Socio-cultural approaches to the phenomenon of disability and the role of special libraries for the blind in the development of an inclusive culture in society

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Abstract. This study aimed to explore the socio-cultural perception of disability and to examine the role of special libraries for the blind in the development of an inclusive society. This article provided a detailed analysis of socio-cultural approaches to the phenomenon of disability and highlighted the importance of special libraries for the blind in promoting an inclusive culture within society. It was determined that specialised libraries for visually impaired individuals played a crucial role in shaping an inclusive environment through the implementation of contemporary initiatives and programmes. Their activities not only ensure access to information, but also broaden opportunities for self realisation among people with disabilities, fostering stronger social connections and promoting a positive societal attitude towards inclusion. Particular attention was given to the shift in perspectives on disability, from the purely medical model to a socio-cultural approach, which views disability as a result of an individual's interaction with the social environment. The article presented specific examples of successful projects implemented by special libraries for the blind, which have contributed to the development of an accessible information space and the realisation of inclusion principles. The influence of such libraries on expanding social interactions for visually impaired individuals, facilitating their adaptation, and integrating them into cultural life was examined. Emphasis was placed on the role of specialised libraries as active participants in social integration processes, providing a platform for inclusive initiatives and collaborative partnerships. The findings of this study can be utilised to develop strategies for integrating individuals with disabilities into the cultural domain, as well as to establish new models of cooperation between libraries, government institutions, and non-governmental organisations

Keywords: social exclusion; social cohesion; cultural adaptation; barrier-free environment; innovative projects

Introduction

The issue of the social integration of people with disabilities into society is one of the key aspects of modern humanitarian science and social policy. In the context of the development of an inclusive society, it is important not only to ensure equal access to social, educational, and cultural resources, but also to create a favourable environment for the self-realisation of people with disabilities. Special libraries for the blind play a significant role in this process, as they serve not only as information centres, but also as hubs for social and cultural adaptation.

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Modern inclusion policy, enshrined in international (Convention No. 995_g71, 2010) and national (Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 366-r, 2021) documents, required cultural institutions, including libraries, to implement innovative approaches to working with people with disabilities. However, despite significant progress in this area, there remained a need for a comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural aspects of disability and an examination of the impact of special libraries for the blind on the development of an inclusive culture.

This study was particularly relevant due to the need to develop effective strategies for the integration of visually impaired individuals into the cultural space, as well as to identify optimal forms of social partnership between libraries and governmental, educational, and public institutions. In addition, the advancement of digital technologies had opened up new opportunities for inclusive library services, which warrants further research and implementation. An analysis of library science literature showed that this topic has been of interest to both scholars and practising librarians, including those in Ukraine. However, for an extended period, the professional literature considered this issue primarily in the context of creating conditions for the effective service of people with disabilities.

Many studies have emphasised the importance of inclusive library services and the role of libraries in promoting accessibility for individuals with disabilities. T. Myskevych (2018) examined the information socialisation of users with special needs in Ukrainian libraries, highlighting national experiences in developing inclusive programmes. The study demonstrated that modern libraries serve as vital social institutions that support the adaptation and integration of visually impaired individuals through specialised services and technological innovation.

According to O. Rivtin (2021), the adaptation of digital platforms was a crucial aspect of ensuring equal access to information for visually impaired users. The research suggested that implementing screen-reader compatibility, high-contrast modes, and simplified navigation significantly improved digital inclusivity. Similarly, M. Hartnett *et al.* (2020) examined the implementation of digital accessibility initiatives in public libraries, assessing their impact on users with disabilities. O. Odnovolykova *et al.* (2022) analysed the role of libraries in creating a barrier-free educational environment. Their research underscored that libraries within academic institutions contribute to creating accessible learning conditions by implementing assistive technologies and developing adapted resources for students with disabilities. This was in line with global trends that position libraries as key actors in building inclusive educational spaces.

Additionally, O. Rivtin (2021) discussed web accessibility for visually impaired users, focusing on the need to adapt digital platforms to ensure equal access to information. The study presented practical recommendations for optimising library websites, such as implementing screen-reader compatibility, high-contrast modes, and simplified navigation. These findings were especially relevant in the context of digital transformation, reinforcing the importance of inclusive design in both physical and virtual library environments.

At the same time, recent trends indicate a shift in terminology and approaches. Researchers were increasingly referring to "inclusion", "inclusiveness", "barrier-free environments", and the accessibility of both physical and virtual library spaces. The study by S. Sinelnikov (2021) focused on inclusive culture as a key element in the development of inclusive education. N. Tiurkedzhy & O. Marina (2023) explored the transformative role of libraries in driving social change and fostering an inclusive society. Global initiatives such as The IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 2022 (2022) have played a crucial role in shaping inclusive library environments by emphasising the necessity of equitable access to information for all user groups. Specialised libraries for the blind have also been the focus of contemporary research. J. Meena (2022) examined accessible technologies that support the library experience of visually impaired users, highlighting the significance of digital tools in overcoming accessibility barriers. Similarly, the RNIB Library (Official website of RNIB…, 2024) and the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (Official website of National Library Service…, 2024) provided exemplary models of inclusive library services, demonstrating the effectiveness of specialised reading technologies and adaptive resources in ensuring accessibility.

This study aimed to examine socio-cultural perspectives on disability and to assess the contribution of special libraries for the blind to the development of an inclusive cultural framework within society. The originality of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of the phenomenon of disability through the lens of socio-cultural discourse, alongside the analysis of libraries as instruments for addressing the social isolation of visually impaired individuals.

Materials and Methods

This research employed an interdisciplinary approach that integrated sociological, cultural, anthropological, philosophical and historical perspectives. The study was based on a detailed review of academic sources, legislative documents and international policies related to library services for people with visual impairments. This methodology allowed for a comprehensive examination of how special libraries contribute to fostering an inclusive society.

The sociological perspective helped to explore the impact of library services on the social adaptation of visually impaired individuals. It was informed by the

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theories of symbolic interactionism by G.H. Mead (1934) and social stigma by E. Goffman (1963), which helped to analyse the role of libraries in shaping users' identities and their inclusion in cultural and educational activities. Key documents such as Convention No. 995_g71 (2010) and Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 366-r (2021) provided a regulatory framework for these processes.

The cultural analysis facilitated an examination of how libraries have evolved into inclusive spaces that promote accessibility and active participation for individuals with disabilities. This aspect was supported by international guidelines, including The IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 2022 (2022), and by academic studies such as those of N. Tiurkedzhy & O. Marina (2023), which emphasised libraries as facilitators of social integration. Additionally, national recommendations highlighted by N. Rozkolupa (2024) have outlined practical strategies for enhancing the inclusiveness of library services. The anthropological dimension enabled an exploration of how visually impaired individuals engage with their social environment through library institutions. Research by N. Malanii (2018) and Ye. Stentsel (2022) provided insights into the role of libraries in fostering independence and self-realisation among individuals with disabilities.

The philosophical perspective helped to explore, how libraries contribute to overcoming societal barriers for people with disabilities. The study referenced T. Parsons' (2005) theory of social systems, which discussed the integration of marginalised groups, as well as the axiological theories of M. Weber (1949) and E. Husserl (1970), which addressed the role of values in shaping inclusive practices. The historical analysis traced the development of specialised library services, focusing on the transition from traditional service models to modern, technology-enhanced approaches. This section drew on legislative acts such as the Law of Ukraine No. 32/95-VR (2022) and The Marrakesh Treaty No. 999_001-13 (2023), as well as scholarly discussions on the historical evolution of library accessibility by V. Yaroshchuk (2005) and V. Pashkova (2010).

To ensure a thorough evaluation, this research applied content analysis to scholarly publications by S.T. Brassai *et al.* (2011) and T. Myskevych (2018), along with legal frameworks and institutional guidelines that define accessibility standards. The findings contributed to assessing the effectiveness of existing inclusive practices and provided recommendations for their further development. The proposed methodology ensured that the study can be reproduced and its results replicated by other researchers.

Results and Discussion

Disability is a multidimensional, historically and socially conditioned phenomenon within sociocultural reality. The need to study this phenomenon arises from its perpetual presence in every society, as well as the continually evolving attitudes towards the challenges faced by disabled individuals and the corresponding legislative changes.

A fundamental shift in the perception of disability occurs, when it was examined through a historical and cultural lens. By tracing how societal attitudes toward individuals with disabilities have evolved, one can observe significant transformations in the conceptualisation of disability across various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, cultural studies and library science. These shifts reflect broader changes in both academic discourse and public policy.

Despite the extensive body of research on the historical aspects of disability, its theoretical and methodological dimensions have remained underexplored, particularly in studies conducted prior to the late 20th century. Disability functions as one of the social institutions of society, dependent on historical context and the prevailing socio-political climate (Yakushchenko, 2019). This ongoing evolution underscored the importance not only of investigating disability as a phenomenon influencing social development, but also of refining and expanding the theoretical frameworks employed in its analysis within contemporary socio-cultural contexts. The increasing recognition of disability as a complex, multidimensional issue has prompted scholars to seek more comprehensive methodological approaches.

L. Yakushchenko (2019) noted two primary models of disability, the medical and the social, which were based on traditional and post-traditional approaches, respectively. The medical model remained the dominant paradigm in Ukraine until the early 21st century. It significantly curtailed opportunities for individuals with disabilities, restricting their access to education, economic activity and recreational pursuits. Consequently, many individuals with disabilities were placed in specialised institutions, resulting in social isolation and reinforcing discriminatory practices (Malanii, 2018).

In contrast, the social model interpreted disability as a consequence of societal structures, attributing its causes to various barriers rather than to individual impairments. This perspective aligned with modern sociological, anthropological, axiological, philosophical and historical approaches to disability studies (Parsons, 2005; Stentsel, 2022). Understanding disability within a socio-cultural context was essential for the development of an inclusive society and for assessing the role of specialised libraries in this process. Table 1 illustrated, how special libraries have evolved to offer tailored services and technologies that enhance accessibility for individuals with visual impairments. From a social perspective, disability can be understood by examining the broader processes that shape interactions and relationships within society. This approach enabled researchers to explore the origins of disability as a social construct, identify key factors that

influence the experiences of individuals with disabilities, and analyse the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. By identifying these patterns, it became possible to address contradictions and barriers within the "disabled-society" relationship, ultimately contributing to more inclusive policies and practices. Thus, this approach helped to identify areas of interaction between state authorities and people with disabilities.

Table 1. Comparison of traditional and special libraries

Feature	Traditional libraries	Special libraries for the blind
Font accessibility	Standard printed books	Basic reading rooms
Audiobooks	Limited selection	Extensive catalogue
Digital adaptations	Minimal accessibility features	Screen readers, voice synthesis software
Specialised equipment	General-purpose computers	Braille displays, tiflo-complexes, OCR technology
Inclusive services	Basic reading rooms	Inclusive reading spaces, adaptive technology training

Source: developed by the authors

The anthropological approach contributed to understanding the capabilities and needs of a person with a disability in society, as well as their role and purpose within it. The concepts of "disabled person" and "disability" did not attract philosophical interest until the 21st century, when an "anthropological turn" occurred in philosophy (Malanii, 2018). The axiological perspective investigated how societal values related to disability manifest in real-world practices. Drawing on the ideas of M. Weber (1949) and E. Husserl (1970), researchers argued that values were culturally relative rather than universal. Each society established its own framework of values, which in turn shapes public perceptions and attitudes towards individuals with disabilities.

The philosophical and historical perspective focused on the evolving role and status of individuals with disabilities across different historical periods. By applying the method of extrapolation, N. Malanii (2018) identified patterns in how disability has been perceived over time and anticipated future developments in the field. The structural-functional perspective, as formulated by R.K. Merton (1968) and T. Parsons (2005), interpreted disability as a social condition shaped by broader institutional frameworks. This approach examined how established social norms, policies, and institutional structures influence the lived experiences of people with disabilities, either facilitating or restricting their inclusion in society.

The socio-anthropological perspective, rooted in the theories of É. Durkheim (1956) considered disability concerning prevailing social structures and norms. Concepts such as "social norm" and "deviation" were central to this framework, highlighting how societal definitions of normality can marginalise individuals with disabilities. It was suggested that even those without disabilities may, under certain circumstances, be perceived as "different" and experience social exclusion.

The macrosociological perspective, as outlined by V. Bronfenbrenner, examined disability within a multi-level framework. It considered the macrosystem, which encompassed political, economic, and legal structures; the exosystem, referring to the role of social institutions; the mesosystem, which focused on interactions between different societal domains; and the microsystem, representing the immediate environment of an individual (Stentsel, 2022). Within the framework of symbolic interactionism, G.H. Mead (1934) viewed disability as a system of symbols that defined a distinct social group – individuals with disabilities. This theory explored the process of shaping the social "self" of a person with a disability, examining their role in society, the behavioural stereotypes they encounter, and societal attitudes towards them.

According to the theory of stigmatisation, also referred to as the theory of social labelling, E. Goffman (1963) and H.S. Becker (1963) noted that disability was perceived as a deviation from the social norm, leading to the categorisation of people with disabilities as individuals exhibiting deviant behaviour. This process results in their stigmatisation, reinforcing specific societal value systems. Expanding upon this concept, M. Foucault (1977) argued that mechanisms of stigmatisation emerge from the interplay between social phenomena and culturally constructed notions of "norms". Scholars have suggested that societies classify phenomena as either normative or non-normative, constantly redefining what falls within the accepted standards.

Shifts in social structures influence how disability was perceived, impacting both philosophical interpretations and methodological approaches to its study. A significant turning point in this regard was the adoption of Convention No. 995_g71 (2010) by the UN General Assembly. This document laid the groundwork for a new understanding of disability, emphasising inclusion and equal rights. Ukraine ratified the Convention on 16 December 2009, marking a key step towards aligning national policies with international standards.

In modern society, addressing issues related to the social integration and inclusion of individuals with disabilities has become a pressing necessity. Following the ratification of the Convention, Ukrainian legislation

on disability evolved significantly, fostering public discourse on inclusion and prompting institutions to expand their efforts in this domain (Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 366-r, 2021; Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 285-r, 2021). In particular, the implementation of accessibility policies, such as ensuring digital inclusion, has played a crucial role in promoting equal participation in public life (Accessibility of government..., n.d.).

These legal and institutional developments have also influenced academic research, leading to the refinement of theoretical and methodological frameworks in the social sciences and humanities (Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 533/2020, 2020; Law of Ukraine No. 4170-IX, 2024). Additionally, the role of cultural institutions, particularly libraries, has expanded to support inclusive initiatives, recognising their importance in fostering social cohesion (Regulation on the honorary..., 2018). The broader concept of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has further contributed to transforming societal perceptions of disability, encouraging the development of more comprehensive approaches to accessibility (Adamenko, 2024). Moreover, international agreements such as The Marrakesh Treaty No. 999_001-13 (2023) have further contributed to shaping policies that promote accessibility and equitable participation in society.

Within the framework of modern innovative paradigms, new perspectives on disability were emerging, closely tied to the establishment of an inclusive society. These perspectives significantly influenced the interpretation and advancement of socio-cultural practices. The inclusive approach has gained widespread recognition in education and culture, emphasising the integration of individuals with disabilities and special needs into all aspects of public life. This approach was grounded in the principle that inclusion was essential for fostering a society in which everyone, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, can fully participate. The theoretical foundations of inclusion can be traced to the ideas of T. Parsons (2005), who considered it a crucial component of social evolution. According to his theory, social systems tend to incorporate previously marginalised groups once they demonstrated their contribution to societal development.

Scholarly discussions presented multiple overlapping interpretations of concepts such as "inclusive society", "inclusive culture", and "culture of inclusion". For the purpose of this study, an inclusive society was understood as one that actively creates opportunities for people with disabilities and special needs to engage in various social domains. The fundamental premise of such a society was that every individual, regardless of disability, ethnicity, religion, or cultural background, should have equal access to social interaction and participation in cultural life (Shcherbyna-Yakovleva *et al.*, 2019).

Following the adoption of key legislative acts, including Convention No. 995_g71 (2010), Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 366-r (2021), and the Law of Ukraine No. 32/95VR (2022), efforted to foster an inclusive culture expanded beyond the education sector to encompass cultural institutions. These organisations have begun restructuring their activities to support inclusion by developing specialised programmes aimed at habilitation and rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities and special needs. Additionally, numerous initiatives have been launched to promote inclusivity, ensuring that diverse social groups can actively participate in cultural and educational projects.

Special libraries for individuals with visual impairments played a crucial role in fostering an inclusive society. These institutions go beyond traditional library services, offering adaptive reading technologies, digital accessibility solutions, and specialised programmes aimed at socialisation, education, and professional development. As noted by P.T. Jaeger *et al.* (2015), their work was essential in ensuring that visually impaired individuals had equal opportunities for cultural participation and lifelong learning.

Globally, leading institutions providing accessible library services included the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) in the United States and the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Library in the United Kingdom. The NLS offered free Braille and talking book services to individuals with visual and print disabilities, delivering materials via postage-free mail or online downloads (Fig. 1).
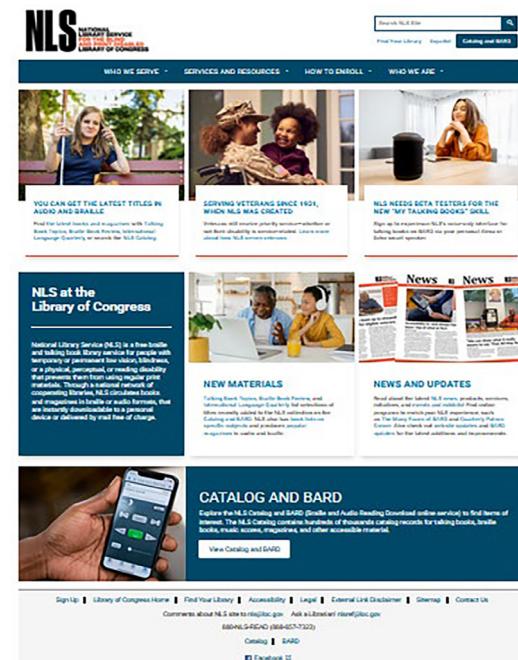

Figure 1. Homepage of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled
Source: Official website of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (2024)

Figure 1 presented the homepage of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS). This platform provided access to Braille and talking books for individuals with visual and print disabilities. The interface was designed for ease of navigation, offering multiple formats for reading materials, including audio and electronic versions.

Figure 2 illustrated the range of services provided by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Library. The library offered an extensive collection of over 60000 items, including audiobooks, Braille texts, and large-print materials. The interface ensured accessibility, allowing users to browse and request books conveniently.
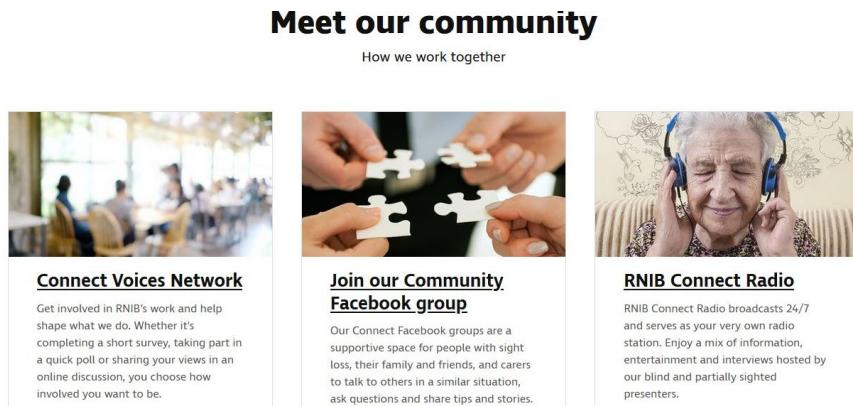
Figure 2. Services of the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Library
Source: Official website of RNIB Library (2024)

Figure 3 highlighted additional features of the RNIB Library, focusing on digital accessibility options and support services. The platform enabled users to access reading materials remotely and provided resources for individuals with different levels of visual impairment. These features promoted independent access to information and inclusive reading experiences. As one of the largest libraries of its kind in the UK, the RNIB Library provides access to over 60000 items, including audiobooks, Braille, and large-print formats (Official website of RNIB

Library, 2024). Meanwhile, in Ukraine, although there were no national libraries exclusively dedicated to the blind, several institutions were actively enhancing their inclusive services. The Yaroslav Mudryi National Library of Ukraine and the Odesa National Scientific Library have introduced initiatives to support individuals with visual impairments, including Braille collections, digital accessibility programmes, and collaborations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to expand inclusive reading opportunities (Accessible libraries…, n.d.).
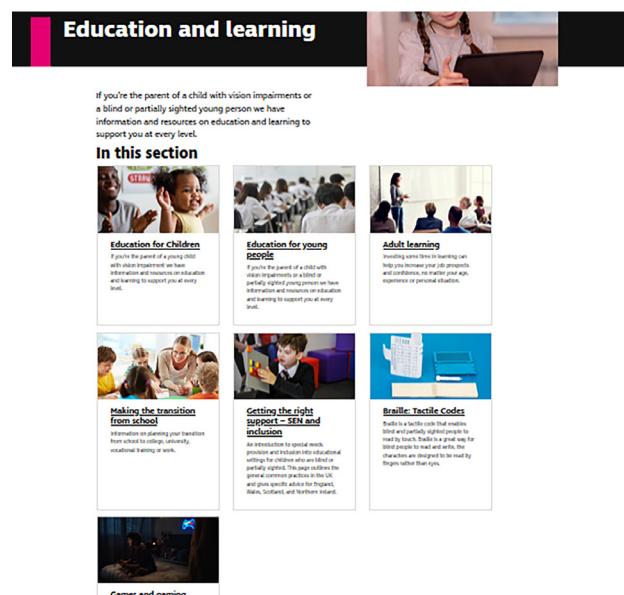

Figure 3. Services of the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Library
Source: Official website of RNIB Library (2024)

The official naming of institutions varies depending on their scope and historical development. While some retain the title of "library for the blind", others adopt broader designations such as "special libraries for the blind and visually impaired" or "centres for social and cultural rehabilitation of visually impaired individuals". These evolving names highlighted a shift from a narrow focus on information access toward a more comprehensive role in cultural and social integration (Meena, 2022).

According to the Law of Ukraine No. 32/95-VR (2022), individuals who are blind or visually impaired were entitled to specialised library services and access to materials in adapted formats across different types of libraries. These services were provided not only in dedicated state-funded institutions, but also in public libraries that integrate inclusive practices. Additionally, government authorities and local administrations have the power to establish specialised central libraries designed to cater to specific user groups, including individuals with visual impairments.

The network of specialised library and information services encompassed both institutions specifically created for people with visual disabilities and dedicated departments within national, universal, and public libraries that offer inclusive resources. It examined the role of specialised libraries for the blind within the broader classification of library science, where they were recognised as a subset of public libraries designed to serve specific user groups (Vasylchenko *et al.*, 2002*;* Asharenkova, 2006). A special library was defined as an information and cultural institution that provided library and information services, while also facilitating the socio-cultural rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities and special needs. These libraries employed a range of specialised tools and resources, including printed materials in Braille, audiobooks, tactile books, and electronic publications with text-to-speech functionality. Additionally, they provided access to adaptive technologies such as screen readers (JAWS, NVDA), electronic magnifiers, and refreshable Braille displays.

Beyond providing accessible reading materials, specialised libraries implement educational programmes and cultural projects that promoted social integration. For instance, the RNIB Library offered extensive literacy initiatives and audiobook lending services (Reading and books, n.d.). In Ukraine, the Odesa National Scientific Library has launched a project to record audiobooks with volunteer narrators, while the Lviv Regional Library for Youth has established a collection of tactile books for children with visual impairments (RNIB National Library Service, n.d.). These initiatives demonstrated that special libraries were not merely repositories of adapted books, but active participants in the broader process of inclusion, supporting the personal and professional development of individuals with disabilities.

As a result of the development of an inclusive society, special libraries for the blind have been expanding their user base to include new groups – disabled individuals of various categories – broadening the scope of their collections, incorporating new publication formats, diversifying their activities, and extending their range of services. At the same time, activities aimed at different groups of users were not regulated in legal documents, and therefore, additional reader categories have not been reflected in the names of libraries (e.g., "library for people with disabilities", "library for people with special needs").

Special libraries for the blind were evolving into inclusive information and cultural centres, operating within an inclusive paradigm and aimed at creating and developing an open and accessible information environment for people with special needs. In addition to the availability of publications in special formats and the use of specialised library and information services technologies, these libraries offer a range of services for users with diverse needs: access to personal computers with assistive equipment and guidance on the use of adaptive tools. For example, the Yaroslav Mudryi National Library of Ukraine (Kyiv) provided computers with screen readers such as JAWS and NVDA, allowing visually impaired users to access digital content. The library also offered magnification software, such as ZoomText, for people with low vision. N. Rozkolupa (2024) noted that specialised Braille displays and voice synthesis software were available for users, who required alternative methods of interacting with text. The Odesa National Scientific Library has introduced digital literacy training sessions for visually impaired individuals, guiding them in the effective use of assistive reading devices such as electronic magnifiers, speech-to-text converters, and OCR (Optical Character Recognition) technology. The library collaborated with NGOs to provide tailored workshops for learning how to navigate digital platforms (Accessible libraries…, n.d.). The Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine (VNLU) has been actively working to implement specialised information technologies to support individuals with special needs. In 2016, the library developed a set of technologies aimed at providing remote services for users with visual, hearing, and mobility impairments (Official website of Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine, 2024). However, the official VNLU website does not offer specific information regarding the availability of specialised equipment or software for direct use within the library premises. To obtain detailed information about such services, it was recommended to contact the library administration directly (Official website of Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine, 2024). Meanwhile, other Ukrainian libraries have already introduced specialised services for visually impaired individuals. For example, the Zhytomyr Regional Universal Scientific Library

named after O. Olzhych has established an "Inclusive Reading Room" equipped with assistive technologies such as tiflo-complexes, Braille displays, and portable magnifiers. This space provided access to JAWS and MAGIC software, which facilitated information accessibility for visually impaired users (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. Inclusive Reading Room of Zhytomyr Regional Universal Scientific Library named after O. Olzhych
Source: Projects of the Inclusive Reading Room department (2015)

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Library (UK) provided visually impaired users with access to personal computers adapted with assistive software. The library offered individual consultations, during which specialists train users to work with screen readers, speech recognition tools, and adapted e-books. RNIB also delivered remote support for users, who required assistance in installing and configuring assistive technologies at home (Reading and books, n.d.). The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (USA) run an extensive programme offering access to assistive technologies and customised digital devices for reading. The library trained users in screen magnification software, refreshable Braille displays, and audiobook navigation tools, ensuring digital accessibility for users with different types of visual impairments (Official website of National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, 2024). In addition, N. Tiurkedzhy &

O. Marina (2023) observed that a special library served as a centre that ensures the realisation of the right to equal access to information.

Special libraries for the blind implement a range of inclusive programmes and projects aimed at ensuring access to information and cultural resources for individuals with disabilities. The following were examples of initiatives undertaken by various libraries:

1) The "Library Hub for Everyone" project at the Inclusive Library of Zaporizhzhia. Supported by the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, this project aimed to create an inclusive creative space that facilitated social adaptation and ensured access to cultural resources for people with disabilities, as well as those mentally and physically affected by war (Horchynska, 2024).

2) An inclusive youth programme in Ukrainian libraries. This initiative developed a youth-focused programme that equiped participants with technological

and practical skills, legal and social support, and opportunities to establish cultural connections and implement creative initiatives within an inclusive environment (Horchynska, 2023).

3) The "Public Space" project at the Central Library of Khmelnytskyi. This project aimed to create a safe, interactive space for communication and information within the library, offering psychological support, educational opportunities, and access to resources and services designed to reduce stress and enhance psychological well-being (Public project: Budget for urban initiatives, 2019).

4) The development of professional handbooks and methodological materials to support the social integration of people with disabilities. Libraries contributed to the creation of specialised handbooks and methodological guides that supported the social adaptation of individuals with various disabilities. These materials helped cultural institutions tailor their services to the needs of people with disabilities and facilitated their integration into society (Aleksyeyenko, 2023).

5) The implementation of universal design in libraries. Many libraries have adopted universal design principles to make their spaces, services, and programmes accessible to all users, regardless of their physical abilities. This included infrastructure adaptation, the development of specialised programmes, and the provision of accessible information (Universal design: How to get…, 2018).

Regional libraries have also introduced a variety of partnership projects (Rozkolupa, 2024). Special libraries for the blind served as methodological centres for public libraries and consulting centres for cultural institutions of various types, offering guidance on working with people with a range of disabilities and adapting services for blind individuals. Collaborative initiatives with cultural institutions have led to the establishment of inclusive venues and have become an integral part of promoting an inclusive culture within society.

It was also important to highlight several additional studies related to libraries for the blind. In particular, S. Vasylchenko *et al.* (2002) examined issues concerning library and information services for people with disabilities. N. Asharenkova (2006) investigated the challenges of providing access for users with special needs in public libraries, while V. Pashkova (2010) analysed the evolution of library services for citizens with special needs in the context of equal access and equal opportunities. The differentiation of library services for users with special needs and the role of digital libraries in this process was the focus of N. Kunanets (2013). The issue of servicing individuals with disabilities had long been the subject of research by V. Yaroshchuk (2005), who analysed it in the context of accessibility to library and information services. S. Vishwakarma & H. Sharma (2019) explored the role of libraries in ensuring equal access to resources for individuals with visual impairments, examining both traditional services and their adaptation to the digital era to enhance users' quality of life. S.T. Brassai *et al.* (2011) investigated contemporary assistive technologies developed for individuals with visual impairments, assessing their role in enhancing information accessibility and promoting social inclusion. These studies underscored the ongoing efforts to improve library services for individuals with disabilities, highlighting both traditional and digital approaches. Researchers have explored various aspects, including accessibility challenges, service differentiation, and the integration of assistive technologies. The findings demonstrated that libraries continued to play a crucial role in fostering equal opportunities by adapting their resources and services to meet the needs of users with specific requirements. Despite the increasing reliance on digital tools, ensuring inclusivity within library environments remained a key priority.

Conclusions

Thus, the inclusive approach conceptualises individuals with special needs or disabilities through the lens of inclusion and was based on the creation of an inclusive society. The formation of such a society relies on the triad of "inclusive policy", "inclusive practice", and "inclusive culture", which can be effectively developed through active interagency cooperation that fostered the implementation of inclusive processes across various spheres of public life. Special libraries for the blind played a crucial role in shaping this process by facilitating collaboration among different institutions, promoting accessibility, and implementing initiatives that ensured equal participation for individuals with disabilities. These libraries served not only as information hubs, but also as centres of social adaptation, lifelong learning, and cultural engagement for visually impaired individuals.

Special libraries for the blind have accumulated valuable experience in working with different categories of disabled users, leading to the modern transformation of these institutions into inclusive information and cultural centres. In 2024, they will operate within a new inclusive paradigm, continuously modernising their services, expanding their collections, and integrating innovative digital and assistive technologies. The implementation of inclusive programmes and projects has strengthened their role as key facilitators of social integration, providing visually impaired users with greater opportunities for education, professional development, and cultural participation. Additionally, by fostering cooperation with local and national authorities, establishing partnerships with specialised and related institutions, and maintaining active communication with media representatives, special libraries contributed to shifting societal attitudes toward

disability and reinforcing the principles of universal accessibility and inclusion.

The growing importance of inclusive libraries highlighted their broader influence on promoting diversity and equity across different cultural and educational sectors. These institutions were not only adapting to the needs of visually impaired users, but were also proactively shaping a more inclusive environment for all social groups. Ensuring continued support for such initiatives requires sustained investment in assistive technologies, staff training, and the development of universally designed library spaces that accommodate users with diverse needs.

Future research should focus on analysing global best practices, assessing the long-term impact of inclusive library initiatives on the social, cultural, and professional inclusion of individuals with disabilities, and exploring innovative ways to integrate artificial intelligence and virtual accessibility tools into library services.

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Conflict of Interest
None.

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Соціокультурні підходи до феномену інвалідності та роль спеціальних бібліотек для сліпих у розвитку інклюзивної культури у суспільстві

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Анотація. У цьому дослідженні розглядалося соціокультурне сприйняття інвалідності та аналізувалася роль спеціалізованих бібліотек для незрячих у формуванні інклюзивного суспільства. У статті представлено детальний аналіз соціокультурного підходу до феномену інвалідності та акцентовано увагу на значущості спеціальних бібліотек для незрячих у просуванні культури інклюзії. Встановлено, що спеціалізовані бібліотеки для осіб з порушеннями зору відіграють важливу роль у створенні інклюзивного середовища шляхом реалізації сучасних ініціатив і програм. Їхня діяльність не лише забезпечує доступ до інформації, а й розширює можливості для самореалізації людей з інвалідністю, сприяє налагодженню соціальних зв'язків і формуванню позитивного суспільного ставлення до інклюзії. Особливу увагу приділено зміні поглядів на інвалідність – від суто медичної моделі до соціокультурного підходу, який розглядав інвалідність як результат взаємодії особистості з соціальним середовищем. У статті наведено конкретні приклади успішних проєктів, реалізованих спеціалізованими бібліотеками для незрячих, що сприяли створенню доступного інформаційного простору та втіленню принципів інклюзії. Проаналізовано вплив таких бібліотек на розширення соціальних взаємодій осіб із порушеннями зору, полегшення їхньої адаптації та інтеграцію в культурне життя. Наголошено на ролі спеціалізованих бібліотек як активних учасників процесів соціальної інтеграції, які створюють платформу для інклюзивних ініціатив і партнерських проєктів. Отримані результати можуть бути використані для розробки стратегій інтеграції осіб з інвалідністю в культурну сферу, а також для формування нових моделей співпраці між бібліотеками, державними установами та неурядовими організаціями

Ключові слова: соціальна ізоляція; соціальна згуртованість; культурна адаптація; безбар'єрне середовище; інноваційні проєкти

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