

**Report to the Ulverscroft Foundation
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LIBRARY SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DYSLEXIA

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DANISH APPROACH:

2 week study visit to Nota – The Danish National Library for Persons with Print Disabilities, in Copenhagen and attendance of ORD 12 Conference, March 2012

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of my visit to Nota was to learn what services for the dyslexic users can a library for people with print disabilities offer, to understand the basics of Danish approach to dyslexia and finally to see if and how can the Croatian Library for the Blind implement some of the ideas and solutions introduced. But the whole visit turned out to be much more than that thanks to the very intense and broad programme that Nota made for me.

BACKGROUND – THE CROATIAN LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND

Croatian Library for the Blind, of which I am an employee, offers library services for people with print disabilities. We have around 2000 active users borrowing books directly from the library or using cecogramme and/or door-to-door service. The library holdings consist of Braille (2300 titles, April 2012) and talking books (2800 titles in MP3, Daisy 2.02 and tapes, April 2012), a small collection of large print, music CD's and Playaway Preloaded Audio Digital Players) (around 300 titles all together, April 2012). The library is also a publisher of Braille and audio books and magazines, and has a print department and recording studios within the institution. Besides the regular library and publishing services the library organizes various events and workshops. Our main users are blind and partially sighted people but we also have a small though constantly growing number of users, mostly children and youngsters, with dyslexia that find talking books very useful. We've decided to improve our services to meet

the needs of our new users (in a way that our user population in a whole could benefit from it) and the idea was to learn from the best. The word is spread that libraries in Scandinavia are the most experienced with services for people with dyslexia, and Nota library from Copenhagen, Denmark, has a reputation as the most affective one.

NOTA

At Nota, I was introduced with all the basic services and production steps that were not just a good basis to comprehend the special services and projects for the dyslexic users but also this big Nota tour gave me the whole new perspective of the world where a standard print is not a standard.

Basic facts

Nota is the Danish national library for persons with print disabilities. As a national specialized digital library, Nota produces and „lends out“ audio books (18.265 titles, December 2012), e-books (3.388 titles, December 2011), Braille books (3.669 titles, December 2011) and Braille notes (3.305, December 2011). In February 2012. Nota had 36.760 enrolled users, 54% of them were dyslexic. There is no membership fee but a person applying to become user of services must supply Nota with a document witnessing that he/she is not able to read standard print because of a handicap, which is a regular procedure in the Croatian library for the Blind as well. Member can also become a teacher that has a pupil with reading disabilities in his class or an assistant helping the end-user with browsing, selecting and purchasing of library materials. The teacher is only allowed to get books for use in teaching and the assistant can not get books himself.

Book's journey from standard print to end-user

Every two weeks there is a meeting at Nota where a new list of titles for production is suggested. The main actions that precede that selection are taking in consideration users needs and wishes and keeping a track with Danish book production. Once a title is picked and the book arrives the production may begin with scanning and creating an XML file (Nota also uses XML conversion services from India). The narrator reads directly from the Daisy XML file and records himself in one of the six Nota's recording studios. Every file is watermarked for protection when a user is going to get it. The watermark contains the name of the user and the date of lending/download. The library pays the authorship fee based on the duration of the material recorded. If the title already exists in the audio format, Nota pays a fee for the master copy to the publisher. When the

audio file is stored on the server and catalogued it is ready to meet the end-user. There is also a possibility of Braille print on demand of the same master copy, as well as lending out of a e-book format. Nota also produces around 60 newspapers and magazines. At present, Nota does not produce teaching materials and school subject text books.

Library software

There are several applications supporting various stages of book production. These programs together with one for cataloguing are made especially to meet the needs of Nota services and are a product of their own IT department. For borrower administration, integrated users wish lists including preferences such as titles and genres, circulation and automated lending and purchasing of materials Nota uses Vubis. Vubis Smart is an integrated library system that enables libraries and information centers to organize and present data from any source and in any format. So, the standard library catalogue is enhanced with the information useful for the better functioning of material circulation and automated lending based on the user profiles and managed via Vubis.

Presenting the information

Nota has two web sites. First one, www.nota.nu holds all the information about the institution, about the organization and function, services, projects, innovations, it contains video and audio clips that make browsing easier and more interesting. The other web site is E17, www.e17.dk and it's main purpose is to serve the Nota user from the enrollment to the on-line catalogue, from news about products and services to the downloading and live-streaming. Beside presenting services through the Internet, Nota has very strong promotion and marketing strategy from distribution of information leaflets and booklets to clips advertising library services on national television, in some regional trains and in S trains in Copenhagen, from participating and organizing seminars, conferences and workshops to collaboration with schools, libraries and organizations within the field of their interest.

Services

Once a person becomes a Nota user with his own user profile, with wish list describing the quantity and quality of reading material as well as a reading preferences, he or she can browse a catalogue, receive nonreturnable CD's with audio titles, download or live stream the files directly (every user has its own password). A brand new option is E17 Mobile which can be used for streaming of books from any platform. Users can also subscribe for magazines or newspapers. „Job service" is meant to meet the specific

needs for the material characteristic for a user's own workplace or vocation. The user addresses to Nota team the title of a book or a document required, the item is put into production and within 2 weeks is distributed to the user in e-format. For some members that can not use e-books the desired document or book is made in audio-format (rarely a job service user demands Braille). Although the production is made especially for that one user, the material stays in Nota data base for the benefit of other members. International file share services are also available for Nota users.

DANISH APPROACH TO DYSLEXIA

Attending the ORD 12 Conference on dyslexia with speeches and workshops held by various field experts has given me an overview of the basic problems and some of the most usual approaches to dyslexia, especially in the United Kingdom and Denmark. The Danish education system has some opportunities and privileges for the scholars with dyslexia but a starting point is difficult and, just like in Croatia and probably in most countries, depends on the individual (parent, kindergarten or little school teacher) noticing on time that a child has certain problems with words. What is „on time" when it comes to dyslexia? The answer is simple: the sooner the better. There is no unique approach to the problem and no definite cure to it but the results from practice show that a child that is put under some kind of supervision and training before it starts to read and write has better chances to fight (unfortunately not to overcome) dyslexia than the one diagnosed with it already at the age when it is expected of him to write and read fluently. The problem itself can not be terminated but deepening of difficulties and the lifetime consequences can be suppressed if one reacts on time. Once diagnosed with dyslexia a child can have assistance of speech therapists and teachers. In Denmark, dyslexic pupil receives the „IT rucksack" with hardware and software support supposed to make the learning easier and less painful. At the end of every level of education a pupil must return the rucksack with its items that he or she is used to, only to ask for a new IT rucksack when he enters new stage of education (simplified: from primary school to university the student changes three different rucksacks). And that is something that obviously deserves to be reconsidered and changed for better. In Denmark there are boarding schools for dyslexic pupils. The program lasts for a year (usually at the end of the primary school or a beginning of high school) and it is meant for catching up with the school program, learning various helping methods and getting to know other pupils with similar difficulties. At final exams in primary schools and high schools the pupil with writing/reading disabilities is allowed to have more time and all the assistance needed to support the skills so the knowledge learned could be represented. There are also various computer programmes that assist the person with writing disabilities

(for example a programme that suggests words from vocabulary or even the entire phrases while you start to write) and reading (software like Jaws and applications that read aloud the content on the screen).

Thanks to the already mentioned programme made by my hosting library I was also able to visit the public library in Fredericia as well as the one in Kolding where I saw the concrete approach to the dyslexic users within the public area, the approach that was direct but discreet at the same time. I must mention that my impression was that even in the highly democratic and very well organized society like Denmark's, when it comes to putting ideas into practice at the end everything depends on the individual(s) in charge of it. And in the relatively small town of Fredericia young users of public library are lucky to have a creative and energetic librarian with fresh ideas and new solutions. For example, library materials can be displayed and marked with different colours presenting the level of reading ability demanded, books can be arranged and grouped by themes and/or marked with simple pictures explaining the genre etc. The project Paws for reading is an innovative programme meant for building a reader's self esteem: a kid (but it can be a grown up to) reads aloud to the trained dog that listens attentively. Librarians are working on the collaboration with other state institutions and they are willing to held workshops on on-line literacy. In Fredericia I was also introduced to the online tools and library sites for dyslexics (like ligetil.nu, adgang for alle, letbib.dk).

An extra insight to the whole subject was a visit to the public school in Frederiksberg specialized in teaching pupils with reading/writing disabilities. The classes are smaller and teaching is based on the more individual approach. To have a school of that profile is a great thing, together with all the IT support but it was clear to me that a teacher must be very creative to overcome the lack of teaching materials and subject textbooks suitable for dyslexic students. There are some books available from big publishers, together with materials scanned in organizations based on volunteer work, but in the end it all depends more or less on the teacher. It is a catch 22, being a student with reading disabilities and not having a learning material in a right form. Nota is more than willing to offer its services but the problem is with financing such a large and continuous project as the production of suitable school materials for dyslexic, especially because Nota is under the Ministry of culture and this project would interfere with the domain of the Ministry of education.

Nota services for dyslexic users

In Nota, opening for the dyslexic population is closely linked to the end of analog era and the digitalization of library holdings in 2005. Otherwise there wouldn't be enough capacity to meet the needs of every user. Going

digital was a big step and it shifted library services in a whole new dimension: it put the end to the item returning business, tape rewinding and fixing, space consuming stocks of Braille books and cassettes etc. From that point the number of users doubled and the average age group and type of user dictating a book production changed dramatically. Youngsters, especially boys were not interested in love stories and typical crime novels, or „heavy" literature and a change in a book selection had to be done. Besides the titles belonging to the literature canon taught during the education, new users wanted to listen to the books that their colleagues were reading for leisure and also learn something practical from non-fiction titles. Nota had to ensure their till now primary users, blind and visually impaired people, that the improvement of services and broadening of the book selection will also have a positive and beneficial effect for them as well. Since then a number of field studies and campaigns have taken place, meant not just for presenting Nota services to the potential users, librarians, teachers but also for getting the information back from the target group, the information that will help creating a better strategy. The design of campaigns and advertising materials changed from very complex with lots of text to the clearer, simpler vision, with key information and hip, well defined images that send the message straight forward to the user. Another breakthrough point in library services was the introduction of audio-book live streaming and download option at E17 website, making library services flexible and almost limitless but at the same time even more invisible. One step further was this year's introduction of audio book live streaming for mobile players. Extremely light weight service that enables users to be independent and free of any kind of heavy gear. The sending out of nonreturnable CD's with materials is still a favorite option, but at the beginning of July all the dyslexic users will switch to streaming/download/mobile player option. Since the beginning of „digital era" in Nota, costs per loan went down opposing a constantly growing number of users. Nota organizes conferences for librarians about new services where participants are able to learn useful information in the IT field. ROAL - national network for dyslexia and print disabilities is a project that gathers field experts like educators, teachers, librarians all trying to make the education system work better for the dyslexic students. On the other hand Nota also prepares a conference for youngsters for boarding schools for dyslexics. Pupils meet students, musicians and other interesting people with dyslexia that stood up for themselves in life and could function as a roll model for the young. During conference participants share their experience, meet the Nota services and are engaged in various interesting workshops. Small clips from these events are available on websites. Nota employees occasionally „tour" the boarding schools, libraries conferences nation wide to represent their services and exchange the information and experience.

CONCLUSION

Nota and the Croatian Library for the Blind have the same mission in the society and vision of equal access to knowledge. Both libraries are under the domain of the Ministry of culture and their primary role is to produce and lend out the library materials in a format suitable for people with print disabilities. Nota has more than 3 times more employees (including an IT team and a designer), free lance narrators, studios and technical support and it serves 10 times more users. The Croatian library has a higher percentage of blind/partially sighted employees. Nota has a strong structured process of production and fascinating outcomes. Although they function in a different way, both libraries are well organized considering their capacities and, yes, good spirited. Croatian library functions on the basis of lending out and returning library items and has holdings, whereas Nota's library holdings are digital and users don't have to return the items received, as well as they can live stream and download them. Not having library holdings and lending out without returning, without being restricted to the number of titles physically present on the shelves, makes working less stressful and time consuming and more production oriented and opened for new ideas. But on the other hand, having users physically present in the library, being able to collaborate with them on daily bases and prepare all kinds of little events is also very rewarding.

LESSONS LEARNED

To open a library for people with dyslexia means changing a perspective and creating services that will support not just an enlarged number of users but also protect the library capacities from collapsing. Basic changes in collection of books and introduction of download/live streaming option would be more than enough at the beginning. These two innovations will appear satisfactory for the other user groups as well. Strong collaboration with teachers, and students studying to become teachers, speech therapists, professors at the educational university, NGO's for dyslexia and, finally, the end users is a priority that would create more satisfactory results than a solitary librarian's approach. Keeping public libraries informed and aware of your services is a duty. And of course, it is normal to try and to fail in the process (not every project is a success!) as long as you have a goal. Libraries can do a lot, they can broaden and adjust the approach to knowledge and make reading fun for people with reading/writing disabilities but they can not fight the system on their own. To make the education system user friendly for people with dyslexia is something that needs a lot of hands and heads and hearts put together.

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