

Jesper Klein (president DAISY Consortium):

# The Transition of Publishing and Reading towards Born Accessible and Mainstreaming Access

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## Plenary abstract Jesper Klein, president DAISY Consortium

As the digital books becomes more and more adopted globally and thereby commercially critical for the publishing industry, the preconditions for accessible reading changes completely. It's shifting from a model based on charity or public funded republishing of accessible information to a universally designed reading environment that is inclusive to all, also people with disabilities.

### Background

For hundreds of years, people with print disabilities such as visual impairment or dyslexia had a great disadvantage compared to non-disabled persons since they were to a large extent excluded from the ability to read, and thereby to take part in education, cultural life and the democratic society. Access to information, and in practice the ability to read using eyes, ears and fingers, is a fundamental human right now confirmed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In some countries organizations categorized as libraries serving people with print disabilities with specialized, republished versions of books and other reading materials have existed since the mid 1800s. Together with universities, many of these organization have also supported students in k-12 and higher education with accessible reading materials.

During the first decade of our current millennium these organizations have successfully developed standards for accessible reading and moved to digital production flows and on-line services. When the e-book finally became a hit in the market after 2008 when companies like Amazon launched their ebook store and the reading platforms, the smartphone and tablet became more or less universally available, the environment that libraries serving people with print disabilities exist in quickly changed.

### The e-book is the best answer so far

For a while it seemed that the print first culture, DRM and fragmented technical standards for digital reading would risk keeping accessible reading marginalized in the commercial market. However, ten years later there is general consensus in both the more progressive publishing companies and in the accessible reading community that universal design of digital reading will eventually make copyright exception based republishing of things like DAISY talking books and braille books unnecessary.

Implemented the right way the e-book can do just what those other two can and more for a person who is blind, has dyslexia or some other print disability. Commercially driven inclusive publishing, grounded in the digital first paradigm is more sustainable and will in the long run it will make books and other publications much more widely and quickly available to people with disabilities.

## Also “mainstream” libraries will be important in the accessible reading ecosystem

Public libraries across the world have collection of millions of print books and other reading materials to be able to meet the public demand for wealth and width of knowledge, different perspectives and stories. Libraries are the unique institution in society that can provide such a long tail of books. As more and more people shift from reading print to e-books and audio books – also libraries are building better and more inclusive digital reading services that co-exist with things like Amazon’s and Apple’s services. A good example is New York Public Library’s service SimplyE which is now spreading across USA to more states and city libraries in form of an open source platform and national program called Library Simplified. This is made possible by funding from among others IMLS - the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Library Simplified has been designed to live up to leading accessibility standards from the start. This is natural for a progressive library – who in many countries are legally and ethically required to be inclusive to all.

Also libraries in Europe including national libraries are building more and more advanced e-book services that make growing collections of in- and out of copyright ebooks available on-line to the public. These services provide an important complement to what is being made available through commercial publishers and book retail.

## The strategy to make reading accessible to all, globally

So will reading become accessible to all “by itself” or do we have DO something?

The DAISY Consortium in partnership with various stakeholders started on a journey quite a few years ago to help inclusive publishing happen faster and live up to its full potential. A few areas were identified as extra important to focus in order to make things happen. These key areas where we still have lots of work to do but are beginning to see some really interesting concrete results are:

- Develop a specification for accessible EPUB – a clear technical definition of what an accessible book is
- Tools for checking accessibility – that can be implemented in the publishers workflow
- Run pilots projects on accessible publishing with publishing companies to push towards organization wide implementation of standards and best practices for accessible publishing
- Evaluate reading systems for accessibility – to help developers of reading systems get clear feedback on how accessible their products are
- An inclusive publishing information hub – that supports the whole value chain and all stakeholder with useful information about how to publish accessibly

The positive results of these efforts have mostly been visible in the more mature digital book markets, like USA and the UK, but will spread around the world. As the Marrakesh treaty enables people in more countries to get access to accessible reading – the vision of an end to the book famine among people with print disabilities becomes less and less a dream.

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