# Social Campaign 'InternetInclusive'

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## Theoretical background

According to The Central Statistical Office, in Poland there are almost 2 million people with sight impairments and the estimated number of blind people is 100,000, while sight impairments are the fourth most frequent reason of disability. Moreover, only 17% persons with sight impairments have jobs and 35% of blind people have never worked. We argue that the problematic issue of the inaccessible Internet is not only the one of technological nature, but it is about allowing persons with disabilities, particularly with sight impairments, personal and professional growth.[1]

An early disability rights organization based in the United Kingdom, The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation *(UPIAS),* published in 1975 a document entitled 'Fundamental Principles of Disability' where we can find the following important statement: 'In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society.'[2] According to the WHO definition, the term 'disability' can be understood in three different ways: as an impairment, meaning a problem in body function or structure; as an activity limitation, being a difficulty in executing a given task; a participation restriction, which is a problem that could be encountered in various life situations. It is worth noticing that a disability is not just a health problem, but a complex phenomenon structured at the intersection between physicality of an individual and social environment. In this perspective, the difficulties encountered by the people with disabilities can be overcome through removing environmental and social barriers.[3]

Similarly, in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 1, we can find that: 'Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.'[4] The Convention is an international human rights treaty that aims at delivering protection of human rights and assuring an equal treatment of people with disabilities, just as any other citizens. It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, while Polish government signed it one year later and ratified in 2012.[5] In 2016 the Polish Disability Forum (PFON) launched the project „Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – a common cause". Its aim was to involve persons with disabilities in public and political life through their participation in the creation and effective introduction of policies regarding the Convention's implementation.[6] Importantly, the Constitution of the Republic of Poland says that: 'The inherent and inalienable dignity of the person shall constitute a source of freedoms and rights of persons and citizens. It shall be inviolable. The respect and protection thereof shall be the obligation of public authorities.' (Article 30) and that: 'No one shall be discriminated against in political, social or economic life for any reason whatsoever.' (Article 32).

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[1] http://www.biznesbezprzeszkod.pl/2016/06/14/osob-niewidomych-niedowidzacych-pracuje/

[2] http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/UPIAS-fundamental-principles.pdf (accessed 13.06.2017).

[3] http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/ (accessed 13.06.2017).

[4] https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-1-purpose.html (accessed 13.06.2017).

[5] https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/konwencja-o-prawach-osob-niepelnosprawnych (accessed 13.06.2017).

[6] http://www.pfon.org/wdrazanie-konwencji-o-prawach-osob-niepelnosprawnych-wspolna-sprawa/65-projekt-wdrazanie-konwencji/694-the-project-implementation-of-the-un-convention-on-rights-of-disabled-persons-a-common-cause (accessed 13.06.2017).

Regardless of all of the above-mentioned legal regulations, the situation of people with disabilities in Poland is still highly unsatisfactory. People with limited physical or sensory abilities find it hard to move around public spaces, being discriminated by barriers of architectural, urban or communicational, including digital, nature. These hardships lead to social exclusion, especially when other citizens lack knowledge on how to interact with persons with disabilities - oftentimes reacting emotionally with grief, tending to treat them in a patronizing manner, assuming them to be helpless and pitiful.[7] This way of seeing a disability is described in the 'medical model', in which persons with disability are called 'disabled' - meaning: having some serious limitations - and so should adapt themselves to the environment. The opposite stance is taken by the 'social model', in which persons having disabilities are seen predominantly through their potential and value for a society that should transform itself in order to meet their needs. Making the public space more functional and accessible is naturally interconnected with improvement of quality of daily lives of people with disabilities, allowing them to become more independent and self-reliant.[8]

During the last years the significance of the topic of digital exclusion has become recognized on the Polish, European and global level. The reason behind the growing interest in this subject can be found in the fast technological development, changes in legal policies, legislative changes as well as raising of social awareness. The growing number of services, both public and commercial, are being offered digitally, but also the quality of our private lives depend very much on the access to the web. The more advantages can be found in this field, the more excluded people with various sight impairments can get. In our modern world, digital exclusion leads directly to social one. To prevent this from happening, there are several ways available of making the Internet sphere more accessible to all its users. Designing all of the content should follow the guidelines stated in the standard WCAG 2.0 Web Content Accessibility. Therefore, making the Internet accessible is not a matter of choice, but a necessity. According to the Ordinance of the Ministry from 2012 all public institutions are obliged to adjust their websites to the level AA of this standard.[9] According to the report published by the Foundation Widzialni.org, in 2013, only 1,7% of all websites taking part in the research fulfilled the minimum expectations of this directive. The results have been progressively improving through the next years - in 2015 the number raised to the level of 13%, in 2016 to 22,9% and this year already achieved satisfactory result with 48% of all websites of public administration being called as 'digitally inclusive'. Unfortunately, this does not relate to the needs of users with sight impairments, who still find it very hard to access public services online.[10]

The year 2016 brought crucial changes in European law, when European Parliament accepted the directive regarding accessibility of all European institutions' public websites as well as mobile applications. Currently, the UE diplomats are working on an additional document named European Accessibility Act that is supposed to regulate digital accessibility in such industries as banking, transportation, telecommunication, audiovisual services or e-sales. All of these legal procedures are accompanied by raising social awareness on this problematic issue. It's critically important to spread the news about this issue so that the broadest audience can acknowledge the necessity of changes - and start with their own activities taking place in the web. The accessibility of websites relates to the way they are designed, so that they are available to all of the users, also those with sight impairments, allowing them independent, full and effective participation.[11]

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[7] Joanna Konarska, Bariery aktywności psychospołecznej osób z niepełnosprawnością – mity i rzeczywistość, Kraków 2015.

[8] Marcin Popiel, Innovative solutions in adapting urban space and tourism development for people with disabilities on the example of selected European cities, Kraków 2015.

[9] http://www.aptus.pl/www/porady/strony_dla_niewidomych.php

[10] http://www.widzialni.org/wyniki-raportu-dostepnosci-2017,new,mg,6,306

[11] D. Batorski, Diagnoza i rekomendacje w obszarze kompetencji cyfrowych społeczeństwa i przeciwdziałania wykluczeniu cyfrowemu w kontekście zaprogramowania wsparcia w latach 2014-2020, Warszawa 2012.

**Key campaign ideas**

We have set three main goals of our campaign. Firstly, it is to raise social awareness about the fact that people with visual impairments use Facebook just as often as other users, and so should have equal access to all content posted there. Secondly, we want to educate our audience about how to make their posts available to everyone. Finally, we want to encourage them to add a description of each photo they post.

We want to achieve our goals through:
- informing about good practices allowing the Internet to become a more inclusive space - beginning with Facebook
- challenging various organizations to start describing their graphics and thus making Facebook more inclusive
- posting information about the necessity of making the Internet accessible for people with sight impairments
- describing all graphics posted on our page in a proper way - our page can serve as a good example for others
- entertaining our audience in order to keep their attention on our case
- spreading information about our campaign


**Implementation plan**

We have created a detailed schedule for the days 14th-19th June 2017, pointing to the key actions needed to be undertaken each day in order to reach the goals of our campaign.

14.06
- Creating our page on Facebook
- Designing our logo and main graphic
- Posting information about the aim of our page
- Posting a meme informing how to make a proper description of a graphic on Facebook with an exemplary photo described by us
- Posting a meme informing about the challenge 'Write A Photo'

15.06
- Sending our first invitation to accept the challenge (to 'Hot Chocolate Hits')
- Starting posting memes and videos containing interesting information regarding the topic of digital inclusion (one or two per day)

16.06
- Sending our second invitation to accept the challenge (to 'Troll the Troll')
- Starting contacting organizations that might be interested in our topic (in total minimum 20 of them)

17.06
- Starting an advertising campaign on Facebook


18.06
- Sending our third invitation to accept the challenge (to 'MamyGłos')

19.06
- Posting the videos made by us

**Impact indicators**

**We have agreed upon some key impact indicators enabling us to assess the success of our campaign. We want to achieve at least:**

- 3000 views in total of all published content
- 200 likes of our page
- 15 sharings of the published content
- 5 organizations accepting our challenge

**Our visual work**



Picture 1: The main graphic on our Facebook page.



Picture 2: Our logo.

Picture 3: The meme informing how to make a proper description of a graphic.



Picture 4: The meme informing about the challenge 'Write A Photo'.

Picture 5: The meme calling 'Hot Chocolate Hits' to accept our challenge.

**What was already done by others**

To our knowledge, in Poland there have been active several platforms or organisations which goals are similar to ours - making the Internet more accessible to all its users. We list them below with their short descriptions.

- The blog internet-bez-barier.com about how to use specific tools and guidelines in order to make any websites more accessible for people using screen readers.
- The website dostepnestrony.pl run by the NGO Integracja standing behind the project 'Supporting persons with disabilities in accessing services and information available in Internet'. Their aim is to support public institutions in adjusting their websites for needs of people with disabilities. They worked with over 500 public institutions in Poland.
- The Foundation Widzialni counteracting digital and social exclusion. They work closely with public and private institutions in making Internet more accessible for all people regardless their age, disabilities or wealth. They work on changing the Polish law and monitor implementations of it alongside the international standard of accessibility WCAG 2.0 by Polish administration. They organize the yearly conference 'Digital inclusion' during which contests 'The leader of digital inclusion' and 'The Website without borders' take place. Each year they publish 'The Accessibility Report', which is the only Polish research on progress made by public institutions in the subject of digital inclusion.
- The grassroots initiative Opisujemy that has an aim of making graphics posted online more accessible for blind people. They were the first to start describing on a large scale memes and other entertaining graphic content in the Internet, making them understandable for all. The network of people engaged in this initiative creates a Facebook group where people can send requests about describing anything they need - a video, a book cover or a photograph.

Moreover, there were two social campaigns that gave us some inspiration in our work:

- The NGO White Cane based in Serbia created a campaign named 'Web Blackout' with an aim of raising awareness in the society about the challenges people with sight impairments encounter in the Internet. The main action of the campaign was creating banners that would pop up unexpectedly on the monitors of people searching the web. Banners were completely black and instead of a mouse cursor, the white cane appeared. Additionally, various chaotic sounds can be heard. The confusion that is brought by this experience is supposed to develop empathy and understanding of the troubles people with sight disabilities have when searching websites that are not accessible for them. The claim of this action was: 'For you, it's easy to escape the darkness. For some people it is impossible. Donate to support the purchase of guide dogs for blind people.'[12]
- The Foundation 'Culture Without Borders' created the campaign named 'Zabierz laskę do kina' (Take your girl/cane [in polish it's the same word] to the cinema), whose aim was to raise social awareness about the problematic issue of excluding people with sight impairments from cultural life. The Foundation wants to promote adding an audiodescription to movies in cinemas and on DVDs, adding subtitles to all polish movies - so that people with hearing impairments can also watch them - as well as inviting sign language translators for all cultural events. The campaign was based on the series of screenshots from famous movies, like "Blue Velvet" by David Lynch or "Psychosis" by Alfred Hitchcock. The photographs were covered with black spots, on which there was a description of a given scene.[13] In our opinion it was a smart way of delivering the powerful message that without audiodescription, people with sight impairments are excluded from the entertainment brought by participation in cultural life that we all appreciate and enjoy highly.


Picture 6: Poster from the campaign 'Zabierz laskę do kina'.

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[12] http://www.kampaniespoleczne.pl/kampanie,2899,biala_laska_prowadzi_po_sieci (accessed 16.06.2016).

[13] http://innpoland.pl/114553,walka-z-ciemnoscia-polskie-kino-takze-dla-niewidomych (accessed 16.06.2016).

**Our assumptions that have turned out to be right**

- Digital exclusion of people with sight impairments is a serious problem that still waits for effective solutions.
- It would be a challenging task to encourage Facebook users and organizations to start describing their graphics posted online.
- Our campaign should consist both of serious and fun content playing entertaining and educational roles.
- It is highly important to engage network of people already interested in the topic.

**Reactions to the content we have posted**

We received positive feedback from organizations and persons interested in the issues related to our campaign, including:

- sharing our page or posts ( 15 times);
- answering our private messages with the support to continue 'the good job', proposing changes we could implement or recommending other pages that could serve as good examples for us (4 times);
- liking our posts ( 64 times).

We achieved  5931views and  193 likes.

Three organizations accepted our challenge and we are still waiting for the answers from other two. Overall, we perceive our campaign to be fairly successful, although not all goals have been fully reached.

We consulted both our idea and the page with one blind person and received very positive feedback from her. That assured us about the real necessity of tackling this problem and the right direction of our actions.

Regarding the organizations we've challenged, none of them rejected but we still haven't come up with effective ways of encouraging our existing partners to keep the job done - and the potential ones to accept our challenge.

**Feedback received from the training team**We had changed our initial ideas a few times before we decided on the topic of digital inclusion. It was mainly due to highly valuable feedback gathered from experts in the field. They shared with us their concerns about possible reception of the actions we wanted to undertake, that we had not thought of before. That reminded us how sensitive is the topic we want to work on. We have also discussed the scope of actions we plan to undertake, as dealing with a too broad spectrum of issues would not be efficient. When we came up with the InternetInclusive campaign we received positive feedback from  the training team members, although there was one critical voice arguing that our idea was not going to work, as organizations have no time to describe graphics they post. Instead, we were encouraged to start  a fundraising campaign in order to run a 'describing office', where we would do this work ourselves for anybody interested. Nonetheless, we decided to stick to our idea, as we believe the positive mission of our campaign is a good enough reason for socially sensitive organizations - like NGOs - to accept our challenge and keep doing the work on their own.

**The ways we modified our work**

After starting our Facebook page, we decided to change the layout of our graphics in order to make it more visible for people with sight impairments. Also, we fixed the descriptions of our graphics after one person had written us a message with some recommendations about how to improve the quality of our initiative.

**Lessons learned**

We have learned a few key lessons:

1) Always ask for feedback - do it on every stage of a project, try to consult it with as many various people as possible

2) Do not be afraid of deleting all your previous work and starting all over again with a fresh idea - even if it happens just before the deadline of submitting a subject

3) Reach out to many organizations and people interested in your topic in order to spread the news about your initiative

4) Stay open to new ideas coming along an implementation process, learn through experiments and have fun!

**Potential long-term development**

Our initiative could develop in various ways, both on- and off-line. In a digital world, it could become a platform serving as a meeting place for people excluded, for different reasons, from using the Internet and those interested in making the web more accessible space for everybody. Together, they could work on the best solutions of improving accessibility of the Internet, help with descriptions needed, educate others and persuade private and public institutions to make their websites more inclusive. Offline, we could start running workshops educating about the necessity of changing the web in order to make it accessible for everybody - we have already received such request from The Association of the Deaf-Blind so probably we could cooperate with them on that project.