READING PREFERENCES OF PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF LEGISLATIVE, TECHNOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES

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Abstract

The main aim of the research study is a detailed analysis of reading preferences of citizens with visual impairment in the Slovak Republic. The purpose of the study is to examine the relations between the current offer of specific media contents to blind and partially sighted members of the audience and their subjective needs and preferences. Regarding the specific character of physical disabilities we have primarily focused on media available in audio form, in Braille or those reading of which is possible using the computer and technical equipments (screen readers). Secondary aim of the study is the analysis of the offer of public libraries in the Slovak Republic that provide such media contents adapted to this target group (i.e. people with visual impairment). A qualitative research strategy was used within the implemented research. The practical implementation of data collecting and analysis was carried out using the framework analysis. Based on the research procedure focused on context factors related to the issue of people with visual impairment people we present in the study series of significant conclusions and findings connected to the discussed issues.

Keywords: periodical press, audio publications, library system, culture of reading, framework analysis

1. Introduction

For the citizens with blindness and low vision is the Internet the one and only possibility how to overcome their disability and learn more about the world they can not see properly or at all. Similarly to any other web user it provides them with free access to information improving so their education possibilities and satisfying their personal needs and interests. In a society where the terms such as cyberspace, virtual reality or social networks are no longer perceived as neologisms has the originally inaccessible world of information technologies for people with visual impairment people an increasing tendency due to legislative amendments and various assistance technologies. The accessibility is generally

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called barrier-free, e.g. such as a building with this attribute which also people with physical disability can visit. Naturally does the barrier-free web overcome also other obstacles apart from physical disability (either visual, audio, physical disability or others). It may be useful for people of higher age and people with short-term disabilities. The founder of the World Wide Web (www) Tim Berners-Lee considers the following sentence to be the basic pillar of accessibility: “The power of the web is in its universality. Access by regardless of disability is an essential aspect.” [1] Even though the people with visual impairment are considered as the most numerous group with disability in the context of using the Internet, from the aspect of barriers they face with their impairment we could rank them among groups which get the most attention in solving the given issue.

Media audience can be defined from several aspects and criteria. The most common differentiation is its classification based on used medium. Thus we have readers, listeners or viewers. In the sphere of digital media the term technology users has become common [2]. In the relation to digital media Marc Prensky defines digital natives and digital immigrants [3]. The natives are children and the youth born after 1980 who have been surrounded by digital era devices since their childhood. The other group is digital immigrants who try to get acclimatized to the new environment. He sees the significant difference between these those groups in the way immigrants learn. Using this idea we could classify almost all people with visual impairment (born not only before 1980) as immigrants. Everybody has to learn about the digital world and secondary technologies at the same time (screen reader, etc.) by use of which they have the possibility to get into this world. It might seem that from the viewpoint of immigrants and conditions created by them - not very favourable – are the people with visual impairment in relation to digital media ‘unwelcome immigrants’.

To become a member of media audience apart from technological knowledge a man needs access to media. The mentioned access depends not only on their will and abilities but also on external factors which they often can not influence. By watching certain media, browsing web sites and the amount of time devoted to it we reveal a lot about ourselves. We demonstrate not only our interests but also values and subjective perception of the world. In this context it is important to deal with the way the reading preferences of people with visual impairment change in connection to even more massive spread of the Internet communication and what are the conditions for satisfying the cultural needs of this specific group of physically disabled.

2. Research strategy

The main aim of the research study is a detailed analysis of reading preferences of citizens with visual impairment in the Slovak Republic. The purpose of the study was to examine the relations between the current offer of specific media contents aimed for the blind and partially sighted audience
members and their subjective needs and preferences. Regarding the specific character of physical disabilities we have primarily focused on media available in audio form, in Braille or those reading of which is possible using the computer and technical equipments (screen readers). Secondary aim of the study is the analysis of the offer of public libraries in the Slovak Republic that provide such media contents adapted to this target group (i.e. people with visual impairment).

A qualitative research strategy was used within the implemented research. The practical implementation of data collecting and analysis was carried out using the framework analysis. The procedure is to simplify a systematic examination of qualitative data. They proceed from the fact claiming the first step when working with material is its organization with attentive data classification and reduction. Second step is the interpretation itself leading to descriptive or explanatory report on the researched area. It allows a systematic search and evaluation of the whole data set [4].

In accordance with the qualitative methodology described by Jane Ritchie a Liz Spencer [5] we divided the research questions in four categories.

1. **Context questions** aimed at the identification of form and base of the examined phenomenon:
   - What are the dimensions of attitudes and perception of reading preferences of people with visual impairment?
   - What are the reading and media needs of population the study deals with?
   - Which aspects work within the system offering service to the target group?

2. **Diagnostic question** focused on reasons or causes of examined phenomena:
   - Which factors are the bases for concrete perception of the given issue?
   - What specific needs originate within these processes?
   - What services or programmes are used?

3. **Evaluation questions** focused on evaluation of services efficiency:
   - What influences successful performance of existing programmes or services?
   - What experience influences the subsequent behaviour of service users?
   - What are the obstacles in this area?

4. **Strategic questions** focused on identification of recommendations, politics, plans and measures:
   - What type of services is necessary to meet the reading and media requirements of citizens with visual impairment?
   - Which steps are necessary to make the programmes and services more effective?
   - How can the systems improved?
   - What strategies are needed to overcome the newly-defined problems?

   Below is the concise description of individual steps in the framework analysis carried out in the research.
2.1. Identifying a thematic framework

In this step we carefully studied the researched material and its structure. The emphasis was put on creating descriptive categories proceeding from a close relation to the given area.

The first part of the research sample consisted on the following types of periodicals published in the Slovak Republic:
- 6 specialized magazines published in Braille,
- 11 specialized magazines published in audio-format on CDs,
- 5 specialized magazines accessible via the Internet in digital format WMA DRM 10.

The second part of the research sample consisted of 3300 book publications adapted to the needs of readers with visual impairment. These are books accessible in audio format DAISY (Digital Audio Based Information System). The publications for this target group are accessible on CD-ROM or they may be downloaded in the computer using the Internet.

The third part of the research sample is the descriptive analysis of the services provided by 2696 public libraries in Slovakia. We concentrated primarily on the fact whether the individual libraries offer services for blind or partially sighted people or not. We subsequently evaluated the scope and focus of these services for people with visual impairment.

2.2. Indexing and charting

All accessible data were analyzed and indexed. We examined the informative value of materials and attributed proper indexes to the phenomena afterwards. Indexation process led to moderation and revision of the categorization schema. When indexing periodicals we subjected them to content analysis and divided them into thematic categories. In case of book publications we focused on genre categorization of publications and examined which types of publication people with visual impairment prefer. Within the quantitative analysis we worked with secondary statistic data about the number of publications which the blind and partially sighted people used in the period 2006-2014. We obtained the statistic data from the online archive of the Matej Hrebenda Slovak library for the blind in Levoča that registers a detailed overview about every single audio publication provided for citizens with visual impairment in Slovakia.

2.3. Mapping and interpretation

Key data were put into tables depending on their indexation (e.g. thematic indexation, case mapping). We mapped the scope and feature of phenomena, creating typologies, searching for associations, data clarification and interpretation.
3. Results

Based on the results of framework analysis focused on contextual factors related to the issue of people with visual impairment we can present several significant conclusions and findings relating to the research problem.

3.1. Problems of users with visual impairment in relation to access cultural and media services

Digital divide is a multidimensional phenomenon covering three aspects: global, social and democratic divide [6]. Thus it is about categorization of society which uses or does not use modern information and media technologies following the mentioned differences. In relation to this term we might speak about divergence in the areas of media competencies and media literacy which deal with the problems of obstacles preventing full access to media from several aspects. The level of media literacy depends on demographic, individual, symbolic and technological barriers. With individual barriers it may be the factors which are in smaller or larger extent out of individual’s control (e.g. physical impairment). The research findings related to the processes and principles of media literacy development in the group of people with visual impairment may contribute to the initiation and proper formulation of legislative and supporting documents and initiatives connected with this group of citizens [7]. Such impairment plays a role in the relation to technologies. However, the access to them should be understood mainly as skills and competencies by which we are able to use these technologies efficiently. Those with limited access only have fewer possibilities to develop their skills [8]. Livingstone points out that the researches on media literacy do not often measure or do not take into consideration the results of various population groups [9]. One of these groups is certainly people with various types of physical disability.

The development of abilities and skills in using new media is for citizens with visual impairment important in two aspects. The first one might be called individual as the chance for a better position (e.g. on the labour market) increases depending on the level of media and information technologies. The second aspect – social - could contribute to the elimination of prejudices and exclusion of people with visual impairment from the society.

The ability rate of moving on web pages is dependent on various types of visual impairment form which specific problems result. For the blind and people with severe visual impairment the use of input and output device is important. Severe visual impairment does not allow the use of mouse; they have only a keyboard at their disposal. Based on this fact the use of a mouse must be substituted with an option performing the same command using a keyboard and keyboard shortcuts. Sound output allows reading the screen content, haptic hardware device changes the information displayed on screen into Braille. To achieve a correct text interpretation with the screen reader all types of graphic information must be completed with a text alternative. Programme JAWS
developed by the American company Freedom Scientific is the world leader among readers with both types of outputs. Partially sighted users can make partial use of their sight. In majority of cases they have the need to magnify the text on a web page using magnifying software. However, this allows them to see only a limited part of the screen at a moment. Thus it is important to differentiate the element’s meaning both visually and semantically. Web users with impaired colour perception face a problem with distinguishing certain ranges of colours what might result into total inaccessibility of a web page. Thus it is important to use a sufficient background contrast with text and in order to distinguish the meaning of information the use of single colour should be avoided [Ľ. Jašková, Prístupnosť informácií na webe pre hendikepovaných, http://edi.fmph.uniba.sk/~jaskova/IKTH/tema07/tema07.html]. Regarding the users with temporarily impaired visual perception we do not have to think of temporarily impaired vision only but also temporarily worsened conditions influenced by monitor lighting or older monitor which does not allow the perception of colour in sufficient quality.

3.2. Legislation in relation to barrier-free access to information

The Slovak legislation obliges only the information systems from public administration to create barrier-free access. We appreciate the effort to make the essential information related to public life accessible to the blind or partially sighted citizens. On the other hand, we draw the attention to the absence of adapted web pages in the areas which the people with visual impairment could be interested in visiting due to their subjective needs. The legal regularization should be focused on making the information on the Internet accessible according to free will of each citizen including people with various physical disabilities and it should not limit their choice on the basis of satisfactory of unsatisfactory web page. People with visual impairment should gradually become legitimate members of the interactive audience which from the aspect of media audience development belongs to the last phase characterized by the possibility of individual choice. They would at the same time become active part of media communication on the basis of which an individual chooses from the offer of media contents and deals with them according to their needs, interests and possibilities.

The rules summarized in Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) represent a document which, according to the European Union, should be included in methodologies and rules of all member states. It is about the requirements for information systems in public administration which the Slovak Republic summarized in the Act no. 276/2006 statute book about information system of public administration and also in the Decree of the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic on standards for information systems from public administration. “A standard is a set of rules connected with creating, development and use of information systems of public administration which includes characterizations, methods, procedures and conditions regarding mainly
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the security and integrability with other information systems. Standards must be open and technologically neutral.” [Štandardy pre informačné systémy verejnej správy, http://www.informatizacia.sk/standardy-is-vs/596s]. These standards agree with the rules of the Blind Friendly Web project, which originated from the initiative of the Union of Persons with Blindness and Low Vision in Slovakia and citizens association ‘eSlovensko’. Their goal is the gradual improvements in barrier-free webs and thus subsequent possibility of more simple orientation on web sites for people with visual impairment. Whether a web page is accessible and to what extent user may examine. It can be achieved on the web page using of special testing tools or by asking the owner of the web page. In consideration of barrier-free web page there is the prestigious ‘Blind Friendly’ mark, but more importantly the higher number of web page visitors not only among the users with visual impairment [O projekte Blind Friendly Web, http://blindfriendly.unss.sk/o-blind-friendly-web.php].

The access to information about culture and satisfying the needs of readers with visual impairment in Slovakia is coordinated by the Matej Hrebenda Slovak library for the blind in Levoča. The Slovak legislation allows free circulation of works among the blind, namely Act 618/2003 statute book concerning copyright and rights related to copyright (the Copyright Act). This Act in § 29 defines the use of a work for the needs of the disabled as follows: “Author’s consent is not required for the reproduction of published works, on its public distribution by other form of transfer of ownership as a sale, on its public dissemination by borrowing or for public broadcast if such use occurs solely for the needs of disabled on the extent justified by their disability and not performed to obtain direct or indirect financial benefit.” [Zákon o autorskom práve a právach súvisiacich s autorským právom, http://www.epi.sk/Main/Defaul.aspx?Template=~/Main/TArticles.ascx&phContent=~/Comments/RuleComments.asc x&RuleID=28881&CTypeID=1].

Nevertheless, it is necessary to provide protection to prevent an unauthorized person from getting access to such work. The Matej Hrebenda Slovak library for the blind in Levoča decided to protect their audio books made accessible on the web page [www.skn.sk] using this system. Each authorized reader obtains an electronic certificate DRM10 from the library. It authorizes him to choose from the offer of books in WMA format, download it from the mentioned web page and play it on his computer, laptop or any other device. To play such book, a PC is usually used. Even the use of a mobile phone with operating system Symbian or Windows Mobile is also possible. Using MP3/WMA players is very practical. By their design they do not differ from classical portable players but their firmware also supports the DRM 10 certificate.

3.3. Periodical press for people with visual impairment in Slovakia

“In discussions about the influence of media upon a man it is the children and youth who are the high-risk group. It is so, particularly because they do not have a complete value system, learn by imitating from not the real but also
media reality and in the early childhood they can not differentiate between fiction and reality. Another vulnerable social group which is less discussed in this context consists of elderly persons.” [10] Magazines published by the Matej Hrebenda Slovak library for the blind in Levoča cover a wide range of this group’s interests. We find among them magazines with old tradition offering information from various thematic areas and specifically focused periodicals. The library respects specific preferences based on sex, age or various kinds of hobbies. Some of the magazines are even transformed selections from social magazines accessible to sighted public. There are six magazines published in Braille (Table 1) which is a smaller number in comparison to magazines in audio form (Table 2 ) due to more complicated and costly production. Persons with blindness and low vision can listen to five titles in WMA DRM 10 format accessible at the library web site. The main function of these periodicals is related to „the establishment of new information needs, the needs that were brought about by cultural expansion and led to the mass communication fragmentation” [11].

Table 1. Magazines published in Braille in Slovakia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of magazine</th>
<th>Thematic focus of magazine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOVÝ ŽIVOT</td>
<td>Monthly magazine with tradition since 1949. It presents information about life, work and personalities among people with blindness and low vision and essential documents from legislature or industry in the majority population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIERKA</td>
<td>Bimonthly magazine for women. It regularly presents authors’ articles with practical consultancy (recipes, handicraft, tips for household, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLADOSŤ</td>
<td>Bimonthly for youth with visual impairment. It content covers existential questions, activities and interests of youth with blindness or low vision regarding their further social and work placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ĠŠACH</td>
<td>Bimonthly magazine. It provides space for active chess players with visual impairment for mutual professional communication and publication of analyses and comments on chess domestic and foreign affairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NÁDEJ</td>
<td>Ecumenical magazines for Christians. It deals with theological themes and practical questions from the lives of believers in popular form. It is published on a quarterly basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KULTÚRNO-LITERÁRNÝ VÝBER</td>
<td>Magazine published quarterly. It deals with literature, art and cultural affairs in Slovakia and abroad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Audio books are classical soundtracks. Usually it is a text read by an actor which can be on a CD divided by chapters or into smaller units. However, the work with an audio CD is challenging and it is suitable to listen mainly to fiction in which the listener does not have to keep track of his position in the text,
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rewind to come back to the place already heard, etc. It is possible to listen to an audio CD with audio book soundtrack on any CD.

**Table 2.** Magazines in audio form on CDs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of magazine</th>
<th>Thematic focus of magazine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOVÝ ŽIVOT</td>
<td>magazine about the life of persons with blindness and low vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NÁDEJ</td>
<td>ecumenical magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRAMEŇ</td>
<td>magazine, mainly reportage and interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POHYB</td>
<td>magazine for sports fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOVET</td>
<td>magazine about the latest issues in science and technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKORD</td>
<td>magazine for music fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOTYKY</td>
<td>magazine for masseurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIABETIK</td>
<td>magazine for diabetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ŽIVOT</td>
<td>selection from magazine Život for sighted public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZDRAVIE</td>
<td>selection from magazine Zdravie for sighted people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLOVENKA</td>
<td>selection from magazine Slovenka for sighted public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.** Overview of reading preferences of persons with blindness and low vision in Slovakia (10 most downloaded books in the period from 2006 to 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Narrated by</th>
<th>Year of publication</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Number of downloads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Da Vincio kód</td>
<td>Dan Brown</td>
<td>Peter Čižmár</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>SKN</td>
<td>thriller</td>
<td>1625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Harry Potter a dary smrti</td>
<td>Joanne K. Rowling</td>
<td>Afřed Swan</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>SKN</td>
<td>adventurous novel for children and youth</td>
<td>987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Posledná šanca</td>
<td>Michael Connelly</td>
<td>Peter Čižmár</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>SKN</td>
<td>detective novel</td>
<td>980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Na podpátkoch</td>
<td>Dominik Dán</td>
<td>Lukáš Šepták</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>SKN</td>
<td>Slovak detective novel</td>
<td>949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Žiješ iba dvakrát</td>
<td>Dominik Dán</td>
<td>Igor Šabek</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>SKN</td>
<td>Slovak detective novel</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Da Vincio kód pravda a ťikcia</td>
<td>Bart D. Ehrman</td>
<td>Igor Šabek</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>SKN</td>
<td>fact-based literature</td>
<td>797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tieň vetra</td>
<td>Carlos Ruiz Zafón</td>
<td>Peter Čižmár</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>SKN</td>
<td>Social novel</td>
<td>777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Kožené srdce</td>
<td>Dominik Dán</td>
<td>Peter Čižmár</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>SKN</td>
<td>Slovak detective novel</td>
<td>694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Svedectvo kostí</td>
<td>Jefferson Bass</td>
<td>Igor Makovický</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>SKN</td>
<td>detective novel</td>
<td>673</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SKN - Slovak Library for the Blind in Levoča  
SBS - Slovak Bible Society
Apart from magazines of the Matej Hrebenda Slovak library there are also internal periodicals published by other organizations in Slovakia. Participants in the Rehabilitation centre for the people with visual impairment in Levoča publish their comments, stories or recipes in their occasional magazine Nadhľad. Home of social services for adults in Báhoň publishes in black and white print and in Braille the magazine Rozsvietme tmu. The monthly magazine Očko is the core magazine in the Centre of integrating activities and district branch of the Union of the blind and partially sighted persons in Slovakia located in Nitra. It presents information both about people with blindness and low vision and for them. The magazine Okamih is published by people with blindness for sighted people once a year by the Union of the blind and partially sighted persons in Slovakia.

3.4. Book publications for persons with blindness and low vision in Slovakia

We can find ca. 3300 talking books in audio form on the web site of the Matej Hrebenda Slovak library. We focused on the period from 1 January 2006 to 1 March 2014, i.e. the whole period of existence of the audio recording archive. We concentrated on TOP 10 most downloaded books in a particular period (Table 3). Among the most popular genres of the people with blindness we can find the detective novel either by Slovak or foreign authors. The highest score of downloads for the whole period of the archive’s existence was achieved by Dan Brown with his novel ‘The Da Vinci Code’. Listeners with blindness prefer books by contemporary authors than older classic books even though there is a plenty of them in the archive. The oldest titles among TOP 10 were ‘Kľukatý let motýľa’ by Hana Zelinová and ‘From Rio de la Plata’ by Karl May both published in 1985. The highest number in statistics of most downloaded books was recorded with the works by Slovak author Dominik Dán.

Table 4. Public libraries in the Slovak Republic proving service for the persons with blindness and visual impairment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Number of public libraries providing service for the blind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>local public</td>
<td>2552</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>municipal public</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regional public</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>district public</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5. Accessibility of periodicals and book publications by public libraries in Slovakia

One of the frequently used ways of gaining access to magazines and book publications in Slovakia is the public libraries. In our study we intend to compare the number of public libraries providing services for people with blindness with those who do not. According to the Law no. 183/2000 statute book on libraries, a public library is local, regional and district. Among local
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public we also include municipal public (see Table 4). Besides public libraries, according to the law regarding libraries belong to the library system: the Slovak national library, scientific libraries, academic libraries, school libraries and special libraries.

For the purpose of our research we analyzed the services provided by 2696 public libraries in the Slovak Republic. Subsequently we evaluated the scope and focus of services provided in libraries which provide service to people with visual impairment. We found out that only 28 libraries from the total number of libraries in Slovakia provide service for people with blindness or low visions. The majority of them is located in bigger cities and covers a wider region.

4. Conclusions

Current offer of specialized magazines for citizens with visual impairment in the Slovak Republic is relatively wide and includes titles with different content. There are still countless uncovered thematic areas which could be developed in future. However, considering the number of people with visual impairment in Slovakia it is not necessary to create such a varied database of magazines as for the sighted public. The solution is rather in an active use of other types of media, mainly the Internet by audience with visual impairment. This way the subjective interests and needs of this target group are satisfied. Even accessing cultural and media services by people with blindness and low vision face several problems. Thus the subjects that are not obliged to optimize web pages by law should care for the technical accessibility on the basis of moral duty in relation to citizens with visual and other impairment. Not only do the users with physical impairment benefit from the web site optimization. Commercial subjects which neglect the technical accessibility keep loosing many clients. Besides users with impairment neither the older users are able to access their services on an inaccessible web. Barrier-free web also allows correct display in mobile phones and increases its visibility in search results. Misunderstanding appears in case when the solution exists but the users do not know about it. Thus it should be an effort for the entire public, to bring not only to people with visual impairment possibilities of innovative solutions focused on the use of web pages accessible without any problems to citizens with blindness and low visions (lectures, courses, etc.) A positive change could be achieved by an increased number of magazines for people with blindness which would be accessible in digital form in WMA DRM 10 format.

At present citizens with visual impairment in Slovakia have access to five publications on the Internet. However, the total number of magazines published in Braille and in audio form on a CD is three times higher. We could achieve better accessibility mainly with people who do not have any local public library near the place of permanent residence. A sufficient number of book publications can be found in the Matej Hrebenda Slovak library for the blind in Levoča. Based on this fact we claim that the submitted overview of top ten most
downloaded books in audio form is a result of reading preferences of people with blindness and low vision in Slovakia. Their interest is focused both on current book releases and classical literature. Majority of these publications is from abroad. Regarding genre the novel prevails.

The analysis of the Slovak public libraries shows that out of 2696 institutions providing services to citizens with visual impairment only 28 of them are involved in making the media accessible in audio form or Braille, i.e. only 1.04% from the total number. 27 of them are either district or regional libraries. The library of Professor Štefan Pasiar in Hnúšť is the only municipal public library offering the above mentioned services. More libraries (at least the municipal public ones) should be requested to participate in cooperation with the Matej Hrebenda Slovak library for the blind in Levoča and offer library and information services to people with blindness and low vision or any other impairment.

Life with visual impairment is not easy. However, due to the rapid development of modern communication and assistance technologies even people with blindness and low vision have knowledge about information, can deal with them and in this way overcome obstacles resulting from their impairment.

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