Accessibility Guidelines for Public Libraries in Finland

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Public library network in Finland

- Public i.e. municipal libraries
  - 743 libraries + 137 bookbuses in 2016
- Special libraries
  - Celia Library for the Print Disabled
  - Sign Language Library (online)
- Popular service
  - 66 % of the population visit libraries
  - 78 % are satisfied with the service
  - 2013-2017 libraries no 1 in the national customer service inquiry
Library for All

• A project to develop a digital talking book service via public libraries for print disabled persons
• Co-operation with Celia Library for the Print Disabled and public libraries
• From a centralized special service from Celia to an inclusive service at public libraries
• Started in autumn 2013, ended in Dec 2015
• During this project we found out that there is little knowledge about accessibility in public libraries
• Accessibility Guidelines were a spin-off project, started in 2014
Accessibility Guidelines for Public Libraries

- To raise awareness of accessibility in public libraries
- To give practical advice on how accessibility can be ensured in all library operations and activities
- Meant for all library professionals from management to librarians working at the customer service
Composing the Guidelines

- Composed in co-operation with different authorities, library associations, libraries, user organizations and other experts
- Many disability and minority organizations and authorities were also asked to give comments on the drafts of the Guidelines
- Based on the Design for All idea - while good design solutions are necessary for disabled users, they can benefit everyone
- Permanent disabilities, temporary impairments, situational limitations
What is an accessible library?

- An accessible library is a library whose services all citizens can use equally despite their disabilities, special needs, or minority group status.
Many aspects of accessibility

- Accessibility is understood very broadly
- All minorities taken into consideration not just persons with disabilities
- Environmental and physical aspect
  - wheel chair access
- Informational aspect
  - accessibility of the content
  - accessible collections and materials
- Social aspect
  - all citizens feel welcome to a library
Contents of the Guidelines

- Introduction by Director of Helsinki City Library
- Concepts
- Strategic work and management
- Collections and materials
- Customer service
- Events
- Pedagogic operations
- Communication
- ICT procurements
- Premises
- Lists of special libraries and disability and other organisations
Some main points 1/5

• Leadership and strategy of libraries
  – Accessibility should be included in the strategy of the library and budget planning.
  – All citizens should be involved in developing library services.
  – Disability organisations, diverse learners, elderly people, HLBTI organisations, etc.
  – Accessibility should be taken into consideration when recruiting library professionals.
Some main points 2/5

• Collections and materials
  – The diversity of society is reflected in collection. For example, children’s collection have titles in which disabled children are characters.
  – Accessible book formats: audio / talking books, easy to read books, tactile books, videos with subtitles and audio description
  – Accessible books are easy to find. There is a shelf for them near main entrance or service desk.
  – A library has a book delivery service.
  – Co-operation with special libraries
Some main points 3/5

• Events
  – There are sign language interpreters or induction loops available if needed.

• Pedagogic operations
  – In booktalks also accessible books are mentioned.
  – Children are encouraged to read aloud (reading education assistance dogs / guinea pigs / grannies / grandpas)

![READing Dog Sylvi](image-url)
Some main points 4/5

• Communication
  – Use of many channels. Webpages, social media, e-mail, printed materials, announcements in the library, etc.
  – Use of many formats. Text, audio, video, infographics
  – Simple, understandable language
  – Making sure that web pages are accessible
  – Telling clients how accessible library is

• ICT procurements
  – WCAG 2.0
  – Usability testing with persons who use assistive technologies
Some main points 5/5

• Customer service
  – Library staff is easily recognized.
  – Language skills of staff (incl. sign language) is shown.
  – Staff knows how to communicate with clients who have a personal assistant or an interpreter.

• Premises
  – Detailed information about accessible entrance, lifts, toilets, furniture, etc.
  – Information about signs, lights and acoustics
Available in English

• The English translation is available [https://www.celia.fi/eng/accessible-library/](https://www.celia.fi/eng/accessible-library/)
• Published under the Creative Commons license Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International
• Can be translated and adapted into other languages
Process

• Writing group started working in Dec 2014
  – Many experts involved in writing
• First part was published in June 2015 for commenting
  – Comments asked from disability organisations
• Complete version of the Guidelines were published in June 2016
• In 2017, seven one-day symposiums/workshops around Finland
  – Presenting the Guidelines
  – Presenting local examples of accessible solutions
  – Discussion accessibility pros and cons in local libraries
• Updating the Guidelines
  – In August 2017
Thank you! Kiitos!

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