits do not take into account the specificity of a given place, they only refer to statutory requirements. Current regulations require adjustments to be made in all public institutions, as well as those that receive financing from public funds.

MATERIAL ACCESS ARTIFACTS FOR BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE – INFORMATION SPACE: DATA SETS, MEDIA, SUPPORTING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

Access by blind and visually impaired people to information requires its development in a format corresponding to the specificity of extra-optical perception (for blind people) or in a way that takes into account the consequences of low-sightedness, such as significantly reduced visual acuity, defects in the field of vision, needs related to illumination or limitation of light, sensitivity to glare, disturbance of color vision or depth sense, and others.

According to the definition of M. Czerwińska (2017a), a book for blind people is a compact publication with editorial and formal features adapted to the perception of the text by people with profound visual impairment (blind or severely visually impaired); also in accordance with IFLA

terminology² alternative library material or special reading materials. In terms of content, these publications are mostly Braille, sound and electronic equivalents of typical printed books (so-called black-print books), but they differ in form, adapted to tactile, auditory, auditory-tactile and visual reception (low-sightedness). The vast majority of these publications are Braille, sound and electronic equivalents of books from typical publishing houses.

As M. Czerwińska notes, the development of typhlo-informatics and typhology indicates that there will be a radical limitation in the publishing of Braille books – they will only be used in early school education and in learning Braille writing. This system will also be used to read electronic books on Braille devices (e.g. Braille notebooks). The basic form of a book for the blind will be a digital book in various formats (e.g. DAISY, TXT, HTML, MP3, PDF). According to data from the World Union of the Blind, only 5% of all publications are accessible to people with visual disabilities. The best chance to share literature, especially scientific literature and new publications, is a digital book in formats accessible to the blind.

The basic formats of reading materials useful for blind and visually impaired people as well as the most important assistive technologies are described below.

BRAILLE MATERIALS

Braille books are publications printed in embossed writing. They are 3-4 times larger than a regular print publication. The offer of Braille books in public libraries is generally very modest. The cost of purchasing a Braille publication is very high. For example, Joanna Bator's book "Dark, Almost Night", with 512 pages, costs approximately 35 PLN, while in Braille it is contained in eight Braille volumes, with approximately 100 Braille pages each and costs 639 PLN. DZdN GBPiZS has the largest collection of Braille books. Currently it has over 6,000 titles. Braille books are also in the collections of, among others, such libraries as the Raczyński Library (500 volumes) or the Provincial Public Library in Kraków. Due to the fact that items containing Braille publications are exempt from postal fees, readers can use them throughout the country. Data from DZN GBPiZS shows that among the main collection sections of talking books, Braille books, and online loans, the fewest readers use Braille books (in 2018, 4,861 readers used the Talking Book Collections section, 627 readers used the Braille Book Collections section, and 3,297 used the online rental service).

As M. Fedorowicz-Kruszewska (2010) notes, libraries should promote Braille text recording and facilitate access to Braille materials for blind

² IFLA – International Federation of Library Associations.

members of the local community. Expanding their own collections is possible thanks to donations and purchases. Many non-governmental organizations provide provincial public libraries with Braille collections, which is the result of various projects. The Szansa Foundation "We're Together" (Fundacja Szansa – Jesteśmy razem) is very active in this area. In 2022, it completed, among others, the projects "'I see by touch and hearing' – a campaign promoting reading by the blind", promoting books in Braille, Braille publications, and audiobooks, and "Development of reading among blind and visually impaired people", as well as numerous publication projects. In 2023, as part of the implementation of social projects, it published in Braille versions among others titles "*Północ i Południe. Teksty o polskiej kulturze i historii*" – ("North and South. Texts about Polish culture and history") – a book by Marek Cichocki available to the blind (2023); "*Memories*" ("*Wspomnienia*") by Aleksandra Piłsudska – edition for the blind (2023), "*The Barbarian in the Garden*" ("*Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie*") – essays by Zbigniew Herbert available for blind readers (2023), "*To Snowia and Beyond*" ("*Do Snowia I dalej*") – a book by Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz available for blind readers, and many others.

When it comes to purchasing Braille books, the Trzecie Oko publishing house has a commercial offering (175 titles). You can also order the adaptation and printing of any title from companies offering such services, such as Altix, Impuls, BrajlPunkt and others.

However, it is worth emphasizing that a way to offer Braille materials to readers is also to use interlibrary loans and to include links to libraries where such collections are available in catalogues.

ANALOG TALKING BOOKS

Analog talking books (audiobooks) are books that are read out loud, books to be listened to (a recording of the reader reading the content of the book), recorded on audio cassettes (and previously on vinyl records or reel-to-reel tapes). Today analogue talking books and equipment for their reproduction are no longer produced. However, they are still popular, especially among seniors with visual impairments, mainly those with low digital competencies. Sets of analogue talking books are in the collections of DZdN GBPiZS and special libraries, as well as many public libraries (for example, the Talking Book and Braille Lending Room of the Provincial Public Library in Kraków has over 3,000 titles).

DIGITAL TALKING BOOKS

Digital talking books (audiobooks) are sound materials recorded in the form of digital files, initially in the media format of CDs, currently available on servers, in virtual libraries and bookstores, or through publishers and

streaming services. The book may be a voice-over recording or a recording of sound generated by a speech synthesizer. Audiobooks are available in the following formats: MP3, WMA, MPEG4, OGG, which can be played on a computer or other devices using appropriate programs or applications. Talking book formats dedicated to blind and visually impaired people are the DAISY and CZYTAK formats. Files in these formats are equipped with a special navigation system based on tags delimiting the text, allowing the recipient full access to the structure of the book (chapters, subchapters, pages, paragraphs, footnotes, references), instead of the linear composition in traditional talking books (Śmiechowska-Petrovskij 2017b). Books in the DAISY format can be played on computers using software such as EasyReader, DaisyReader, DaisyWebPlayer and many others. The Polish-produced CZYTAK format is another talking book format with similar navigation properties as DAISY, but it is encoded and can only be played using special equipment (player) of the same name. Digital books can be played using digital book players.

Traditional audiobooks already constitute quite a significant part of library collections. They are easy to obtain from mainstream publishing houses. Special formats such as DAISY and CZYTAK can, in turn, be obtained thanks to many campaigns aimed at promoting reading among people with visual disabilities conducted by non-governmental organizations, co-financed by PFRON, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, provincial assemblies and other grantors. The most important initiatives in recent years are described below.

The Association for Assistance to Disabled Persons "Larix" (founded in 2003) has for many years considered the promotion of reading by people with visual impairments as its main area of activity. Since 2007, the organization has been recording and providing free digital talking books (in the CZYTAK format). The association's catalog contains 3,522 oral books and is successively being supplemented. Moreover, for several years it has been lending Czytak talking book players to public libraries. The association cooperates with over 300 libraries throughout the country.

Another important organization is the Klucz Foundation for the Education and Promotion of Reading of Blind and Visually Impaired People (founded in 2005). The main axis of the organization's activities is the creation and popularization of books published in the DAISY standard. It also provides the DAISY book reading browser (DaisyReader) at no cost. In the years 2007-2022, the foundation developed 682 book titles in the DAISY format, which it donated to 107 libraries.

The next organization discussed has a slightly different activity profile. The Masovian Association of Work for the Disabled "De Facto" (year of establishment: 2005) considers its flagship activities to be running an e-kiosk with periodicals for people with visual impairments – magazines

from the open press market, converted into a form that is friendly and accessible to blind and visually impaired people. The second activity is creating audio descriptions for films. Together with the Main Library of Labor and Social Security (DZdN) – Collections Department for the Blind, they created and run the National Resource of Digital Films with Polish Audio Description for the Blind.

It is worth emphasizing that apart from organizations created by people with visual impairments, other organizations are also involved in disseminating books for this group of recipients. For example, the Modern Education Foundation (founded in 2011), whose statutory goals are broad and quite diverse, has adapted 160 titles to the DAISY format as part of several editions of the “Book for You” project (2021, 2022, 2023 – the last one in cooperation with the Moderna Foundation). As part of the “Literature from the Recovered Territories” project, another 20 audiobooks were made available online and sent to libraries and other public institutions serving people with visual impairments.

An important initiative is the Wolne Lektury Foundation, which runs the free digital library wolnelektury.pl, containing over 5,500 literary works from the public domain. Thanks to the development of technological tools, the books offered are available for download in spoken form in .mp3, OggVorbis, Epub+audiobook formats, and some of them in the DAISY format. You can also download text formats: PDF, EPUB, MOBI, TXT. During the years 2023-2026, the foundation is implementing the project “E-collection of school readings and literature for listening for students with disabilities”. As part of this, 111 audiobooks with school readings, classics, and contemporary literature will be prepared, including 53 new titles in three formats: mp3, Daisy, Epub 3; 19 titles in two formats: Epub MO 3, Daisy; and 39 books only as Epub MO 3. Audiobooks that have already been prepared are available for free on the Wolne Lektury website and are also available in all school libraries.

DIGITAL TEXT BOOKS (EBOOKS)

Reading materials in text form can be read by blind people thanks to the use of typhlo-informatic tools or accessibility options built into the operating systems of mobile devices (computers, tablets, smartphones).

Files with text without formatting tags (TXT) and formatted texts (RTF, DOC, DOCX, PDF, ODT) can be read by touch on Braille devices (e.g. Braille notepads) or listened to on special devices, such as talking book players and publicly available players such as computers, tablets and smartphones (thanks to screen reading programs and speech synthesis). Blind people can also use other formats, such as EPUB and Mobi, on mobile devices with sound – but the disadvantage is that they have to work

with the device's screen turned on. This significantly facilitates access to mainstream reading materials – assistive technologies enable reading texts in digital form not adapted to Braille or audio speech.

This clear demand for digital collections poses a challenge for libraries to digitize their collections – developing and sharing digital files that can be read by people with visual impairments on various devices thanks to screen reading programs and implementing an online lending system.

It is worth mentioning digital libraries in this context. First of all, we should mention the Academic Digital Library (ABC) – a library system cataloging and sharing collections developed in special formats adapted to the needs of people with disabilities, the first digital library in Poland for blind people among others, established in 2010 on the initiative of the University of Warsaw Library. Since 1997, the Library of the University of Warsaw (BUW), among others, ran the Digital Book Library (first with talking books), developing materials in alternative formats at the user's request and providing typhlo-IT cabins for individual work. These collections have become part of ABC, which is currently co-created by leading universities in Poland (Czerwińska, 2017b). The ABC library's collections are made available to blind people, people with other visual impairments that cannot be corrected to an extent equivalent to that of an able-bodied person, and people with other disabilities that prevent them from using traditional materials in ordinary print. Sharing collections may involve various forms of providing access to their content, depending on the type of material provided and the method of access by the reader. Available forms of access are: downloading the file to a computer device, downloading the file directly to the reading application (only for applications compliant with the OPDS standard), reading the file via an online browser, sending the file to the reading device registered in the user's profile or to a digital storage service. The collections and all operations on them are available free of charge to readers after logging in (*Regulations of the Academic Digital Library*).

In 2011, the Zielona Góra Digital Library for the Blind was established on the initiative of the University of Zielona Góra Library and Dr. hab. Małgorzata Czerwińska, professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Sociology and Health Sciences of the University of Zielona Góra (UZ). It is addressed to all people with visual impairments.

Another non-academic initiative was the IBUK Libra Light platform, created in 2017 at the request of the Book Institute (Instytut Książki) and created by Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN. The platform made publications available to blind, visually impaired and physically disabled people (who cannot read printed books). Authorized readers could use fiction, scientific, and specialist publications free of charge in ePUB or mp3 file formats. The condition for gaining access to the platform was documenta-

tion of a disability. The IBUK Libra Light project was closed in 2021 (it was a 5-year project). Currently, users can use the general IBUK Libra service. This is a collection of several thousand e-books. The website is intended for everyone. Currently, it fully meets WCAG 2.1 AA standards. To use the website, you must create an account, select your library and obtain a special PIN, or access via HAN, PROXY or VPN.

This example perfectly shows how implementing the digital accessibility standards required by law minimizes the need to create special platforms and services for blind and visually impaired readers.

LIBRARY MATERIALS IN ENLARGED PRINT

Enlarged print or large print is the conventional name for the editorial adaptation of a text aimed at the needs of visual perception of visually impaired people and others who have difficulties in reading texts. It includes adjusting the font type and size (simple, sans-serif font, minimum 14 point), using larger spaces in the text, appropriate colors and contrast of the text and background, margin sizes, page numbering, and adaptation of graphic elements.

Materials of this type are intended for visually impaired people – using visual and visual-auditory-tactile techniques, whose vision allows them to read black-print texts, even if it is necessary to enlarge them or use optical or optoelectronic aids. People with low vision experience different functional consequences and, therefore, have different text needs. The most common consequences include: decreased visual acuity – reduced ability to perceive details, various types of visual field defects (peripheral, central, mixed, semi), impaired light sensitivity (including photophobia), decreased contrast sensitivity, impaired depth perception, visual variability, color vision disorders and others. Reading difficulties for visually impaired people occur in visual, cursory reading of the text; distinguishing subtle differences between colors and patterns used in drawings, graphs or charts; shifting eyes between graphic elements and text; shifting eyes between booklets and test answer sheets; visually encompassing the entire graphic element; shifting eyes from one line of text to the next; interpreting graphic elements, especially groups of drawings. Moreover, visually impaired people have difficulty maintaining reading speed at a level considered average for people with normal vision (Kończyk, 2011, pp. 7-8).

Reading materials in enlarged print are also a very good choice for older people who experience both physiological and pathological eye changes related to age. It is estimated that over the age of 70 only 10% of the population after correction have full visual acuity. The need for light increases with age: for the same level of vision, an average 6-year-old needs about twice as much light, and an 80-year-old about three or four times as

much light as a 20-year-old. Furthermore, age is a serious risk factor for blindness and low vision. It is estimated that one in three people over the age of 65 have some form of vision-limiting disease (Kilian, 2020).

Materials in enlarged print were created only occasionally. In 2011, school textbooks and teaching materials adapted in this way at the request of the Ministry of National Education began to be prepared (Śmiechowska-Petrovskij, 2015; 2018). However, in recent years, public market initiatives have also appeared. One of them is a series of books published in large font called "Wielkie Litery" ("Large Letters") – new editions of enlarged font books that make reading easier for visually impaired people and seniors. The project was initiated in 2019 by the book distributor OSDW Azymut. So far, over 500 books from several publishers have been published in the Wielkie Litery series. Publications with large fonts have joined the book collections of over 1,000 libraries from all over Poland.

The second important initiative is the "Big Letters" series, offered in the Gildia.pl online bookstore. This is an offer of books that meets the needs of readers with vision problems, intended for the elderly, people with visual impairments and the sick who feel discomfort when reading standard print. These are books printed in soft cover, with a colorful cover, in a larger format (16 x 23.5 cm) and with a large, legible and easy-to-read font (14-point size). The bookstore offers 960 titles.

LIBRARY MATERIALS IN BRAILLE AND BLACK-PRINT (TRANSPARENT)

Books in transparent print are publications containing black-print text prepared in accordance with the guidelines for adaptation to enlarged printing and Braille text. The black-print text is an underprint with raised text placed on top of it. Such publications appear as the result of reading projects. The main publisher is the Szansa – We're Together Foundation. This is a type of publication "for shared reading" – the same copy can be used by sighted, visually impaired and blind people.

OTHER LIBRARY MATERIALS

Other library materials that can be used by blind and visually impaired people include: typhlocartographic collections (touch maps and atlases), typhlographics (convex drawings), films with audio description, Braille and black-print books with relief graphics (for young blind children), musical materials and others.

LIBRARY EQUIPMENT: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Assistive technologies help blind and visually impaired people read materials that are not adapted for Braille or magnified print. Nowadays, people with visual disabilities most often use personal technologies in the form of special devices or in the form of applications for a mobile device (smartphone). However, libraries should have an individual work station for a person with a visual disability, the equipment of which includes:

- a computer with screen reading software installed for blind people and applications that magnify the image on the screen to be used by visually impaired people, as well as a sound module to listen to the read content (speech synthesizer);
- Braille display (a device connected to a computer, containing a special panel on which information displayed on the screen is highlighted in the form of Braille text (this is the so-called refreshable Braille));
- a fast scanner for scanning books and other materials, with OCR software (optical text recognition) enabling saving the scanned content as a text file;
- software for translating regular texts into Braille characters;
- a Braille printer;
- a printer for embossing convex graphics (optional);
- a stationary enlarger, portable enlargers, electronic magnifiers – devices that allow visually impaired people to enlarge reading material;
- lecture devices that allow you to scan the text and listen to it in real time.

DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY OF WEBSITES AND ONLINE CATALOGS

Libraries, as public entities, are subject to the requirement to ensure digital accessibility in accordance with the Act on digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities of April 4, 2019, which is the Polish equivalent of the European WCAG 2.1 rules. It contains basic guidelines on how to organize online communication to make it fully accessible. These concern the structure of the website, graphics and photos with methods of providing these with alternative text information, videos, and preparation that ensures navigation and full reading of digital texts and documents or of the intranet. Blind people use screen reading programs, and what is important is the logical structure and order of information on the page and the ability to navigate it using keyboard shortcuts (e.g. headings that have the option of expanding them). They also need alternative information for graphic objects (so they know what the photo or drawing shows). Active forms and links should also have appropriate, readable information. In turn, visually impaired people need the ability to enlarge the font, change the contrast of text and background, and know

which element is active when navigating the keyboard (e.g. by highlighting with an additional frame).

The annex to the Act of April 4, 2019 (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 1440) is a checklist with detailed guidelines for the accessibility of web content applicable to websites and mobile applications in terms of accessibility for people with disabilities.

INTANGIBLE ACCESS ARTIFACTS FOR BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE OF A BEHAVIORAL AND LINGUISTIC-COMMUNICATIVE NATURE

Library employees who do not have specific knowledge about how people with particular disabilities function and have no personal contact with them may feel fear and discomfort related to serving this group of readers. Very often, librarians' professional experience comes from institutions designed and operating without the presence and participation of people with disabilities, which is why they do not have skills related to organizing an accessible library. Raising the competencies of librarians in working with readers with special needs in terms of access to library materials is a key activity supporting the area of reader service.

Małgorzata Fedorowicz already pointed out in her 2010 publication that the responsibility for the proper preparation of library staff to provide library and information services to people with disabilities lies with the library management staff. Following Andrew McDonald, she mentioned factors important for creating an institution's "culture of awareness", such as: library policy and planning related to serving users with disabilities; support provided by management staff; proper allocation of collected resources; comprehensive staff training; appropriate attitude towards the issue of readers' disabilities – all staff members are responsible for serving this group. She also pointed to recommendations regarding the importance of appointing one library employee as the person responsible for, among others, the implementation, development and coordination of services for people with special needs in reading print. Their tasks should include: participating in the development of library policy, supervising the implementation of services, training librarians and users, being familiar with the latest trends in library services, and others (Fedorowicz 2010, pp. 132-134). These important tips have found legal force in the previously mentioned accessibility laws. Pursuant to Art. 14 section 5 of the Act of July 19, 2019 on ensuring accessibility for people with special needs (Journal of Laws of 2022, item 2240, of 2024, item 731), public institutions are obliged to appoint accessibility coordinators. Public libraries are on the ministerial list of entities subject to the Act, but they are not obliged to appoint a coordinator. Nevertheless, voluntarily appointing coordinators

in organizational units, especially if they serve a larger number of clients, is possible and recommended – the decision in this respect rests with local governments.

Accessibility coordinators are appointed in many public libraries. The coordinators' tasks include in particular:

1. providing support for people with special needs in accessing services provided by the library;
2. preparation and coordination of an action plan to improve the library's accessibility to people with special needs;
3. monitoring activities related to ensuring accessibility for people with special needs;
4. publishing the details of the accessibility coordinator in the Public Information Bulletin;
5. preparing reports on ensuring accessibility for people with special needs in the scope of library activities;
6. presenting the library director with current information on activities undertaken in the scope of tasks performed.

When it comes to improving librarians' competencies in working with readers with visual disabilities and inclusive implementation of the statutory goals of libraries, many free training courses for library employees have been organized in Poland in recent years. A significant part of them was funded thanks to funding from the government's Accessibility Plus program, established to support the implementation of the provisions of the Accessibility Act in the years 2018-2025.

One such training initiative was a project organized as part of the cooperation between the Rehabilitation Center of the Typhological Institute of the Polish Association of the Blind, the book distributor OSDW Azymut (publisher of the "Wielkie Litery" series), and the Good Books company, under the name: "Wielkie Litery. Blind and visually impaired readers in the public library – training program". The training topics concerned the participation of seniors and people with visual impairments in the cultural and literary life of libraries.

Issues covered during training include:

- visual impairment,
- activities of the Polish Association for the Blind as an institution working for people with visual disabilities,
- the Availability Plus program,
- the Act on ensuring accessibility for persons with special needs,
- the Act on digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities,
- tasks of the accessibility coordinator,
- accessibility declaration,
- accessibility reports,

- information and communication accessibility for blind and visually impaired people,
- application of the principles of *savoir vivre towards people with visual impairments*,
- digital accessibility: WCAG 2.1 standard, website accessibility, website accessibility audit,
- architectural accessibility of rooms and public space to the needs of people with visual disabilities,
- optical, non-optical, and electronic aids as support for reading and a way of obtaining information by people with visual disabilities,
- Braille writing and reading skills for people with visual disabilities,
- availability of literary and cultural events for people with visual impairments.

The trainings were recorded in the form of video recordings and are available free of charge on streaming services.

Another important activity in this area was the implementation of the project "Books available to everyone – training in handling disabled readers and promotion", co-financed by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, implemented by the *Szansa dla Niewidomych* (Opportunity for the Blind) Foundation. As part of the project, training was conducted in the field of contact and service for people with disabilities. They covered both institutions already to some extent adapted to the needs of people with disabilities in terms of the availability of library materials (audio-books, black-print versions, Braille versions of publications), but also those that did not have such numerous specialized collections. The training took place in 16 institutions in each voivodeship and was attended by over 160 people. Employees of provincial typhlopoints – a branch of the Szansa Foundation – and promotion specialists conducted workshops as part of the training, during which each institution developed an action plan focused on the promotion of reading among people with disabilities. The plans were implemented in the months following the completion of the training.

A commercial offer of training for libraries is made available on an ongoing basis by Good Books, which has been providing training for librarians, publishers, and booksellers for fifteen years, supporting the development of reading in Poland, mainly by implementing technological innovations and changing the way of working with readers and library users. The following problem issues are offered within the "Availability in the library" area:

- Cultural offer for people with special needs in the library
- How to properly behave towards a person with a disability, i.e. *savoir vivre for librarians*.

- Accessibility in the library – ABC of the librarian and cultural institution.
- Accessibility of websites and mobile applications, i.e. digital accessibility management in libraries and cultural institutions.
- Adapting websites to WCAG 2.1 requirements.

In addition to improving the knowledge, skills and social competencies of librarians, it is also important to organize ways of making library materials available, which is an essential library service. As for blind and visually impaired people, this can be done through:

- personal loans at the library premises;
- providing access outside the library through the following services: home delivery, sending materials by post, making them available electronically (online lending); offering bibliobuses (mobile library branches in trucks or semi-trucks; bibliobuses not only enable the borrowing of books “closer to home”, but also the use of assistive technologies).

SUMMARY

Modern libraries face many challenges. These undoubtedly include: digitization and technology implementation – management of digital resources, providing e-books, audiobooks, online databases, as well as providing access to modern communication and educational tools for users. In addition, the management of limited budgets and the need to modify the role and tasks of librarians should also be mentioned. A special challenge today is to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, including the blind and visually impaired, to library resources as well as events and practices carried out in these special cultural institutions.

The analyses carried out show that for many decades public libraries have not had to systematically and methodically create an accessibility framework for their functioning, especially in relation to readers with visual impairments. Specialized libraries, school libraries at educational centers and the library at the Polish Association of the Blind were responsible for promoting reading and providing services to blind and visually impaired people. The reasons for this state of affairs were, among others, limitations resulting from difficulties in issuing and making available special materials, Braille and spoken. Technological and socio-cultural changes require that – just like inclusive education – libraries become universally accessible to all people living in their immediate area, regardless of health status and functional ability, consolidating the local community. For this to be possible, the access artifacts mentioned in the article, both tangible and intangible, must exist.

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EMILIA ŚMIECHOWSKA-PETROVSKIJ
Wydział Nauk Pedagogicznych
Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego
w Warszawie
e-mail: e.smiechowska@uksw.edu.pl
ORCID 0000-0002-6522-3817

BIBLIOTEKI PUBLICZNE JAKO PRZESTRZEŃ INFORMACYJNA OSÓB NIEWIDOMYCH I SŁABOWIDZĄCYCH. MATERIAŁNE I NIEMATERIALNE ARTEFAKTY DOSTĘPU

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Artefakty dostępu. Biblioteki włączające. Inkluzja informacyjna. Osoby niewidome i słabowidzące.

ABSTRAKT: **Teza/cel** – Celem artykułu było ustalenie, jakie są materialne i niematerialne artefakty dostępu osób niewidomych i słabowidzących do bibliotek publicznych jako przestrzeni informacyjnej, a także ukazanie w ujęciu historycznoprawnym obsługi bibliotecznej osób niewidomych i słabowidzących w Polsce. **Metody badań** – analiza danych zastanych (akty prawne, dane statystyczne), analiza piśmiennictwa i inwentarz praktyk wdrożeniowych. **Wyniki** – do materialnych artefaktów dostępu osób niewidomych i słabowidzących należą: adaptacja przestrzeni fizycznej do percepcji pozaoptycznej i ograniczonego widzenia (tyfloplany, oznaczenia dotykowe, znaczniki przestrzeni – beacony, oznaczenia kontrastowe w powiększonej skali) oraz zgromadzenie materiałów bibliotecznych w użytecznych formatach. Rozwój technologii znacząco wpływa na warunki dostępności: preferowane jest tworzenie materiałów w formatach cyfrowych, doposażenie bibliotek w technologie wspomagające a także wykorzystanie znaczników przestrzeni

(beaconów, kodów NFC i QR do transferu informacji orientacyjnych). Na niematerialne artefakty dostępu składają się kompetencje bibliotekarzy odnośnie do pracy z użytkownikami z niepełnosprawnością narządu wzroku, które współcześnie mogą być podnoszone w ramach programów rządowych oraz komercyjnych oraz zróżnicowane formy obsługi użytkownika. Dzięki nim biblioteki publiczne mogą budować inkluzywny model funkcjonowania, uprawomocniając zapisane w ustawie o bibliotekach "powszechne prawo do korzystania z zasobów" oraz "powszechną dostępność" dla wszystkich czytelników, również z niepełnosprawnością wzroku.

ALEKSANDRA SZTAJERWALD
Member of the Management Board
The SYNAPSIS Foundation
e-mail: a.sztajerwald@synapsis.org.pl

LIBRARY ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM



Aleksandra Sztajerwald is a pedagogue and socio-cultural animator cooperating with numerous institutions and non-governmental organizations throughout Poland, opening them to the needs of people on the autism spectrum and people with intellectual disabilities. She participates in teams consulting and developing accessibility solutions for people with disabilities in Poland. Co-author of guides, standards and recommendations, Ms. Sztajerwald popularizes and creates materials with texts that are easy to read and understand, as well as developing and coordinating

original and innovative projects, testing new solutions, training and advising. Between 2022-2023, she was a member of the Council for Supportive and Alternative Communication and Easy-to-Read and Understand Text, established by the Government Plenipotentiary for Disabled Persons. Co-author of the social innovation "Culture in easy text – patterns for institutions", i.e. guides for teams working on materials with text that is easy to read and understand. Since 2008, she has been associated with the SYNAPSIS Foundation and is currently a member of the Management Board.

KEYWORDS: Autism. Autism spectrum. People with disabilities. Intellectual disability. Accessibility.

ABSTRACT: Thesis/goal – The purpose of the article is to outline the contemporary challenge of creating libraries accessible to people on the autism spectrum. **Method** – In the first part, I focus on explaining what autism is, presenting statistics on the frequency of occurrence and the main needs of affected persons re-

sulting from autism. Then, referring to the applicable legal documents, I describe what solutions have been developed for readers on the spectrum as part of the project "Librarian, make friends with a person with autism". **Conclusions** – The project was implemented by the Association of Polish Librarians in partnership with the SYNAPSIS Foundation. Finally, I present various initiatives of Polish libraries aimed at creating friendly conditions and increasing the awareness of the local community regarding people on the autism spectrum.

INTRODUCTION

A modern library is a place for everyone. When we hear such a statement, we usually first think that everyone will find something interesting in it. However, even if it is the best-stocked library in the region, it will not be a place for everyone if accessibility is not ensured. In the governmental *Accessibility Plus Program 2018-2025*, accessibility is defined as "a property of the environment (physical space, digital reality, information and communication systems, products, services) that allows people with functional difficulties (physical, cognitive) to use it on an equal basis with others. For many people, accessibility is a condition for leading an independent life and participating in the social and economic life of the country, local community, school or workplace" (Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, 2023).

Libraries as public institutions should be accessible. Therefore, when planning their activities, they must take into account the capabilities and needs of current and future readers to provide them with free access to the premises and resources. They must also prepare staff to effectively support readers in using the library's offer. Over recent years, we have seen an intensification of various activities aimed at older people, people with disabilities and people on the autism spectrum. Creating a place accessible to this last group of people is currently the biggest challenge. The development and implementation of solutions ensuring the availability of the offer for these people is a complex and long-term process.

People on the autism spectrum want to participate in cultural life and develop their passions and interests, just like their peers. Unfortunately, for most of them, leaving home is associated with a lot of stress. Most often, it is caused by fear of unpredictable situations, new places, and the judgments and reactions of other people. Therefore, they need places where they will feel understood and safe, and which they can use as independently as possible. It is worth taking a look at what has been developed so far in Poland and in other countries, and to ascertain which initiatives have been best received by people on the spectrum and their families, as well as by librarians. Only then will we be able to plan further activities regarding library accessibility.

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a different way of thinking, knowing, and feeling the world. In the International Classification of Diseases ICD-10, still in force in Poland, childhood autism, atypical autism, and Asperger's syndrome are listed among pervasive developmental disorders. Work is underway to introduce a new version of the ICD-11 classification in Poland. The new classification will not include the previously mentioned distinctions, but will use the term "autism spectrum disorder" (ASD). For the purposes of this article, I will use the terms a person on the autism spectrum and an autistic person interchangeably. Both are indicated by people on the autism spectrum as the most acceptable (Autism Europe, 2022; National Autistic Society, 2021).

The word spectrum emphasizes how diverse autistic people are and how differently autism can affect their lives. Features of autism appear in early childhood and accompany the person throughout his or her life. The skills and needs of each autistic person are very individual and may change over time. Autism spectrum disorder can be diagnosed both for non-speaking people, i.e. those who do not use verbal language, who need constant care and support throughout their lives and who function at the level of intellectual disability, as well as for people who communicate efficiently with speech, start families and pursue professional life. Another characteristic feature is that people with autism perceive sensory stimuli in a specific way. Many of them are excessively sensitive to sensory stimuli, e.g. light, sound, touch, smell.

Autism does not have to be, but it can be a cause of disability if it limits a person's independence in various life functions. People with such a diagnosis due to their lack of independence in various areas may apply for a disability certificate in Poland (Act of August 27, 1997 on vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of disabled people, 2023).

STATISTICS

The number of autism spectrum diagnoses is constantly increasing, with preschool and elementary school children most often diagnosed. According to WHO data, it is assumed that 1 in 100 children has autism. This is an estimate because there is no uniform way of keeping statistics in individual countries (WHO, 2023). There are also different levels of access to diagnostic tests.

The most accurate statistics are provided by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. According to recent research, among children born after 2012, 1 child in 36 was diagnosed with autism. The study covered 11 American states and was conducted in 2020. The research report was published in 2023 (Maenner, Warren, Williams, 2023).

In Europe, the estimated rate of autism is approximately 2% of the population, i.e. 7 million people (Autism Europe, 2024). There is no single reliable source of data in Poland. In the textbook "Standards for functional assessment and planning of educational and specialist support (...)" prof. Ewa Pisula estimated, based on her own calculations, that the group of children aged 0-18 on the autism spectrum in Poland is approximately 73.1 thousand. (Pisula, 2022). However, statistics from the Educational Information System show that in the 2019/2020 school year, among people with a certificate of need for special education, 40% of children in preschool institutions and 20% of students in schools were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, with a total of 48,091 children (Podgórska-Jachnik, 2021). Considering current statistics, it is obvious that society should take into account the needs of people on the autism spectrum and provide equal access in all areas of life.

AVAILABILITY

Creating a more welcoming and open environment is key to building a society that accepts and supports diversity, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in society. In Poland, there is increasing social awareness about the needs and lives of people with disabilities. Actions are being taken to ensure equal access to public spaces and services for everyone. The document that contributed to this and changed the way of thinking about disability is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of December 13, 2006. The Polish Government became a signatory on March 20, 2007, and Poland ratified the Convention on September 6, 2012. The convention ensures that people with disabilities have the right to participate fully in society on an equal basis with other citizens. Most importantly, it obligates states party to it to implement its provisions in their own legislation:

"Art. 30 Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sports

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities:

- a) Enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats;
- b) Enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats;
- c) Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance.

The implementation of the provisions of the convention by Poland is confirmed by the Act on Accessibility (Act of July 19, 2019 on ensuring ac-

cessibility for persons with special needs, 2022). The Act together with the Act on Digital Accessibility (Act of April 4, 2019 on the digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities, 2023) obliges public entities to take specific actions in the field of accessibility for people with special needs. This term emphasizes that accessibility applies not only to people with disabilities, but also to older people and people with baby carriages.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

Before the introduction of legal acts, ensuring accessibility was associated only with architectural interventions, e.g. installing driveways and elevators; tools supporting people with hearing or vision disabilities; and care for people with intellectual disabilities. Ensuring accessibility to public services for people on the spectrum is something new in Poland. It is also a challenge due to the great diversity of needs of this group.

In Western countries, the idea of autism-friendly spaces has been developed for many years. An example of such action in Poland was the project "Culture friendly to people with autism" implemented in 2013 (SYNAPSIS Foundation, 2014). It was the first project focusing exclusively on increasing the accessibility of cultural institutions to people on the autism spectrum. The project was an initiative of the SYNAPSIS Foundation. This foundation was established in 1989 as one of the first non-governmental organizations in Poland working for people on the autism spectrum and their families. Currently, the foundation deals with diagnostics, therapy, training and advocacy.

The SYNAPSIS Foundation invited the cooperation of Warsaw cultural institutions, including the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, the Copernicus Science Center, Baj Theater and Multikino Ursynów. Close cooperation with cultural institutions resulted in the development of universal solutions and tools that make it easier for autistic people to participate in cultural life. The solutions were co-created and tested by autistic people, their families, therapists and employees of various cultural institutions. After its completion, other cultural institutions began to use these materials. The National Institute of Museology and Collections Protection (currently the National Institute for Museums) and the National Center for Culture Poland have also begun organizing training for the needs of people on the autism spectrum. In 2015, the publication "ABC Guest with a Disability in the Museum, Part 2 – Intellectual Disability, Autism and Diverse Groups" was published by the National Institute of Museology and Collections Protection, and events created with the needs of autistic people in mind are increasingly included in the educational activities of cultural institutions across Poland.

PROJECT "LIBRARIAN, MAKE FRIENDS WITH A PERSON WITH AUTISM"

The next major action towards the accessibility of cultural institutions was the project "Librarian, make friends with a person with autism". The initiator and leader of the project was the Polish Librarians' Association in partnership with the SYNAPSIS Foundation. The project was implemented in 2015-2016. The aim of the project was to improve librarians' competences in serving readers on the autism spectrum and to show autistic people and their families that the library is a friendly place where it is worth spending free time (Grzecznowska 2016).

The previous experience of the SYNAPSIS Foundation, conversations with library workers and people on the autism spectrum, and foreign initiatives such as "Libraries and Autism: We're Connected" and "Targeting Autism" played an important role while working on the detailed concept of activities. Therefore, the decision was taken to conduct parallel activities aimed at library employees and autistic people.

ACTIVITIES WITH LIBRARIANS

Nine libraries were invited to participate in the project. The facilities were selected to represent different types of collections. They included university, school, local, district and modern media libraries. During the entire project they provided a place for testing tools and observing the behavior of employees and participants on the autism spectrum. Therapists checked what constituted difficulty in communication, where support was necessary, and where it was enough to use an additional tool. Each visit was completed with an evaluation, separately with participants and library employees. A total of 19 visits took place. During the meeting summarizing all the visits, many librarians admitted that they had changed their perceptions of autistic people. Previously, they considered people on the autism spectrum to be unpredictable and withdrawn. They were afraid that they would not know how to talk to them and whether they would be able to communicate with such a reader at all. This was due to numerous stereotypes and lack of previous experience. After meeting the participants, the librarians became confident and were ready for direct contact.

In turn, participants on the autism spectrum were asked why they hadn't used libraries before. The most common answer was that they did not know about the wide range of additional activities they offered. They perceived libraries as places only for borrowing books. They were also afraid that they would not be able to cope with the new situation and that the library employees would not help them. Previously, when using other public institutions, they felt very anxious and felt judged by employees

and by other users. Therefore, they preferred to spend their free time at home.

A similar situation was described in the report “National Autism Census of 2016” (Platos, 2016). It presented a summary of survey research in which 360 parents, 129 autistic people and 73 normally developing individuals took part, the last constituting the control group. In answer to the question: “Where do you most often spend your free time?” people on the autism spectrum were less likely to declare spending time outside of the home either in public places or with friends and colleagues than people from the control group. According to the data, only one fourth of autistic people indicated that they spend time in public places (e.g. a library, park, community center or cafe), while every second person from the control group did. Time spent at the home of friends or colleagues was indicated by 12% of autistic people and 40% of people from the control group. However, as many as 20% of autistic people stated they liked to spend their free time with their family compared to 6% of people from the control group.

TOOLS FOR PEOPLE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM – PROTOTYPE DEVELOPMENT, TESTING, PRODUCTION

For the process of preparing tools, it was very important to take into account the diversity of needs of people on the autism spectrum, as well as their interests and motivation to use library resources. As part of the project, five communication tools and six instructional videos were created.

The purpose of the tools and videos was to facilitate activities such as:

- asking for help,
- finding one’s way in a new space,
- initiating a conversation with a librarian,
- transitioning from one activity to the next,
- taking action (e.g. joining the library, borrowing a book).

All tools were designed in such a way as not to stigmatize people on the autism spectrum. They were intended to be universal and able to be used by any reader. Thirty-one autistic people and five therapists took part in the tool testing process.

COMMUNICATION BOOKS

Many autistic people find it difficult to cope with new social situations. People on the autism spectrum feel good when they are in control of the situation and know what will happen. Therefore, they avoid situations that require flexibility and quick adaptation to new and unknown circumstances. If changes occur, they feel a strong need to restore the previous state through rituals, the positioning of objects, and even in the behavior

of other people. In new situations they may experience anxiety, fear, and frustration, have difficulty concentrating or be withdrawn, aggressive, or self-aggressive.

Any hints on how to behave in a given situation and what will happen are helpful. "Library Toolbox" is a two-part scenario of a visit to the library. The first part contains the most important information about the first visit, including how to prepare for it, what you should take with you, and what you should ask the librarian about. The second part is a collection of the most frequently asked questions and matters dealt with in the library, e.g. borrowing, extending a loan, returning a book. The tool helps you initiate a conversation with a librarian and choose the right words.

A simpler version of the "Library Toolbox" are the "I want to borrow" and "I want to use" books. Each of these contains an example of dialogue regarding a given activity. Single sentences are placed on separate pages with instructions on what to do, e.g. hand over the reader's card or wait for the librarian's response. The books contain "hints", i.e. cards with selected types of collections or devices available in the library (e.g. book, audiobook, newspaper, game, computer, film, Internet, tablet), enabling the reader to choose what he or she wants to borrow or take advantage of. A sticky note with the selected item can be attached to the indicated place in the sentence.

The third communication tool consists of two boards with pictograms. The inspiration for this tool came from communication boards used by people using alternative communication methods. On one board there are boxes with pictograms of items to be borrowed, on the other there are pictograms indicating information and rules applicable in the library, for example "Please be quiet", "No eating or drinking", "Wait", "Help me". The reader can point to the cardboard with the pictogram or tear it off the board and hand it to the librarian. In the same way, the librarian can point or give a card in response.

MAPS

Even people on the autism spectrum who have great difficulties in functioning can independently find the book or equipment they are interested in. However, in a space they do not know well yet, they often feel lost. The map helps them master and understand the space of the library they intend to go to and then use. Maps make your destination more predictable and therefore safer. As part of the project, sample maps and instructions on how to make a map for your own library were prepared.

MOVIES

People on the autism spectrum often have difficulty imagining a given situation. Illustrating and showing how it will take place helps them prepare for it. The advantage of films is the ability to watch them in a safe place, such as at home. As part of the project, films were created presenting the most common situations in the library: What is a library, I apply for a library card, I want to borrow, I want to borrow using pictograms, I want to use, I am returning books. The films are posted on the YouTube channels of the SYNAPSIS Foundation and the Polish Librarians' Association. In total, the films have been viewed 21,000 times (as of May 3, 2024).

Each film consists of two parts. The first is an introduction containing the most important information. The second one shows how a conversation between a person on the autism spectrum and a librarian may go. The roles were played by autistic people and by librarians.

"LABYRINTH" GAMIFICATION

Paweł Tkaczyk is a recognized specialist in Poland dealing with marketing and brand building, mainly through gamification and storytelling. He defines gamification as turning everyday activities into a game, adding such elements of game mechanics as collecting, using leaderboards, having a specific goal, moving through sequential levels, facing challenges and gaining achievements and rewards (Tkaczyk, 2014).

While the project was underway, gamification was just gaining popularity in Poland. The Highlight/Inaczej Foundation was responsible for creating the "Labirynt" gamification tool. The tool was intended to help motivate autistic people to use the library at least once a week. The prototype was created specifically for the project. It was the first use of gamification for people on the spectrum in Europe.

The gamification took place in two spaces – in the library and in a place previously known to the participants, e.g. at the foundation, where they had previously attended classes. During the classes, participants were given a mission to complete in the library. The mission was confirmed by a stamp on the report card. At the next meeting, the players discussed the visit and solving the task. For completing the task they received cards with a picture of a part of a corridor. The cards were used to build tunnels in the Labyrinth, at the center of which was the Book of Creation and Doom. Players had to regularly complete missions, cooperating with other participants. An additional element was provided by special missions introducing players to a famous figure from the world of culture, science and art. Each of these characters was a person on the autism spectrum.

The gamification prototype was given a rating by participants of four on a five-point scale. Participants stated that the library became a more

friendly place for them after gamification. Half of the participants answered that they would not go to the library without participating in the gamification.

For a month, tests of various board games were carried out to examine what forms and elements of gameplay bring the greatest joy to the participants. The way of thinking of autistic people was also taught in order to motivate them to act as effectively as possible. It is worth emphasizing that taking part in gamification requires participants to have specific skills such as reading and writing. All elements of the "Labyrinth" gamification together with the user manual are posted on the project website.

WEBSITE

For the needs of the project and with a view to its durability, a website www.autyzm.sbp.pl was created. During the project, reports from visits, articles prepared by various specialists and information about current activities were posted on the website. An important element of the website is an interactive map of autistic-friendly libraries. The map is constantly being developed. A library that meets specific requirements may contact the Polish Librarians' Association (website administrator) with a request to mark it on the map. The website also includes graphics to mark the library as an autistic-friendly place, a reader card template and a publication summarizing the project.

TRAINING

The last element of the project was training for librarians. 49 people from 37 libraries from all over Poland took part in the training. The participants learned about the needs of people on the autism spectrum and became familiar with the concepts behind the tools being prepared. All libraries received sets of printed tools.

Subsequent training sessions were organized independently by libraries or local activists. Training was held for employees of the Municipal Public Library in Andrychów and school libraries in this city, and then the tools prepared as part of the project were implemented. Training was also carried out at the Regional Public Library and Culture Animation Center in Poznań and the Cyprian Norwid Provincial and Municipal Public Library in Zielona Góra, during the international scientific conference "People with Disabilities in the Library – Inclusion in the World of Information and Culture – Theory and Practice".

The project "Librarian, make friends with people with autism" became an inspiration and initiated a number of changes in libraries throughout Poland. It was a great honor to have the opportunity to present the project's premises and results during the IFLA World Library and Informa-

tion Congress in 2017. The project met with great interest and recognition among the congress participants.

Despite the passage of nine years, the “Librarian, make friends with a person with autism” project, in terms of the subject matter and quality of the tools developed, remains the only such comprehensive activity on autism addressed to libraries from all over Poland.

WHAT DOES ACCESSIBILITY LOOK LIKE IN LIBRARIES NOW?

In the reports of Statistics Poland from 2022 (Szlubowska, 2023), the heading “facilities in public libraries for people with special needs” includes such categories as adaptation of workstations for people with physical disabilities, purchase of equipment to facilitate reading: magnifying glasses, and equipment for playing recordings. However, there is no information about what libraries provide for people on the autism spectrum.

Libraries, like other cultural institutions, most often finance investments and purchases in the field of accessibility from their own funds or from grants announced by the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons and from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Today, institutions must make difficult decisions about how to prioritize accessibility investments. Most activities focus on eliminating architectural and digital barriers and purchasing equipment, which contributes to marginalizing the needs of people on the autism spectrum. There is a need to implement a systemic solution under which, along with funds for substantive activities, institutions (including libraries) would receive a pool of funds for accessibility.

The project “Accessibility advocates in libraries”, implemented in 2020 by the Polish Librarians’ Association in partnership with the Culture Without Barriers Foundation, provided great support for libraries. Its main effect was the establishment of a group of certified accessibility advocates in the library community, who gained competencies to share knowledge and to support other librarians in creating and implementing new initiatives for people with disabilities. The website www.autyzm.sbp.pl was also expanded to include information related to the needs of and services for people with autism as well as others (visually impaired, hearing impaired, with psychomotor disorders).

LIBRARY INITIATIVES

We cannot, however, ignore libraries that on their own initiative undertake activities addressed to autistic people, their families, and specialists. Most often they are addressed to the local community and financed from their own funds or obtained grants. The motivation to undertake this type

of action is often the reported needs of readers and the experiences of employees who are parents of autistic children or have such people in their family.

An example of such an action is the Parents' Club established by the Municipal Public Library in Wrocław. For several years, the group "Asperger's syndrome and autism in the immediate environment: what, where, how" has been bringing together parents and teachers once a month for lectures especially prepared for them. Participants can also benefit from individual consultations with a psychologist. The library offers much more. When creating the first adaptations, it cooperated with experts of the "Librarian, make friends with a person with autism" project. The library branches run an "Autism-friendly library" program. Readers can use library maps and tips to help them find their way around the library and its collections. Every Monday, the lights are dimmed and library visitors are asked to talk in hushed tones. This reduction in stimuli is often called "quiet hours". The library is constantly expanding its collection with the latest publications on autism.

SENSORY COMFORT

The library is often perceived as a quiet, peaceful place with limited stimuli. For some autistic people, specific rules, the artificiality of the situation, and the lack of a clear definition of what it means to "stay silent" cause great discomfort. Sensory conditions must be treated holistically. Sounds include: noises coming from open doors, windows, or when walking, echoes, and sounds of equipment. Sounds are combined with visual stimuli (amount of light, glass spaces, decor), olfactory stimuli (dust, cleaning fluids), tactile stimuli and those perceived by the whole body (temperature). All these stimuli influence the sensory friendliness of the space. Only the elimination or minimization of difficult stimuli will promote work and concentration and make autistic people feel safe in this space (McMullin, Walton, 2019).

Solutions ensuring sensory comfort are currently quite popular among various types of institutions and stores. A large amount and variety of sensory stimuli, especially in new and unfamiliar surroundings, may lead to sensory overload for a person on the autism spectrum. In such situations, the brain cannot cope with such a large amount of information, which leads to difficulty concentrating, fatigue, crying, nervousness or panic attack. Providing sensory comfort is important for people on the autism spectrum due to their often high sensitivity to sensory stimuli.

Initially, it may seem that creating such conditions is impossible. The most popular solutions intended to prevent sensory overload or help cope with a situation that has already occurred are the previously mentioned "quiet hours", as well as quiet rooms, the availability of noise-cancelling

headphones, quiet work rooms and appropriate space arrangements (Sztajerwald, Świeża 2015). Each of these solutions should be selected and appropriately adapted to the conditions and purpose of the institution. The team working on creating concepts and implementing solutions must include autistic people, parents, and therapists. Only they will be able to assess the usefulness and sense of a given solution.

Examples of such cooperation include quiet corners created together with parents and non-governmental organizations in the Beskidzka Library in Bielsko-Biała and the Municipal Public Library in Świecie. In the "quiet corners" there are aids for sensory stimulation, and the decor and conditions are conducive to relaxation. Both libraries also offer sensory integration workshops, meetings with specialists and quiet hours.

SPREADING KNOWLEDGE

The simplest way to spread knowledge about the autism spectrum is to expand book collections with items on this topic and prepare bibliographic lists for teachers and parents. Another group of initiatives are events about autism, which is the most frequently chosen form of activities. This group includes: art competitions, exhibitions about autism, exhibitions of works by people on the autism spectrum from local schools and therapeutic centers, exhibitions of artists on the autism spectrum (Public Library in the Włochy District), meetings with specialists and autistic people (Main Library of the Masovian Voivodeship), conferences (MBP Central Library in Gliwice), film reviews (Hugo Kołłątaj Pedagogical Provincial Library in Kraków) and training (Public Library in Piaseczno). Many of these events are organized as part of the World Autism Awareness Day celebrated on April 2 and co-organized with local non-governmental organizations, schools, and Occupational Therapy Workshops.

SUMMARY

With information on statistics regarding autism spectrum diagnosis, the accessibility of public institutions for this group should be developed and indicated as one of the strategic goals for the coming years. However, it is worth considering what the current needs of readers, employees, and the local community are. We must ask what solutions should be created and recommended taking into account the diverse functions and size of the library, from school and academic libraries to ones serving as local centers of social activity. How do we systematize and ensure the substantive quality of these solutions?

Thanks to scientific research and accounts of autistic people, we know more and more, and the social image and nomenclature are changing. A name that was generally accepted a few years ago may now be con-

sidered offensive. An example of this is the medical term ‘a person with autism spectrum disorder’, used in everyday communication as a stigmatizing term. People on the autism spectrum argue that their development is not impaired, just different. Libraries should promote reliable knowledge and prevent the repetition of harmful stereotypes. Therefore, a solution worth considering is creating free e-learning for libraries. The course of the English organization Dimensions, created in cooperation with the Association of Senior Children’s and Education Librarians and Libraries Connected (Dimensions, 2019), can serve as a model. Another solution may also be updating and developing the materials created as part of the “Librarian, make friends with a person with autism” project, as well as the promotion of good practices by umbrella organizations such as the Polish Librarians’ Association.

It is worth noting that staff awareness and creating a friendly space are only part of the work on accessibility. In line with IFLA’s values, libraries should promote the enforcement of human rights and social inclusion through their activities. Access to knowledge and information is one of the basic human rights. I believe that the community of Polish librarians should get involved in creating a reading offer for people on the autism spectrum with intellectual disabilities. In Western and Scandinavian countries, adaptations of literature, Internet portals, and information materials in easy-to-read texts are popular. Guidelines for creating content have also been prepared by IFLA (Momura, Skat Nielsen, Tronbacke, 2010). Additionally, readers’ clubs are established at libraries in which people with intellectual disabilities meet and discuss the texts they have read about culture in a broad sense. In Poland, the Polish Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities and several non-governmental organizations are responsible for writing educational materials in language that is easy to read and understand. So far, libraries have not undertaken this type of action. This is, of course, a much broader topic, but it shows how many solutions are still worth improving on or developing from scratch. I am convinced that, as in the case of the “Librarian, make friends with a person with autism” project, thanks to the cooperation of various environments we can meet these challenges and contribute to the development of accessibility of Polish libraries.

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ALEKSANDRA SZTAJERWALD

Członki Zarządu

Fundacja SYNAPSIS

e-mail: a.sztajerwald@synapsis.org.pl

BIBLIOTEKA DOSTĘPNA DLA OSÓB W SPEKTRUM AUTYZMU

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Autyzm. Spektrum autyzmu. Osoby z niepełnosprawnościami. Niepełnosprawność intelektualna. Dostępność.

ABSTRAKT: Teza/cel artykułu – Celem artykułu jest zarysowanie współczesnego wyzwania jakim jest stworzenie bibliotek dostępnych dla osób w spektrum autyzmu. Metody – Przeanalizowano akty prawne dotyczące osób o specjalnych potrzebach, w tym osób z autyzmem, publikacje dotyczące omawianego problemu oraz dokumenty dotyczące projektu „Bibliotekarzu zaprzyjaźnij się z osobą z autyzmem”. Wnioski – W pierwszej części skupiono się na wyjaśnieniu czym jest autyzm, przedstawiono statystyki częstotliwości występowania oraz główne potrzeby tych osób wynikające z autyzmu. Następnie nawiązując do obowiązujących dokumentów prawnych opisano jakie zostały wypracowane rozwiązania dla czytelników w spektrum w ramach projektu „Bibliotekarzu zaprzyjaźnij się z osobą z autyzmem”. Projekt był realizowany przez Stowarzyszenie Bibliotekarzy Polskich w partnerstwie z Fundacją SYNAPSIS. Na końcu przedstawiono różne inicjatywy polskich bibliotek mające na celu stworzenie przyjaznych warunków i zwiększenia świadomości lokalnej społeczności dot. spektrum autyzmu.

REVIEW OF NATIONAL LITERATURE

In the collective work *Projektowanie uniwersalne w przestrzeni uniwersyteckiej – idee, możliwości, dobre praktyki* (*Universal design in university space – ideas, possibilities, good practices*) (Perkowska, Bajkowski, ed. 2022), universal design is characterized as "...a strategic approach to planning and designing the social environment (architectural, digital, communicational and social), in in such a way as to ensure equal access to all participants. The concept of universal design takes into account all subjects of social life whose functioning is limited in some respect" (p. 10). The authors of the articles dealt with, among other things, the history of universal design (Urszula Wróblewska), and spatial exclusion and universal design from a sociological perspective (Urszula Błażewicz-Górnicka). Most of the texts were devoted to the use of universal design in educational theory and practice – e.g. Agnieszka Karpińska's article on the principles of universal design in the practice of educational innovations and Tomasz Kasprzak's article on universal design aimed at students with simultaneous hearing and vision disabilities. In the article by Małgorzata Bilewicz entitled *Kultura dostępna dla wszystkich na przykładzie działalności Książnicy Podlaskiej* (*Culture accessible to all on the example of the activities of the Podlaska Library*), which ends the volume, the Special Collections Department is presented, working for people with special needs, including those with disabilities, as well as on other projects supporting the accessibility of the library.

One of the methods of bibliotherapy is fairy tale therapy. Bernadeta Szczupał's publication *Bajki w biblioterapii dzieci i młodzieży z niepełnosprawnościami* (*Fairy Tales in the bibliotherapy of children and adolescents with disabilities*) was devoted to this issue (Szczupał, 2020). In the first chapter, which is an introduction to fairy tale therapy, the author emphasized that bibliotherapeutic activities require from therapists precise knowledge of the child's problems and their current situation, proper diagnosis of the problem, appropriate selection of a literary text or an appropriate therapeutic relationship. The second chapter was devoted to the use of therapeutic fairy tales in working with children and adolescents with various types of disabilities. In the third chapter, the author presented the results of her own qualitative research on the use of fairy tale therapy, among others in individual work with a child with a moderate intellectual disability.

The publication *Badania w sektorze kultury. Dostępność. (Research in the cultural sector. Accessibility)* (Pluszyńska et al., ed., 2022) is the result of the third edition of the conference *Badania w sektorze kultury (Research in the cultural sector)* organized by the Department of Culture Management of the Institute of Culture of the Jagiellonian University in cooperation with the Research Institute of Cultural Organizations IBOK (Kraków, November 17-18, 2022). The authors of the articles dealt with the state of implementation of the provisions of the Act on Accessibility in Polish museums (Łukasz Gaweł), presented tips on how to conduct research on recipients of cultural institutions with special needs (Agnieszka Konior, Anna Pluszyńska), and presented a case study describing the transition from building an accessible educational offer to developing an inclusive performative program co-created by people with disabilities at the Center for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka (Barbara Pasterak, Izabela Zawadzka). The final article by Magdalena Ochał and Anna Woźniak presents conclusions from research on awareness of issues related to accessibility in cultural institutions in the Masovian Voivodeship, conducted in 2021. The research covered several selected small cultural institutions, including eight libraries. One of the summarizing remarks reads: "The results of our study showed, first of all, that employees of cultural institutions do not lack good will or empathy, but specific knowledge, and in some cases also the ability to create an accessible place. The Accessibility Acts undoubtedly drew attention to accessibility issues, but by emphasizing obligations, they did not make it possible to understand the meaning of these activities" (p. 207).

The aim of the publication by Ewa Domagała-Zyśk *Dostępna edukacja akademicka (Available academic education)* (Domagała-Zyśk, 2023) was "...to present the assumptions and examples of accessible higher education for students with disabilities and diseases, which were developed both on the basis of the results of numerous research works, analysis of experiences used in individual domestic and foreign universities, as well as their own experiences, research, and methodological reflection on university «accessible didactics»" (p. 8). The first chapter presents a new approach to academic teaching, according to which the task of a modern university is primarily to create a learning environment (community). In the following chapters, the author described selected conditions of studying in the context of disability or illness, presented strategies and evaluations of various methods and ways of supporting students with disabilities and chronic diseases in academic education. In the last, fourth chapter, the author presented a model of accessible education, containing eight dimensions of accessibility, and discussed examples of good practices in this area.

New tasks and functions of libraries, as well as innovative techniques and tools used in their work, are presented in the collection of articles edited by Maja Wojciechowska *Mobilna biblioteka (Mobile library)* (Wojciechowska, ed., 2021). The wide thematic scope of twenty-nine texts included, among others, the issues of scientific information in libraries presented in the first part of the volume, entitled *Narzędzia i rozwiązania (Tools and solutions)* [e.g. Mariusz Balcerek *Informacja naukowa w Wojewódzkich Bibliotekach Publicznych – studium porównawcze (Scientific information in Provincial Public Libraries – a comparative study)*, and Danuta Sroka *Bałtycka Biblioteka Cyfrowa jako warsztat informacyjny bibliotekarza (Baltic Digital Library as a librarian's information workshop)*]. In the Work techniques section, new forms of work with public library users, including projects related to social inclusion and intergenerational integration, were presented by Monika Simonjetz, while Maja Wojciechowska and Monika Orzoł characterized mobile reading rooms and lending stations operating in Poland as examples of innovative and flexible library services aimed, among others, at people with special needs. Librarians shared their observations and experiences in the last part of the volume titled Library Experiences. These included a description of the implementation of the “Ask a Librarian” platform in the Main Library of the Military University of Technology by Mariola Nawrocka and Iwona Piwońska, a record of the experiences of the Municipal Public Library in Opole in introducing innovative forms of work with users (Katarzyna Pawluk), and a discussion of the results of research on the needs of Library users at the Main University of Life Sciences in Lublin presented by Renata Lewińska and Anna Gawryluk.

The leading topic and title of the seventh edition of the Lublin Forum of Bibliologists, Information Scientists and Librarians (January 14, 2021) was *Przestrzeń komunikacyjna współczesnej biblioteki (Communication space of the modern library)*. The book of the same title (Has-Tokarz, ed., 2022) contains articles presented during the forum and texts prepared on the basis of papers presented during previous editions of the event. In the introductory article, Anita Has-Tokarz discussed the issues raised at the seventh forum as well as the papers and discussions presented there. The topics presented by the authors of the volume that fall within the concept of communication space of a modern library include the analysis of models and instruments of marketing communication in the library (Renata Malesa), the characteristics of the possibilities of library activities in the virtual space (Maciej Sztorc), the importance of material space and design in the library (article by Anna Pietuch *Funkcjonalna i przyjazna przestrzeń jako narzędzie wspierające efektywną komunikację z użytkownikami na przykładzie Chełmskiej Biblioteki Publicznej im. Marii Pauliny Orsetti (Functional and friendly space as a tool supporting effective communication with users on the example of the Maria Paulina Orsetti Public Library in Chełm)*). In the article concluding the

volume, Monika Janusz-Lorkowska described the promotion of reading in unusual spaces and situations for reading, for example the cyclical event "We read elsewhere", examples of the functioning of libraries at airports and shopping centers, and bookcrossing.

Jim Trelease's best-selling *The Read – Aloud Handbook* (Trelease, 2022) became an inspiration for, among others, Irena Koźmińska, initiator of the successful social campaign "All of Poland Reads to Children". The Polish translation of the American edition from 2019 has just been published (edited and updated by Cyndi Giorgis). According to the authors, by reading aloud to children, in addition to benefits similar to those brought by talking to a child, e.g. creating bonds, informing or explaining, we also "expand their vocabulary, condition the child's brain to associate reading with pleasure, create general knowledge, become a reader role model and instill in children the desire to read" (p. 35). The following chapters of the publication present, among others, arguments for reading aloud, the stages of such reading, the SSR method, and reading for pleasure. The importance of fathers in this process was also discussed, as well as advice on what to do and what not to do when reading aloud. *The Treasury of Books Recommended for Reading Aloud* that accompanies the publication has been supplemented with suggestions for Polish books.

A collection of twelve articles: *Synergia słowa i działania. Współczesne praktyki czytania, animacji i współtworzenia kultury czytelniczej (Synergy of words and actions. Contemporary practices of reading, animation and co-creation of reading culture)* (Stoch, ed. 2023), which is the outcome of the conference under the same title, begins with a text by Zofia Zasadzka, presenting trends in reading activity diagnosed based on the results of the annual nationwide reading survey conducted by the National Library. The other articles included a presentation of a study conducted among young people aged 13-14 during reading workshops in the Małopolski Garden of Arts in Krakow, the aim of which was to build teenagers' resilience (Wanda Matras-Mastalerz), an analysis of the mechanisms responsible for shaping the bestseller, with particular emphasis on including the Tik Tok platform (Daria Banasiewicz) or the use of marketing tools in building students' reading motivation (Milena Dudzik).

An important event and place on the cultural map of Warsaw and Poland – the opening of the Palace of the Commonwealth in Warsaw after the renovation and modernization of the National Library in May 2024 – is accompanied by the publication *Pałac Rzeczypospolitej. Trzy razy otwierana. Najcenniejsze zbiory Biblioteki Narodowej w Pałacu Rzeczypospolitej (Palace of the Commonwealth. Opened three times. The most valuable collections of the National Library in the Palace of the Commonwealth)* (Makowski, ed. 2024). "The Palace of the Commonwealth has been adapted to the requirements of modern technologies and standards of cultural institutions, it provides

an interactive exhibition space for presenting the unique collections of the National Library (exhibitions of historic objects, temporary thematic exhibitions, presentation of the history of the National Library, of the Palace of the Commonwealth, books and prints, European literary heritage, and also historical and contemporary reading practices)" (p. 226). The facility has been adapted to modern requirements, including in terms of accessibility for people with disabilities. The book contains descriptions and reproductions of title pages or fragments of objects presented at the permanent exhibition in the newly opened Palace of the Commonwealth - valuable monuments of Polish and world literature, with the Holy Cross Sermons and the Florian Psalter, medieval and Renaissance works by European illuminators, literary manuscripts, and monuments of musical culture and cartography.

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Barbara Koryś