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## WHAT CONTENT IS PUBLISHED ON WEBSITES OF ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES? SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF ONLINE SOURCES

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### ABSTRACT

*The article describes the results obtained in the research conducted in the form of an analysis of online secondary sources (websites of organizations supporting people with disabilities). The study covers websites of ten major European organizations whose main activity is to help people with disabilities. The research question is: "What topics and issues dominate in the web content created by organizations, and what is overlooked, unnoticed?" The analysis of websites makes it possible to identify five significant thematic categories that dominate the content published by the selected organizations; these categories are - education, legal issues, architectural barriers, financial issues, social activities. In addition, the research makes it possible to diagnose the absence of several critical disability-related topics in the published content. Essential issues omitted on the institutions' websites include adulthood and sexuality of people with disabilities, everyday life of people with disabilities and their families, and individual perspectives of people with disabilities (presentation of topics from the group's point of view, lack of personal viewpoint). According to research result there is also a hierarchy of disabilities in the content published on the websites (e. g., a small number of articles devoted to intellectual disabilities or mental disorders).*

**Key words:** Internet, Europe, organizations, people with disabilities, secondary data analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

The last few years have seen an increase in researchers' interest in using modern technologies, such as computer software, Internet-based tools, and artificial intelligence to analyze social phenomena (Earl and Kimport 2011; Schumann 2015). This trend also applies to disability-related content and actions of organizations supporting people with disabilities. Social organizations, especially associations and foundations, and humanitarian organizations, carry out multidirectional activities to meet the basic needs of people with disabilities. Organizations are becoming increasingly aware of expanding their activities to include areas related to strengthening individuals and social groups' subjectivity and independence. The assumptions of the multi-faceted activity of institutions offering support for people with disabilities can take various forms. Associations and foundations strive to raise public awareness of critical social issues, such as social integration. Besides, they reinforce the general public's interest in matters related to helping people from groups that risk social exclusion (Chiner, Gomez-Puerta, and Cardona-Molto 2017). Through their activity, (e. g. social campaigns, advertising spots, etc.) organizations want to draw attention to a specific problem or change attitudes towards people or phenomena by evoking emotions. One may argue that, among other things, it is trying to make you think, to shape your empathy, but also to provoke controversy or provoke public debate. Social organizations' activities aim at changing the life situation of people with disabilities and their families, and combating stereotypes related to disability. Furthermore, the institutions may support the idea of social cooperation of local, national, or transnational character.

Numerous theorists stress the need to fight for the improvement of the life situation of people with disabilities. The works of artists in pedagogy, psychology, special pedagogy, or social work often refer to cooperation between a person in need of support their family, local environment, and aid institutions. Mike Oliver, who was an activist associated with the struggle for the rights of people with disabilities in his work, stressed that the inconven-

ience and difficulty of living with a disability are not inherent in the disability itself, but the inability of society to adapt to the needs of people with disabilities (Oliver 1996). Collin Barnes pointed out the shift from the medical model of disability to the social model of disability. The author devoted a lot of attention to the analysis of how a number of areas of everyday life of people with disabilities need to be supported by assistance institutions, whose aim should be to provide such with full access to education, work, or culture (Barnes and Mercer 2010). Among the authors writing about the rights of people with disabilities and the threat of their social exclusion are also Irving Zola, author of publications combining sociology, medicine, and human rights (Zola 2003).

In the case of Poland, a number of authors also stress the importance of integration and improving the living conditions of people with disabilities through increased social cooperation. Several of them had a particularly significant influence on developing the view on integration, inclusion, and a support system for people with disabilities. This group includes Aleksandra Maciarz (1995), Aleksander Hulek (1980), and Władysław Dykcik (1997), who created comprehensive analyses of the functioning of integration in Poland, prepared definitions of social integration, inclusion, and pointed to the required elements of practical cooperation in the area of relations between people with disabilities and their families with the rest of society. They emphasized that it is imperative to pay attention to cooperation of all agents participating in the integration efforts - students, parents, teachers, and the social environment. Among the recent work, it is worth noting the works carried out by Barbara Gąciarz, (2014) and the publication by Tomasz Masłyk (2019) "Po pierwsze człowiek. Kapitał społeczny osób niepełnosprawnych w Polsce" (In the first place - human. Social capital of people with disabilities in Poland).

Nowadays, the Internet and modern technologies play a huge role in providing support for people with disabilities. The slogans mentioned above concerning integration, inclusion,

fighting for people with disabilities' rights now have a better chance of being put into practice. The Internet may be treated as a kind of bridge or window to the wider world, for people who find making social contacts or acquiring knowledge in a traditional form difficult. According to the researchers, the Internet is becoming a space for discussion, and social debates related to disability (Stojkow & Zuchnowska-Skiba 2015; Masłyk 2019). Internet platforms enable efficient communication, searching for content, and improving people's life (Voykinska, Azenkot, Wu, and Leshed 2016). Research on this subject is also conducted in Poland. Tomasz Masłyk & Ewa Migaczewska (2014) analyzed the share of people with disabilities among Internet users in Poland, how they use modern technologies, and possibilities and opportunities provided by the Internet. Researchers presented their views primarily in the context of combating the digital exclusion of people with disabilities (Masłyk & Migaczewska 2014).

Online activities undertaken by organizations supporting people with disabilities aim to strengthen the idea of a supportive society and limit exclusion or stigmatization (Reed 2014). By creating and presenting educational materials on the Internet, their authors express their voice in the struggle for people with disabilities' right to full access to common goods and public benefits. This is important in the context of the ever more audible voices related to community building and anti-exclusion. As Wester J. H. and Loyo A. C. (2013) write: "The idea of a regulated community through the concept of non-excluding society is inextricably linked to the education and training of responsible and supportive citizens, because only in this way can citizens be able to cooperate in defining what can be understood in a particular historical and cultural context as a situation of exclusion" (Wester and Loyo 2013, p. 35).

Institutions often see the enormous benefits of using the Internet to provide information and have access to recipients. Associations, foundations, and public authorities publish disability-related content on several different online platforms. These are websites, blogs, forums, and social networking sites such as Facebook or the increasingly popular Instagram and TikTok.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research described in this publication has been carried out using an analysis of online secondary sources. This method of research implementation was chosen due to the numerous benefits of online research. They allow for the analysis of contemporary social phenomena, which have been largely transferred to the Internet. Moreover, the study provides an in-depth, long-term secondary analysis of the content published on the Internet (in any form - text, image, or video).

The research consisted of analyzing the content published on ten European institutions' websites that support people with disabilities: 3 Polish, 3 English-speaking, and 4 pan-European English-speaking. Articles, messages, information on pages selected for observation were analyzed. The collected data was categorized and matched to general thematic groups defining the scope of the content. Articles published between August 2019 and November 2020 were selected for detailed analysis. The main research question guiding the activities was: "What topics and issues dominate in the web content created by organizations and what is overlooked, unnoticed?"

Below is a table with a list of websites of organizations that were analyzed during data collection. These are both Polish and foreign organizations. The research was not limited only to Poland and its organizations and institutions – this was dictated by the desire to obtain supranational character research, allowing for in-depth comparative analyses. Language issues were the main focus. Only pages in Polish and English were analyzed. Therefore, websites run by British, English, and pan-European aid organizations were selected for analysis. One of the selection criteria was the range of topics covered by the webpages of organizations. Portals focusing on one narrow issue related to disability (e. g., websites where only educational content is published) were excluded. Therefore, the content published by organizations carrying out activities with a broader spectrum of action and publication was analyzed.

The analyses were carried out according to the coding and categorization rules proposed by Graham Gibbs (2015). The coding was

**Table 1. List of websites of organizations analyzed in the research project**

Name of organization	website of organization	Organization's field of activity
Stowarzyszenie Przyjaciół Integracji i Fundacja Integracja	www.niepelnosprawni.pl	Poland
Polskie Stowarzyszenie Osób Niepełnosprawnych	www.pson.org.pl	Poland
Fundacja Fuga Mundi	www.ffm.pl	Poland
Disability Rights UK	www.disabilityrightsuk.org	Great Britain
Voluntary Organisations Disability Group	www.vodg.org.uk	Great Britain
Disability Federation of Ireland	www.disability-federation.ie	Ireland
European Disability Forum	www.edf-feph.org	Europe
European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities	www.easpd.eu	Europe
Fundacion ONCE	www.fundaciononce.es	Europe
International Disability Alliance	www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/blog	Europe

Source: own study

performed based on data without prior conceptualization. Articles published on the websites mentioned above have been coded and categorized. All articles published in a given period on the indicated websites have been analyzed. The categorization key has been created using the inductive approach. Further research categories were added as the research work progressed (initially loose, preliminary analysis of the research material, then robust and structured article analysis). Categorization was based on a detailed analysis of the content to identify specific thematic categories, links, dependencies, differences, and diversity. To take care of the research's ethical side and exclude over interpretation on the researcher's part, excerpts from the analyzed materials were attached to the analyses (article titles or fragments of articles). The research was conducted in a qualitative way; therefore, precise numerical and statistical data were not included in the study of research results.

## RESULTS

Analyses of the content published on the websites of ten selected organizations supporting people with disabilities led to the identification of:

- five dominant thematic categories of articles - material/financial issues, and education, law, architectural issues (accessibility), and social activity

- five areas that can be described as absent or overlooked, by the authors creating the content of the analyzed websites - the sexuality of people with disabilities, the adulthood of people with disabilities, issues related to certain types of disabilities, individual perspective, and psychological sphere.

Material and financial issues are one of the main areas covered by the content published on the organization's websites. This is due to the great interest of people with disabilities, and their families regarding this particular subject. People from this social group face problems obtaining information traditionally, e. g., by visiting an institution's office. For this reason, they are more willing to use Internet resources to obtain information on financial issues. There are articles emphasizing creating job opportunities for people with disabilities as an element of social inclusion. An example or texts from this area may be an article published on the websites run by International Disability Alliance: "Call to Action: Inclusion of Women with Disabilities and Migrant Women Workers in Covid-19 Response and Recovery Plans":

*"We should cooperate to improve the inclusion and participation of women with disabilities and migrant women workers, giving due attention to those with disabilities, throughout the Arab Region in the COVID-19 response and recovery measures.*



*The Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities (AOPD) calls on National and Local Governments, UN Agencies, the International Media and Civil Society to give women with disabilities and migrant women workers, with a focus on those with disabilities, priority in all actions and interventions that would protect them against the current pandemic.*” (International Disability Alliance 2020).

Public institutions, associations, and foundations are aware of demand in this area. Therefore, they create numerous online articles on grants and subsidies for the purchase of equipment, allowances, or other forms of material support. An example could be an article published on niepełnosprawni.pl by Przybyśzewski “Ulgą rehabilitacyjną w PIT za 2019 rok. 10 pytań i odpowiedzi” [Rehabilitation deductions in PIT for 2019. 10 questions and answers]. There are also articles about budgets of national or local institutions:

*“Wednesday’s Budget made shockingly few significant improvements to the lives of disabled people, who have seen living standards and vital services cut over the past decade. 50% of people living in poverty, seven million, are now either disabled or have a disabled person in the household.*

*Disability Rights UK welcomes government commitments to “levelling up” and to investing in infrastructure, but following our departure from the EU, we would like to see much more ambition to create a country where disabled people have equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal access to power. (...)”* (Disability Rights UK, 2020, “Budget fails disabled people”)

Another critical point is education, which is also the subject of number of articles published on the organization’s websites. This thematic scope mainly includes recommendations for parents and teachers of how to educate pupils with disabilities using different methods. In their articles, the authors also address various types of innovative educational activities carried out by public and private institutions. Education also includes texts related to creating extra-curricular activities tailored to children’s abilities and needs. There are also articles indicating the possibilities of using modern technologies in special educa-

tion. An example could be an article “Inclusive Education: What role for the EU in the way forward?”:

*“Education is a fundamental part of our lives, as it not only serves as a way to develop and fully deploy our skills and competences, but it also promotes the personal and social development of learners. The creation of a high-quality education system is therefore crucial, so that everyone has equal opportunities to partake in our society. Unfortunately, despite the benefits of inclusive education, mainstream education still remains largely inaccessible for many learners with disabilities across Europe.*

*Via its research into the state of inclusive education in Europe, the IE+ project has identified a number of common barriers preventing the realisation of inclusive education. These barriers include: the prevalence of poor attitudes towards disability and inclusion; the persistence of the medical model of disability; the continuation of two simultaneous education systems (both mainstream and segregated) as well as lack of hard data to monitor the progress of inclusion. Although education is a competence of the Member States, the European Union still plays a key role in supporting the accomplishment of inclusive education across the continent. (...)”* (European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities 2020)

The law is another issue that can be included among the frequent articles on Internet portals for people with disabilities. This applies above all to papers created by professionals to provide an in-depth analysis of the changing laws that affect people with disabilities and their families. Those kind of texts emphasize need for better advocacy for rights of people with disabilities. An example: “The Disability Data Advocacy toolkit: Better information for better policies”:

*“Data is critical for the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities. Without it, marginalization is perpetuated, and the discrimination encountered by persons with disabilities around the world remains unaddressed. (...)”*

*The goal of the Disability Data Advocacy Toolkit is to contribute to the growing global dialogue on the importance of data on persons with disabilities, providing basic knowledge on data collection, analysis, and use of data for evidence-based advocacy. The toolkit aims at build-*

*ding the capacity of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations around the world, by offering simple approaches to essential advocacy skillsets that could benefit all persons with disabilities, particularly those underrepresented and in more impoverished regions.”* (International Disability Alliance 2020).

These are contents describing the often controversial amendments to regulations, rules that cause significant changes in the context of inclusion, social activity of people with disabilities, and legislative changes in the material sphere. Example: “Put disabled people at the heart of all future policy – VODG chief executive comments on the General Election results”:

*„With the result of the 12 December General Election now decided, VODG (the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group) looks forward to working with the new government to prioritise a progressive agenda that puts disabled people’s lives at the heart of social policy decision-making.*

*VODG believes that disabled people should have timely access to services that support them to live the lives they wish whether that is social care, special educational needs, housing, or employment services. Indeed, VODG’s vision is of a world where disabled people have full choice and control over their lives.”* (...) (Voluntary Organizations Disability Group 2020).

The articles focus on local, national, and supranational law, such as European Union legal acts. Those kind appears especially often during crucial event, situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The articles featured on the websites of given organizations are often their statements or proposals of new legal regulations. An example of such an article: “Statement on the rights of persons with disabilities during COVID-19”:

*“(...)We say Ireland must actively protect the rights of people with disabilities during COVID-19.*

*We must make the promises in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN CRPD, come to life. We ratified the Convention, so we expect equal, inclusive, and non-discriminatory treatment for all during this pandemic. This is especially im-*

*portant in healthcare. (...)”* (Disability Federation of Ireland 2020).

Another group is publications on architectural issues. Above all, these are numerous articles by authors who are critical of the current conditions that make it difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to move around efficiently in public space. This includes, among others, pointing out difficulties in accessing public institutions, schools, or banks’ buildings. An example could be an article posted on Disability Rights UK website “Transport Secretary pledges to improve disabled passengers’ journeys”:

*“Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has announced his intent to accelerate progress to make the UK a world leader for accessible travel as a new Government campaign launches to improve the journeys of disabled passengers on public transport.*

*The Department for Transport has launched the ‘It’s everyone’s journey’ advertising campaign to highlight how we can all play a part in making public transport inclusive. The campaign is being supported by more than 100 partners, including First Group, WHSmith Travel and the Alzheimer’s Society. (...)”* (Disability Rights UK 2020)

However, the organization’s web pages also contain content that takes a different perspective on the subject in question. These are analyses of positive changes in architecture or urban development, which are often visible and make everyday life easier for people with disabilities. An Example: “Zmiana prawa. Więcej osób otrzyma kartę parkingową” [The new regulations. More people get access to parking cards] (Dązbłaż 2020),

The last of the five main dominant thematic categories that are particularly noticeable in the content published on websites run by organizations supporting people with disabilities is social activity. The institutions present numerous reports on cultural and social activities aimed at activating people with disabilities. There are for example articles being a reflection on activity of people with disabilities during the global pandemic. Organizations also shows personal experience of people with disabilities. An examples: “How Social Di-

stancing Disproportionally Restricts Persons with Disabilities: A Story From the Netherlands”:

*“Lisa is a 65-year old woman with physical disability from the Netherlands who uses a wheelchair for navigation. She now works remotely from home but notices that her quality of work and productivity has decreased. “My house is not that big so my working place is my living room, I can’t concentrate very well”, she says. Lisa lives alone. Although her daughter comes to visit her often, they do not have physical contact and she hardly sees any of her friends. She feels lonely and sad. (...)*

*Lissa’s medical treatment has been postponed. She urgently needs to see a doctor, but hospitals are currently overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients. Going to the hospital can be risky and increases the chances of contracting the virus. Her physiotherapy sessions have also been cancelled during the outbreak, which has made her health worse. Her own therapist contracted COVID-19, making her realise that everyone is exposed to the virus, despite the security measures.”* (International Disability Alliance 2020).

There are for example information about specific associations, foundations, local cooperation, or events organized by people with disabilities (theatre performances, charity concerts). Articles about sport, physical activity, and excursions can also be included in the cultural field, since, as in a number of cases, they are combined with cultural and social issues. An example article from this field is published on the website [niepelnosprawni.pl](http://niepelnosprawni.pl) “Podróże marzeń. Wręczono nagrody XVII Konkursu Sztuka Osób Niepełnosprawnych” [The dream journeys. The awards were given in the XVII Competition of Art of People with disabilities] (Dązblaż 2020).

The above analyses concerning the content that is visible as part of articles written by organizations supporting people with disabilities. However, there is a significant group of topics that, despite their importance, are not visible. This is content that is omitted or not sufficiently represented. The focus on children and young people is visible in the content created by organizations. This results in the low presence of content devoted to the problems of adults with disabilities. The we-

bsites mainly feature articles concentrating on the education and upbringing of young people while omitting, for example, life-long education and how the development of adults with disabilities can be supported. This applies to education and other issues raised earlier, such as culture or finance. Although, there are those whose contents are descriptions of cultural and social activities prepared for adults with disabilities, they are not as numerous. Additionally, the financial issues raised in the press releases on the webpages also focus on the support given to children and their parents. The employment of people with disabilities in the open and protected labor market is only mentioned to a small extent (mostly on specialist portals and not on aid organizations’ general websites).

Adulthood of people with disabilities is also connected with sexuality, and the intimacy of partner relationships. This is another vital area, which is not addressed in articles published on the organization’s virtual platforms. Information about anatomy, sexuality, and how to talk about it with people with intellectual disabilities or mental health problems is not available to the public on the organization’s selected and analyzed websites. Likewise, the issues of relationships, partnerships, or marriages appear sporadically. There are no articles for LGBT+ people with disabilities on the platforms observed and researched. Parenting is another area on the margin and is described by a small group of authors.

From the researcher’s point of view, it might also be interesting to draw attention to considerable disproportions in the number of articles created on topics concerning different types of disabilities. Some of them seem to be much more “media-oriented,” which means that content about people with specific disabilities appears in a number of texts posted on the organization’s websites. Much attention is paid to people with motor or sight and hearing disabilities. In contrast, others occasionally become an area of interest for the authors. Intellectual disability is a much less common issue featured on online portals. Another issue is the presence of articles that refuse to take an in-depth look at the individual problems of people with disabilities. The



authors publishing on portals focus primarily on describing the groups events covering broad social groups. Difficulties that may be faced by lesser communities or excluded individuals seem to be unnoticed by creators. An individual voice has no way of breaking through and reaching a broad audience, which makes the goal of social inclusion of all marginalized groups challenging to achieve.

The last thematic category that should find more space on virtual platforms supervised by organizations supporting people with disabilities is the psychological sphere. Mental health, wellbeing, and emotional balance constitute the subject of several public debates. However, this is not reflected in the content of the websites analyzed. The issue of psychological support for people with disabilities is not highlighted. Still, the authors of the articles do not try to bring this phenomenon closer to the readers.

## CONCLUSION

The above analyses attempted to present the topics that dominate the authors' content and those absent on selected and analyzed platforms and websites. Descriptions and the indication of thematic categories may lead to the question: Why are some issues omitted by authors of texts posted on the indicated websites? There are several reasons for this. Some problems remain marginal due to the lack of publicity for psychological support for people with disabilities. Authors publishing on portals may not be aware of what recipients expect, as there is no exchange of information between authors and recipients.

Several of the analyzed sites do not have, for example, a comment section underneath the published articles. Therefore, readers cannot

express their opinion on what they would like to read and what information they would like to find on the organization's website. It should be noted that associations, foundations, organizations act as institutions, thus concentrating their activity primarily on supporting large social groups. This can lead to the omission of topics related to a small number of communities. The hierarchy of disability is visible in the content published on the organization's websites.

A significant number of online publications on fundamental issues such as education, finance, law, culture, and architectural barriers indicate that people with disabilities and their families can find valuable virtual content concerning these areas. The organizations whose websites have been analyzed in this research project are aware of the issues that are especially relevant for people with disabilities. A number of the published articles combine the matters discussed, emphasizing the necessity of social inclusion, cooperation between different environments. The Internet can be an essential factor for change. It enables people at risk of social exclusion to operate in a virtual public space through the availability and diversity of sources.

However, as the collected research material indicates, there are several important topics related to people's daily lives with disabilities that are not sufficiently presented in the articles published on the organization's websites. Such analyses in qualitative research can be an essential element of scientific research in the humanities. The method of virtual content analysis can be useful for both theoreticians and practitioners. Online research is becoming a necessary social research element because it allows for in-depth, detailed studies of people's functioning from different social groups in dynamically changing conditions.

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