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## Accessible Book Publishing, a Dutch Model

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### **Abstract:**

*Accessible Book Publishing, a Dutch model*

*In my presentation I will show how a specialised comprehensive service for accessible books can be combined with and reinforced by good relationship and co-operation with publishers.*

*In the Netherlands people with a print disability have access to a service which provides them with accessible versions of books, newspapers, magazines and educational materials.*

*The available formats are braille, audio, digital text, enlargements (large print and digital), tactile images or combinations of these formats. The Dutch Libraries for the Print Disabled are Dedicon, the Centre for Adapted Reading and the Christian Library for the Blind.*

*Their service is anchored by law and funded by the Dutch government.*

*The relationship between Dedicon and publishers has a longstanding history and has always been constructive. The European implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty facilitates the possibilities for production of accessible information even more. Not only by allowing for cross border exchange, but also by defining a clear exception in the copyright law for the print-disabled.*

*Still, a fruitful model of close co-operation with Dutch publishers is essential and enables a fast and efficient production of accessible materials.*

*Moreover, Dedicon coordinated a structural broad consultation with publishers and other stakeholders which has led to an inclusive publishing programme.*

*In this programme the awareness of the need for accessible publishing by mainstream publishers is being raised. Mainstream publishers are being taught how to implement most basic requirements for accessibility. First positive results are reported.*

*The need for the production of accessible information by specialised organisations like Dedicon will remain in the coming years. However the ultimate goal that every publisher publishes all information inclusively is coming a bit closer.*

**Keywords:** Accessibility, Inclusive Publishing, Print Disability.

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## Introduction

Part of the political culture in the Netherlands is that parties and organisations with different and even with conflicting interests always first seek to find a joint solution. A process of bargaining and compromising almost always leads to an outcome that satisfies both parties. Strikes occur rarely in the Netherlands. Disputes are hardly brought to court. A typical example is a social economic council consisting of delegates from government, trade unions and employers organisations that prepares all important laws in the field of labour and income. This process in which all important stakeholders try to find a common solution through compromising is expressed by a verb: "*polderen*". Typical Dutch, hence the reference to the typical Dutch polder landscape, where all stakeholders, - landowners, farmers and villagers alike have a common interest in dependable dikes and keeping their feet dry

In the same way Dutch unions of visually impaired people, special library organisations like Dedicon, Dutch government and publishers are together seeking for ways to make publications accessible for people with a print impairment. Of course the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty (1) has its positive effects in the Netherlands as well. But since the eighties of the previous century there has been a mutual arrangement between the Dutch Publishers Association (Mediafederatie), Dedicon and the National Library (Koninklijke Bibliotheek) for the production of accessible versions of copyright protected publications. In this spirit of cooperation a broad coalition of unions of visually impaired people, special schools, the Ministry of Culture, Education and Science, the National Library and Dedicon decided to start an inclusive publishing programme.

## Library services for the print disabled in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands persons with a print disability have access to a service which provides them with accessible information. In line with the Marrakesh Treaty persons with a visual impairment, persons with dyslexia and persons with a severe physical disability which leads to a reading impairment, they all are permitted to make use of this service. The service includes accessible versions of books, newspapers, magazines, educational and professional literature. More than 43,000 people with a print disability make use of the special library service (books, newspapers, magazines) and about 15,000 people are client of the service for accessible educational and professional literature. The available formats are braille, audio, digital text, enlargements (large print and digital), tactile maps and images. The library collection counts 80,000 book titles in audio format (Daisy format) 165 titles of newspapers and magazines, 18,000 book titles in braille, and special products like the so called hybrid books (combination of synchronised audio and text) and a braille and tactile version of Donald Duck. The Dutch Libraries for the print disabled are the Centre for Adapted Reading (Bibliotheekservice Passend Lezen), the Christian Library for the Blind (CBB) and Dedicon. Their service is anchored by law and funded by the Dutch government.

## Dedicon

Dedicon is the largest production organisation of accessible information in the Netherlands. For the Adapted Reading Service Dedicon produces yearly 1,600 audio and 800 braille titles of leisure reading books, 2,700 editions of audio newspapers and magazines and 12,000 digital

editions of periodicals. Dedicon serves print impaired pupils, students and professionals with accessible materials. For this purpose Dedicon produces each year 1,100 audiobooks, 1,400 books in paper braille and digital braille, 16,000 different tactile drawings, 12,500 enlargements on paper or in digital format. In total Dedicon sent out more than 1.8 million audio books and periodicals in 2018. The total print-volume of braille in 2018 was more than 3.5 million pages. To improve and develop its service to print impaired people Dedicon invests in research and development. The membership of international organisations like IFLA LPD and the DAISY Consortium creates a very useful launching pad for many of Dedicons developments. Besides the tasks to provide accessible information in the library and educational contexts, Dedicon provides solutions for accessible information in other important fields, like public transport, municipalities and museums. This varies from an interactive tactile map of the subway system of Amsterdam to a tactile versions of the paintings of famous artists like Rembrandt and Van Gogh.

## **Relationship with publishers**

These above mentioned productions and services wouldn't be possible without a good relationship with publishers. Even before the existence of an exception in Dutch copyright law there was a mutual arrangement in place between the Dutch publishers association and the libraries for the blind (the predecessors of Dedicon) and in a later stage the National Library. In this arrangement was stated that libraries for the blind were allowed to convert copyright protected works into accessible formats and to deliver these accessible books to persons with a visual impairment. This arrangement, together with a close relationship of confidence between the publishers association and Dedicon, prevented possible misunderstandings and potential conflicts with individual publishers. Since the eighties of the previous century the arrangement has been updated according to the technological and societal developments. The publishers association and Dedicon have always anticipated on copyright legislation. During the nineties persons with dyslexia were included as beneficiaries of the arrangement. Additional to audio on compact cassette and braille on paper, digital distribution formats were allowed. Dedicon could meet the conditions of a controlled and protected circulation to exclusively persons with a print disability. Although the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty was a significant breakthrough in a global perspective, except for the crossborder lending of titles it didn't add much to the possibilities of Dedicon and the Centre for Adapted reading. After a constructive deliberation with publishers the arrangement has been adapted to the Marrakesh Treaty. The implementation of the production tasks has become even more straightforward. Notifying publishers in advance about the production of a title isn't required anymore, and the legal base for rightsholders to object to a production is diminished. The advance notices have been replaced by a permanently updated overview on a website of all the newly converted accessible books. The arrangement furthermore recommends publishers to cooperate with the conversion by making the digital source material available to Dedicon. And in return Dedicon and its partners promised to make an effort to cooperate with the publishers to avoid what's been called "double productions", that is creating an accessible title when that title is already on the market in an accessible format.

## **Inclusive publishing**

In November 2016 Dedicon organised a first round table meeting on inclusive publishing in the Netherlands, in cooperation with two unions of visually impaired persons. Present at this first round table meeting were representatives from the Dutch publishers association, the

Ministry of Education, Culture & Science, the National Library, the organisation of schools for the visually impaired, the unions of the visually impaired and Dedicon.

Aim of the round table was to improve the adoption of accessible digital publishing by mainstream publishers. All parties present underlined their commitment to undertake necessary steps towards inclusive publishing. Since this first round table meeting, several steps have been undertaken:

- The ambition of the round table meeting was adopted in the implementation plan for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which came into effect in the Netherlands on 14 July 2016.
- A full list of measures and guidelines for publishers was completed, ordered by effect per reading disability and ease of implementation.
- From this full list a shortlist of 10 guidelines was published in a booklet as a quick start guide to accessible publishing. The guidelines were selected for their relatively large effect as opposed to their relative ease of implementation. This quick start guide was sent to all members of the Educational Publishers Association and many other publishers and developers.
- An implementation plan was delivered which resulted in funding of the project by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture & Science and a dedicated fund for accessible publishing (FondsXL).
- Two sessions were organised to create awareness for the need for accessible publishing amongst educational publishers and trade publishers. The session for trade publishers was also joined by representatives from a distribution/logistics organisation (Centraal Boekhuis) and a hardware supplier of e-readers (KOBO).

### **Project ‘Born Accessible Publishing’**

In June 2018 the project ‘Born Accessible Publishing’ (‘Toegankelijk Publiceren aan de Bron - TPUB) started with a kick-off meeting. The project is executed jointly by the stakeholders of the round table meeting. The project consists of four work packages:

1. Awareness and knowledge, in which several awareness sessions for trade publishers and for educational publishers were organised. Additionally we organised sessions to share knowledge on accessibility.

2. Quick start accessibility guidelines

A second quick start guide was produced and published. The guide contains ten additional guidelines, all supported by clear and representative examples to maximize usability of the guide. The guide is published in print and accessible PDF and provided to publishers. Both guides can be ordered and downloaded for free from the website inclusiefpubliceren.nl (2).

3. Activities to boost inclusive publishing

a. Tools and sources. We made an inventory of (internationally) available tools and sources that are useful for inclusive publishing. These are made available on the website inclusiefpubliceren.nl.

b. In-company workshop and consultancy. We visited 7 publishers. Designers, developers, editors and managers are invited to look at their own publications through the eyes of users with a reading impairment and to take measures to improve accessibility. Tools, guidelines and sources are offered. These trade publishers were advised on the implementation of accessibility in their work processes, on monitoring

and an accessibility action plan. All 7 made a person responsible for implementing accessibility within the organisation.

Further steps to take.

1. Helpdesk and user group

a. We will organise a helpdesk consisting of accessibility experts who can support publishers by helping to solve problems that publishers may encounter in implementing inclusive publishing, e.g. organizational and technical problems. The user group can function as a test panel and source of information for publishers.

2. Knowledge sharing through the establishment of (online) communities with experts working on inclusive publishing: one for trade publishers and one for educational publishers. Content items (articles, blogs, vlogs, ...) on topics that are relevant to the members of these communities will be created and shared.

## New Developments

During the project current developments are taking place as a result of the collaboration with publishers and stakeholders.

Implementation of standards.

- We are applying with the Dutch Standardisation Agency (Bureau Forum Standaardisatie) to accept ePUB3 as a mandatory standard for certain government publications.
- With the Standardisation Council for Education in the Netherlands (Standaardisatieraad) we are discussing the implementation of accessibility guidelines as a standard for Dutch digital learning materials, learning environments, and distribution platforms.

We are intensifying collaboration with publishers and other stakeholders. Together with the national publishers association we started a Taskforce Accessibility consisting of educational publishers in 2018. We aim to start a similar taskforce with trade publishers.

Since we expect that educational publishers will mainly work on the accessibility of new content, we started a project to find ways to make existing digital learning materials accessible together with publishers.

In order to improve and maintain accessibility within the entire distribution chain of eBooks we are seeking collaboration with publishers, distributors, vendors and producers of eReaders such as Kobo.

This year we will be starting a long term international project together with BrailleNet (France) and Johannes Kepler University (Austria). Aim is to provide practical and effective learning materials for publishers and producers of digital publications, so they can make content accessible and implement accessibility requirements into their workflows.

## **Inclusive publishing, an international perspective**

Although the cooperation that is described above might be considered as a typical Dutch example of jointly finding and implementing solutions, in other countries organisations that produce accessible content are also working together more and more with the publishing industry in facilitating the production of accessible information and in enhancing inclusive publishing.

An example of international cooperation is the Accessible Book Consortium (ABC) (3), a public-private partnership led by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). It includes organisations that represent people with print disabilities such as the World Blind Union (WBU); libraries for the blind; standards bodies, and organisations representing authors, publishers and collective management organisations. Through ABC's global bookservice, crossborder exchange of accessible books is made possible.

The global DAISY Consortium (4) supports organisations that produce accessible information with the development and maintenance of standards and tools that enable the production and distribution. The DAISY Consortium boosts inclusive publishing by participating in the standardisation process for ebooks (ePUB) and by making available accessibility guidelines, tools for assessment and a knowledge database on accessible publishing (5).

## **Conclusion**

A specialised comprehensive service for accessible books can be combined with and reinforced by mutual understanding and co-operation with publishers. In the Netherlands Dedicon, the Centre for Adapted Reading and the National Library have a fruitful and effective collaboration based on trust with the Dutch Publishers Association.

Based on this good relationship a common initiative arose to promote and to improve the adoption of accessible digital publishing by mainstream publishers.

The Dutch undertaking is part of an international development towards inclusive publishing, which is supported by global organisations like the Accessible Book Consortium and the DAISY Consortium.

## **Acknowledgments**

Put acknowledgments here

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