

VOTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to analyse the political rights of persons with disabilities and gain an insight into their interest in politics, especially their ambition to be actively involved in political life and to make political decisions, which are important for their specific issues. The Republic of Croatia signed and ratified numerous documents such as the Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disability, which promotes social and political activities, as well as equal and undisputed use of voting rights for every person. According to the Croatian Institute for Public Health, more than one tenth of the Croatian population has a disability, so they could significantly influence the election results. Thus there is a need to investigate voting opportunities for persons with disabilities. This study involved 145 participants with intellectual, physical or visual disability from different cities in Croatia. The research team created a questionnaire containing eight questions with the goal of examining the awareness of persons with disabilities of various difficulties. The questions asked about age, gender, place of residence, knowledge of voting rights, social activities, and adaptation options at polling stations. The data were analysed by quantitative data processing, the χ^2 test and the method of correlation. The results indicate the need for more customised information on voting rights for persons with disabilities. There is also a need to adjust and improve voting opportunities for all persons with disabilities regardless of type of impairment, age, gender, or place of residence. Compared with participants with physical or intellectual disabilities, those with visual impairment were more often unable to vote independently and secretly because of inadequate balloting.*

Key words: *right to vote, voting opportunities, politics, persons with disabilities*

INTRODUCTION

The right to vote is one of the fundamental human rights (Ryan et al., 2016) that supports citizenship participation, belonging to society, and democratic processes in a country. According to the data of the Croatian Institute for Public Health of 14 March 2017 (Report on Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Croatia, 2017), there were 511,850 persons with disabilities in Croatia, of whom 60% were men (307,934) and 40% were women (203,916). According to this data, about 11.9% of the population of the Republic of Croatia have a disability. The Register of Voters 2016 shows that the number is far greater: the total number of legal voters in Croatia was 3,799,609 in 2016, which shows that there are more than 12.5% of persons with disabilities in the large "voting machine" (Belt, 2016). For these reasons, it is important to

analyse the voting rights of persons with disabilities in order to gain insight into their interest in politics, their possible ambition for active engagement in political life, and the adoption of political decisions that are important to their society and the community in which they live.

Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) guarantees political rights and the opportunity for persons with disabilities to participate in political life on a daily basis. In order to ensure quality for persons with disabilities, the state should adjust the voting facilities and materials, ensure the secrecy of voting, as well as ensure the right to participate in elections, and to perform all public functions. As a part of the European Union, Croatia is obligated (European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, 2010) to develop a system and ensure equal participation for persons with

disabilities. Some data show (Grammenos, 2014) that there are no significant differences in participation of persons with or without disability, but significant differences occur across member states of the EU.

In the European Parliament elections in 2013, all persons with disabilities in the Republic of Croatia, regardless of their legal capacity (see below), had the right to participate in the elections on an equal footing with other citizens for the first time. The previously mentioned participation in elections and the electoral list was determined according to the legal age of citizens, but also according to the legal capacity of potential voters, which is defined by the Family Act (Family Law, 2015). Legal capacity (Practical Guide for the Preservation of Legal Capacity, 2012) is the ability of a person to consider and acquire rights and obligations by their own activity or by manifesting their will. It is a prerequisite for the realisation of all personal rights. A person with legal capacity may enter into contracts; give consent to a medical treatment; make decisions about where to live; submit complaints and appeals; marry; make decisions on the recognition of maternity or paternity; take out loans; participate in parliamentary, presidential and local elections; and take any legal action that an adult can take in his or her daily life. Voting represents decision capacity (Kelley, 2010), and it relies on the cognitive function of choosing between offered options. The Law on the Voters Registry from 2012 (OG, 144/12, 105/15) in Article 64 states: "Persons who have been completely deprived of their legal capacity by virtue of a legally valid decision of the competent court shall be considered as voters and shall be entered in the register of voters". Voting in Croatia is not a compulsory but rather an arbitrary action for registered voters that allows every person who turns 18 and is a Croatian citizen to participate in an election process fully and equally. Unfortunately, opportunities to vote for persons with disabilities are still in their infancy. There are no good alternative solutions for persons with disabilities to participate independently and equally in elections, except voting with the help of another person. Likewise, there are no clear and adapted instructions on voters' rights and voting methods. Civil

society initiatives are the only thing that exists, such as a promotional campaign to raise awareness of the issue (Brochure *Exercise of voting rights*, 2013). Despite this, persons with visual impairment were able to vote for the first time in the 2010 elections (Persons with Visual Impairment Vote Independently, 2010). All polling stations had ballot papers equally accessible to all voters, containing the list of candidates printed in Braille, with templates that had cut out circles for regular numbers of candidates on which blind persons could independently circle the desired number. Unfortunately, the good practice of these presidential elections was not continued. One attempt was registered in 2013 when the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth (Notice on the Possibility of Accommodation Services Users to Participate in Local Elections, 2013) enabled polling stations to be opened in several centers and social welfare institutions, so that persons currently outside their place of residence could participate in the elections. Following this decision, the Ministry instructed all providers of accommodation services to adapt as quickly as possible, and allow their users to exercise their right to vote as one of the fundamental human rights (Participation of Accommodation Services Users in the Elections for Members of the European Parliament, 2013). In Croatia, voting by mail or email is still not possible (Žiljak, 2013). It could provide better voting turnout of all citizens regardless of type of impairment.

OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

As the realisation of voting rights and voting possibilities demands different accommodations for persons with disability, the authors were specifically interested in whether persons with different types of disability, ages, genders and places of residence in the Republic of Croatia are equal in these civil rights. Thus, the aim of this research was to determine whether there are differences in information and experience of persons with disabilities with regard to voting rights and voting possibilities depending on their type of impairment, age, gender, or place of residence in the Republic of Croatia.

As research on this subject has not been conducted in Croatia, and the authors are unaware of

research on this subject from other countries, there is a lack of a reference framework for predicting the potential results from this research. Therefore, the authors have not included the expected results (direction of differences) in the hypothesis formulation; rather, the authors only point out expected differences based on the abovementioned lack of appropriate accommodations for persons with disabilities to vote. The only exception is the fourth hypothesis H_4 , which refers to possible differences in information and experience between participants from Zagreb and those from other places in Croatia: the authors expect more favourable results for participants from Zagreb, where there is distinct centralisation of care for person with disabilities and better accessibility of voting resources.

- H_1 : There are differences in awareness and experience among participants with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, and visual impairment in voting opportunities and rights in Croatia.
- H_2 : There are differences in information and experience between younger and older participants in voting opportunities and rights in Croatia.
- H_3 : There are differences in information and experience between female and male participants in voting opportunities and rights in Croatia.
- H_4 : Participants from Zagreb are expected to be more informed and have more experience in voting opportunities and rights than participants from other places in Croatia.

METHODS

Participants

The sample consisted of 145 participants who were of legal age and had legal capacity. There were 86 female (59.3%) and 59 male (40.7%) participants, with an average age of 35.10 yr (min=18; max=70). Research was conducted at the Center for Rehabilitation "Stančić", the Institution for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment for Persons with Disabilities "URIHO", and at the civil organisation "HUPRT" (N=70; 48.3%). In terms of

type of disability, each participant had the ability to select intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, visual impairments, or "other". Those with "other" disabilities or multiple disabilities were not included in the sample. There were 49 participants with intellectual disabilities, 48 with physical disabilities and 48 with visual impairment. Eighty (80) participants were from Zagreb and 65 from other places in the Republic of Croatia.

Measuring instrument

The questionnaire was designed so the participants could answer a question with YES or NO. The questionnaire had overall 12 questions with four general questions regarding the type of impairment, age, gender, and place of residence of the participant, and the remaining eight questions regarded eight topics of interest (Table 1). If the participants answered the question with YES, they were offered several statements referring to the main question (they could choose one or more statements that reflected their opinion), and if they answered with NO, they proceeded to the next question. The participants filled out the questionnaire on their own, according to the researchers' instructions. Also, an online survey questionnaire on the website Survey Monkey was created and sent via emails, websites and social media to numerous alliances and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for persons with disabilities, so persons could fill out the questionnaire online (N=75; 51.7%).

Statistical analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for quantitative data analysis.

Interrelationships between the independent variables Type of impairment, Gender and Place of residence and the response frequency of dependent variables were tested using the χ^2 test. The χ^2 test is used in most cases when quantitative data distribution deviates significantly from normal (Petz et al., 2012). It is a very practical test that can especially help when we want to determine whether some observed frequencies deviate from the frequencies we would expect considering a certain hypothesis. In this test, the connection between

Table 1. List of question with offered answers

1. Do you know what is the voting right of every adult citizen in the Republic of Croatia?	a) The ability to vote and participate on all elections in Croatia b) The ability to say what you think c) The ability to make decisions about activities in your own life d) It means nothing to me e) Other
2. Are you informed about your voting rights? (If yes, in which way?)	a) Internet b) Newspaper, brochures, flyers c) Civil and public organisations (associations, institutions) d) TV e) Parents, family, friends f) Other
3. Do you think that persons with disabilities should be more informed about voting rights? (If yes, in which way?)	a) By civil society b) By government agencies c) By local community (county, social care centre) d) By professionals (teachers, psychologist, social workers, rehabilitators) e) Persons with disabilities should learn more about them by themselves f) Other
4. Have you ever voted in the political elections for the President of the Republic, Parliament or Mayor of your city? (If not, why?)	a) I had problems with filling in the voting ballot (I didn't know how to fill it in or could not do it alone) b) I had problems with arriving at the voting place/station due to inadequate space c) I believe that voting secrecy was not fully secured at the polling station d) I am satisfied with the accessibility of polling stations and voting opportunities e) Other
5. Would you like to engage in politics and actively participate as a candidate on electoral lists? (If yes, in what type of election?)	a) Presidential elections b) Parliamentary elections c) Local election (mayor, county prefect)
6. Do you think that availability of voting could be better for persons with disabilities? (If yes, in which way?)	a) Persons with disabilities need to be more informed about their voting rights through media, associations, and professionals b) Access to voting places should be adapted to persons with disabilities (access ramps, ballot box layout, secrecy of voting) c) Voting ballots should be adapted to ensure that every person with a disability has an equal opportunity to vote independently (Braille, font size, clear instructions) d) New technologies need to be introduced to simplify the voting process (touchscreen and app-based computer voting) e) Other
7. Do you think that the impact of persons with disabilities on society and politics would increase if the majority of persons with disabilities voted in elections? (If yes, in which way?)	a) Founding a party of persons with disabilities and the election of their own party representative would directly affect national policy towards persons with disabilities b) It would increase the availability of financial funds c) It would increase the awareness of society towards persons with disabilities d) Other
8. Are you a member of a political party or a non-governmental organisation? (If yes, which one?)	a) Political party b) Non-governmental organisation c) Other

the two variables can be checked, and it shows the probability of the connection. It is also possible to verify the assumption that the theoretical distribution best describes the observed distribution of frequencies.

The connection between the age of participants and the response frequency of dependent variables was tested by a correlation method. Since the authors wanted to know whether age influences differences in response frequency among partici-

Table 2. Frequencies of negative and positive answers to the first question *Do you know what is the voting right of every adult citizen in the Republic of Croatia?*

Type of impairment	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Intellectual	7	42	2.7	46.3	11.116 ^a	2	0.004
Physical	0	48	2.6	45.4			
Visual	1	47	2.6	45.4			

Table 3. Response frequencies on the offered answer *The ability to make decisions about activities in your own life on the first question Do you know what is the voting right of every adult citizen of the Republic of Croatia?*

Type of impairment	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Intellectual	32	17	37.2	11.8	6.552 ^a	2	0.038
Physical	42	6	36.4	11.6			
Visual	36	12	36.4	11.6			

pants, the point-biserial correlation coefficient was taken into account. This is used in cases when the researcher is interested in correlation between one continuous variable and one dichotomous variable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis was tested by questions, with the aim of gaining insight into differences in participants' responses based on the type of impairment. Eight questions were designed in order to assess awareness and experience with voting opportunities and rights in Croatia. The answers given to the questions and participants' selection of possible answers, which showed statistical significance in the frequency response of participants grouped according to categories of the independent variables, are presented in tables and discussed in the text. The tables contain two frequencies – the observed and expected frequencies of the participants. The observed frequency is the value that represents the responses of the participants, and the expected frequency is the value that can be expected under the null hypothesis. In determining the expected frequency, the number of subjects of the independent variable (type of impairment, gender, location, age) and the number of YES and NO responses were taken into account.

In this article and in the tables, due to the limited space, only the values on the questionnaire questions and offered answers which showed statistically significant results are presented.

Response frequencies of YES and NO to the first question, *Do you know what is the voting right of every adult citizen of the Republic of Croatia?* (Table 2), show that persons with intellectual disabilities know significantly less about voting rights than persons with visual impairment and persons with physical disability. There is no customised instruction in Croatia adapted for persons with intellectual disabilities that would explain to them what their voting right is and how they can exercise it (Report on the Work of the Ombudswoman for Persons with Disabilities, 2016). When asked whether they know what a voting right is, persons with intellectual disabilities often gave NO for an answer. When the meaning is explained and they are asked whether they know what elections, voting in elections, and the choice of a particular candidate are, most of them understood and could link the concept of voting rights with the choice of candidate they would like to vote for. For these reasons, it is necessary to create customised instructions on voting rights for persons with disabilities and include them in the whole process (Kjellberg & Hemmingsson, 2013), so that they can be informed and able to understand the voting right of persons with disabilities.

On the basis of the frequencies on the offered answer *The ability to make decisions about activities in your own life* to the first question, *Do you know what is the voting right of every adult citizen of the Republic of Croatia?* (Table 3), it appears that more persons with physical disabilities gave

Table 4. Response frequencies on the offered answer *Internet* on the second question *Are you informed about your voting rights?*

Type of impairment	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Intellectual	39	10	28.4	20.6	14.291 ^a	2	0.001
Physical	23	25	27.8	20.2			
Visual	22	26	27.8	20.2			

Table 5. Response frequencies on the offered answer *Civil and public organisations* on the second question *Are you informed about your voting rights?*

Type of impairment	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Intellectual	44	5	39.5	9.5	7.215 ^a	2	0.027
Physical	40	8	38.7	9.3			
Visual	33	15	38.7	9.3			

negative responses (42) than expected by chance (36.4). There was a statistically significant difference in the response frequencies of the participants with different types of impairment. It is evident that more persons with physical disabilities than persons with other impairments do not think their voting right can provide them the opportunity to share opinions and attitudes, as reflected in a number of negative responses below the expected (32 out of 37.2, and 36 out of 36.4). It seems that persons with physical disabilities believe their right to vote is not the only right that allows them to decide about actions in their life.

In the response frequencies on the availability of information on the offered answer *Internet* on the second question, *Are you informed about your voting rights?* (Table 4), more persons with intellectual disabilities gave negative answers (39) than the number expected by chance (28.4). There was a statistically significant difference in the response frequencies of participants with different types of impairment. It is evident that persons with intellectual disabilities access information about voting rights on the internet less than participants with other difficulties, with the number of negative responses below the expected (23 out of 27.8, and 22 out of 27.8). This is probably due to inability and ignorance about using the internet in everyday life and the preference of persons with intellectual disabilities to use different sources of information than what other groups of participants use. When a person with intellectual disabilities uses the com-

puter, in most cases it is used for entertainment rather than education or learning new content. For these reasons, persons with intellectual disabilities do not use the internet as an opportunity to get new information about their rights and how to use them. They rely on what they see and hear over the media, and from their friends and family. It is important to give them experience and education about the entire voting system (Bell et al., 2001). It can be expected that persons with visual impairment receive more information from the internet, which they can access independently using screen readers and text-to-speech programs, instead of gaining information from regular-print newspapers, which they cannot access independently but rather with the help of a sighted person who reads to them or by using a scanner and OCR program.

By inspecting response frequencies about the availability of information through the offered answer *Civil and public organisations* (*associations, institutions*) to the second question, *Are you informed about your voting rights?* (Table 5), it is apparent that more persons with visual impairment gave positive responses (15) than it was expected by chance (9.3). There was a statistically significant difference in the response frequencies of the participants with different types of impairment. It is evident that more persons with visual impairment receive information on voting rights via civil and public organisations than persons with other types of impairment, with the number of positive responses below expectations (5 of 9.5, and

Table 6. Frequencies of negative and positive answers to the third question *Do you think that persons with disabilities should be more informed about the voting rights?*

Type of impairment	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Intellectual	3	46	8.8	40.2	8.783 ^a	2	0.012
Physical	9	39	8.6	39.4			
Visual	14	34	8.6	39.4			

Table 7. Response frequencies on the offered answer *I believe that voting secrecy was not fully secured at the polling station* to the fourth question *Have you ever voted in the political elections for President of the Republic, Parliament or Mayor of your city?*

Type of impairment	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Intellectual	40	9	37.8	11.2	6.737 ^a	2	0.034
Physical	41	7	37.1	10.9			
Visual	31	17	37.1	10.9			

8 of 9.3). Organisations for persons with visual impairments are well organised and possess enough information about the voting rights of persons with disabilities, which they pass on to their users. In order to receive written information, persons with visual impairment usually use new technologies such as screen readers or various magnifiers that increase print size, or they read Braille. Since most of these technologies are rather expensive and unavailable to most persons with visual impairment, associations such as NGOs often offer such adaptations and the transfer of information to their users. For these reasons, it is expected that NGOs are the main mediator, informing persons with visual impairment about their voting rights and how they can exercise them. Also, the functionality and customisation of the websites of associations for persons with visual impairment enable them to have access to extensive educational content that raises their level of information and knowledge.

YES and NO response frequencies to the third question, *Do you think that persons with disabilities should be more informed about voting rights?* (Table 6), show that persons with intellectual disabilities have a significantly greater need for information about voting rights than persons with visual impairment or physical disabilities. A total of 46 persons with intellectual disabilities said they believe that persons with disabilities should be more informed about voting rights, while the expected frequency of that answer was 40.2 par-

ticipants. For persons with physical disabilities or visual impairments, a smaller number of participants than would be expected by chance do not believe that persons with disabilities should be more informed about their right to vote. Because of the lack of customised voting instruction, persons with intellectual disabilities are probably less informed than persons with physical disabilities or visual impairment. To understand the importance of voting, it is necessary to adapt the information to persons with intellectual disabilities, and to customise the electoral guidelines and the process of voting on election day.

Response frequencies about the failure of secrecy in voting on the offered answer *I believe that voting secrecy was not fully secured at the polling station* to the fourth question, *Have you ever voted in the political elections for President of the Republic, Parliament or Mayor of your city?* (Table 7), show that more persons with visual impairment gave positive responses (17) than the number expected by chance (10.9). There was a statistically significant difference in the response frequencies of the participants with different types of impairment. It is evident that more persons with visual impairment than persons with other impairments consider that, in their voting experience, they have not been provided voting secrecy, with the number of positive responses below the expected value (9 of 11.2, and 7 of 10.9). Because of the lack of ballot adaptation, persons with visual impairment cannot independent-

Table 8. Response frequencies to the offered answer *In the presidential election on the fifth question Would you like to engage in politics and actively participate as a candidate on electoral lists?*

Type of impairment	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Intellectual	43	6	46.6	2.4	9.089 ^a	2	0.011
Physical	47	1	45.7	2.3			
Visual	43	0	45.7	2.3			

Table 9. Response frequencies to the offered answer *Persons with disabilities need to be more informed about their voting rights through media, associations and professionals to the sixth question Do you think that availability of voting could be better for persons with disabilities?*

Type of impairment	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Intellectual	17	32	22.6	26.4	8.138 ^a	2	0.017
Physical	30	18	22.2	25.8			
Visual	20	28	22.2	25.8			

ly complete their ballot using Braille or digital technologies, and they are not able to vote secretly like persons with physical or intellectual disabilities.

In response frequencies of active participation in politics as a presidential candidate on the offered answer *In the presidential election to the fifth question, Would you like to engage in politics and actively participate as a candidate on electoral lists?* (Table 8), it is noticed that more persons with intellectual disabilities gave positive answers (6) than the number expected by chance (2.4). There was a statistically significant difference in the response frequencies of the participants with different types of impairment. It is evident that more persons with intellectual disabilities would run in presidential elections than participants with other difficulties, with positive responses below the expected (1 out of 2.3, and 0 out of 2.3). Persons with intellectual disabilities showed more interest than other groups of participants in participating in presidential elections as an opportunity to act and involve themselves in the public life of their country. When asked what they know about politics in their country, they often associated entire political power with certain individuals, politicians who are very active in the media and in everyday conversations with persons close to persons with intellectual disabilities. In presidential elections, in contrast to parliamentary and local elections, individuals are placed in front of a political party as the subjects of the entire political campaign and media presentation.

In the response frequency about more information for persons with disabilities on the offered answer *Persons with disabilities need to be more informed about their voting rights to the sixth question Do you think that availability of voting could be better for persons with disabilities?* (Table 9), it is found that more persons with physical disabilities gave negative responses (30) than the number expected by chance (22.2). There was a statistically significant difference in the response frequencies of the participants with different types of impairment. It is evident that more persons with physical disabilities than persons with other disabilities believe that persons with disabilities are sufficiently informed about their electoral rights, with the number of negative responses below the expected (17 out of 22.6, and 20 out of 22.2). This suggests that the opinion and position of persons with physical disabilities differ from those of other groups of participants, and that they consider they have enough information on voting rights and voting possibilities that would allow them to vote in the same way as other citizens. Most of the problems for persons with physical disabilities to exercise their electoral rights relate to the spatial adaptation of the polling stations. Persons with physical disabilities do not have intellectual disabilities, so they can understand what their electoral rights are, nor do they have any apparent difficulties in receiving all available information transmitted through the media. Persons with physi-

Table 10. Response frequencies on the offered answer *Voting ballots should be adapted to ensure that every person with a disability has an equal opportunity to vote independently* to the sixth question *Do you think that availability of voting could be better for persons with disabilities?*

Type of impairment	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Intellectual	23	26	12.2	36.8	19.890 ^a	2	0.000
Physical	8	40	11.9	36.1			
Visual	5	43	11.9	36.1			

Table 11. Response frequencies on the offered answer *New technologies need to be introduced to simplify the voting process* to the sixth question *Do you think that availability of voting could be better for persons with disabilities?*

Type of impairment	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Intellectual	31	18	21.6	27.4	11.024 ^a	2	0.004
Physical	16	32	21.2	26.8			
Visual	17	31	21.2	26.8			

cal disabilities do not have the need for customised information. For these reasons, it is understandable that persons with physical disabilities believe that persons with disabilities are sufficiently informed about their voting rights and voting opportunities in Croatia.

By inspecting the response frequencies about adapting ballot papers on the offered answer *Voting ballots should be adapted to ensure that every person with a disability has an equal opportunity to vote independently* to the sixth question, *Do you think that availability of voting could be better for persons with disabilities?* (Table 10), it is noticed that more persons with intellectual disabilities gave negative responses (23) than the number expected by chance (12.2). There was a statistically significant difference in the response frequencies of the participants with different types of impairment. It is evident that more participants with intellectual disabilities than participants with other difficulties believe that ballot papers are well adapted to persons with disabilities, with a number of negative responses below expectations (8 out of 11.9, and 5 out of 11.9). When persons with intellectual disabilities come to vote in elections, they probably already know for which candidate or party they will vote. For them, the standard appearance of the ballots, the election process, and circling the desired candidate do not pose a problem, or the problem is not perceived.

Based on response frequencies about the possibilities of using new technologies on the offered answer *New technologies need to be introduced to simplify the voting process* to the sixth question, *Do you think that availability of voting could be better for persons with disabilities?* (Table 11), it is noticed that more persons with intellectual disabilities gave negative responses (31) than the number expected by chance (21.6). There was a statistically significant difference in the response frequencies of the participants with different types of impairment. It is evident that more persons with intellectual disabilities than participants with other difficulties believe that there is no need to introduce new information communication technologies, with a number of negative responses below expected (16 out of 21.2, and 17 out of 21.2). Persons with intellectual disabilities do not see the need to introduce new technology to elections. They are satisfied with the current voting method, which allows them to come to the polling station and circle the candidate they want. The introduction of new technologies might complicate the overall situation, so they would not understand how to vote, and/or use new technologies. New technologies might even make it difficult for them to give their vote. The observed response frequency may also reflect that persons with intellectual disabilities do not understand what technologies the question was referring to, or do not know how technologies could be beneficial to them.

Table 12. All significant correlation values obtained for age of participants and response frequencies to offered answers as well as YES and NO questions

	AGE	
	Pearson's coefficient of correlation	p
Television (Have you been informed about your own voting rights?)	0.174	0.036
Have you ever voted in a political election for the President of the Republic, Members of Parliament or Mayor of your city?	0.207	0.013
I had a problem in completing the ballot (Have you ever voted in a political election for the President of the Republic, Members of Parliament or Mayor of your city?)	0.321	0.000
In Presidential Elections (Would you like to engage in politics and actively participate as a candidate on electoral lists?)	0.195	0.019

Table 13. Response frequencies on the offered answer *It would increase the awareness of society towards persons with disabilities to the seventh question Do you think that the impact of persons with disabilities on society and politics would increase if the majority of persons with disabilities voted in elections?*

	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Gender					6.310 ^a	1	0.012
Female	30	56	37.4	48.6			
Male	33	26	25.6	33.4			

Responses about the availability of information through visual broadcast media (response *Television* to the question, *Have you been informed about your own voting rights?*), about the existence of problems at voting (response *I had a problem in completing the ballot* to the question, *Have you ever voted in a political election for the President of the Republic, Members of Parliament or Mayor of your city?*), about candidacy in presidential elections (response *In Presidential Elections* to the question, *Would you like to engage in politics and actively participate as a candidate on electoral lists?*), and about the question, *Have you ever voted in a political election for the President of the Republic, Members of Parliament or Mayor of your city?*, show statistically significant correlation with the age of the participants (Table 12). Statistically significant correlation results show that elderly participants have more experience and more information about the voting process than younger participants. This is probably the result of their greater interest in this theme and their life experience (Goerres, 2007). Elderly participants become informed about their voting rights mostly through television as a medium, which is probably the most accessible to this respondent population due to technological advancement and widespread use. As they get older, they have a greater number

of choices to participate and experience voting. With more participation in the elections, they have more opportunity to consequently spot the potential shortcomings of voting, because of which they are not able to fully perform their civilian duty.

To the response frequency about increasing social sensitisation on the offered question *It would increase the awareness of society towards persons with disabilities to the seventh question, Do you think that the impact of persons with disabilities on society and politics would increase if the majority of persons with disabilities voted in elections?* (Table 13), more female participants gave positive responses (56) than the number expected by chance (48.6). There was a statistically significant difference in the response frequencies of participants of different genders. In all other questions and offered answers there was no statistically significant values. It seems that more female participants than male participants believe that sensitisation of society would increase if more persons with disabilities voted in the elections, with positive responses below expectations (26 out of 33.4). Male and female participants often differ in their emotional experience of their environment. The results of this research may be the result of a more emotional approach and empathy among female participants. It may be that more female

Table 14. Response frequencies on the offered answer *It means nothing to me* to the first question *Do you know what is the voting right of every adult citizen of the Republic of Croatia?*

Residence	Observed frequencies		Expected frequencies		χ^2	df	p
	NO	YES	NO	YES			
Zagreb	74	6	76.7	3.3	5.085 ^a	1	0.024
Other places in Croatia	65	0	62.3	2.7			

participants than male participants believe that by uniting a large number of persons with disabilities and participating in elections, there is a potential for greater sensitisation of society, which would improve the relationship between the general population, and point to the problems facing persons with disabilities.

Based on response frequencies on the offered response *It means nothing to me* to the first question, *Do you know what is the voting right of every adult citizen of the Republic of Croatia?* (Table 13), more participants from Zagreb gave positive answers (6) than the number expected by chance (3.3). There was a statistically significant difference in the response frequencies of the participants based on their place of residence. It is evident that more participants from Zagreb than participants from other places do not attribute importance to voting rights, with positive responses below expectations (0 out of 2.7). It can be said that the obtained results were expected due to the current political situation in Croatia, with over a quarter of the population living in the capital city. Namely, participants from Zagreb are more likely than other participants in Croatia to see the potential of voting rights because of access to more information at the city level (the availability of associations and adapted content for persons with disability), and more opportunities to solve their problems and exercise their rights in a different way. The Republic of Croatia (Puljiz et al., 2003) still has a centralist system of providing social services, in which persons with disabilities in larger cities, especially in Zagreb, can achieve more rights than in other parts of the country. In Zagreb, there is a greater possibility of informing persons with disabilities about their rights, and there is a significant shift in the evaluation of all areas of life and work of persons with disabilities, which is happening at the level of the European Union (Šostar, Bakula Anđelić & Majsec Sobota, 2006). Numerous

NGOs, which are the main carriers and providers of social services (Bronić, 2005), volunteers, and the media point to the problems that persons with disabilities face, as well as issues related to voting rights. Because of this, persons with disabilities in Zagreb believe that their right to vote as a fundamental human right cannot solve their daily needs or improve their status in society.

Research conducted with persons with intellectual, physical or visual disability shows how the electoral process, the possibilities of voting, and getting information are still not adequate for equal participation of all citizens (the general population and persons with disabilities) in the elections depending on their needs and difficulties. The Republic of Croatia has laws that implement accessibility of polling stations (Lawson, 2013) as part of election laws, and the statutory duty of the national electoral committee is to educate electoral officials. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of measures or programs aiming at better accessibility.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to determine whether there are differences in the information and experience with voting rights and voting opportunities among persons with disabilities with different types of impairment, age, gender, or place of residence in the Republic of Croatia. The results of this research partially confirmed all four hypotheses, confirming that participants (persons with disabilities) differ in response frequencies in relation to type of impairment, age, gender, and place of residence. The results obtained in the scientific sense indicate that elections and voting opportunities in the Republic of Croatia are not tailored to the needs of all persons with different types of disabilities, and that there is no simple instruction to explain what voting rights are and how to vote. In addition, voting places and ballot papers are not adapted in a way that would allow equal participation of

all persons with disabilities in the elections. This research has shown that participants with intellectual disabilities are least informed about their electoral rights, there is no customised ballot paper for persons with visual impairment, and persons with physical disabilities are mostly satisfied with voting options and information about voting rights. Persons with visual impairment were identified as a group of participants who are most likely to point out the inadequacy of ballot papers for ensuring the independence and secrecy of voting, and therefore the possibility of equal voting. On the other hand, the personal opinions of persons with intellectual disabilities and their views on how they perceive voting rights and adaptation options, which would make it easier for them to vote in elections, are very rarely asked for. In order to improve the ability of persons with disabilities to exercise their voting rights, there is a need for permanent financial support from state institutions and NGOs that should be more involved with the education and informing

of persons with disabilities about their voting rights in order to improve and adjust the voting possibilities that enable independent and secret voting for persons with disabilities. Also, greater involvement of experts in education and rehabilitation and their cooperation with civilian organisations is required to enable them to carry out activities and promote voting rights guaranteed by numerous laws, documents, and conventions. For these reasons, further systematic research on the field of voting rights and voting opportunities for persons with disabilities is needed, not only for the improvement and implementation of the obligations imposed by the law, but also for the improvement of the possibilities and the adaptation of voting places that would allow equal, independent, and secret voting for all citizens as foundations of democracy and respect for human rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, 2010).

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MOGUĆNOSTI GLASOVANJA OSOBA S INVALIDITETOM

Sažetak: Cilj ovog rada je analizirati politička prava osoba s invaliditetom i dobiti uvid u njihovu zainteresiranost za politiku, posebice ambiciju za bavljenje politikom i sudjelovanje u donošenju važnih odluka s obzirom na specifičnu problematiku invaliditeta. Republika Hrvatska potpisala je i ratificirala brojne međunarodne dokumente kao što je Konvencija o pravima osoba s invaliditetom, a koje promoviraju socijalna i politička prava te ravnopravno i neupitno sudjelovanje na izborima svakog građanina. Prema podacima Hrvatskog zavoda za javno zdravstvo, više od jedne desetine građana Republike Hrvatske čine osobe s invaliditetom te bi one stogla mogle značajno utjecati na rezultate glasanja, što implicira važnost istraživanja mogućnosti glasanja ovih osoba. Istraživanje je provedeno na 145 ispitanika s intelektualnim teškoćama, tjelesnim invaliditetom i oštećenjem vida iz različitih gradova u Republici Hrvatskoj. Za potrebe istraživanja kreiran je anketni upitnik koji se sastoji od osam pitanja, a koja imaju za cilj ispitati informiranost osoba s različitim vrstama invaliditeta, dobi, spola i prebivališta, o poznavanju biračkog prava, društvenoj aktivnosti i mogućnostima prilagodbe izbornih mjesta. Podaci su obrađeni χ^2 testom te su izračunate korelacije mjerenih varijabli. Rezultati ukazuju na potrebu za boljim informiranjem osoba s invaliditetom o njihovim biračkim pravima te za prilagodbom i unapređenjem mogućnosti glasanja svih osoba s invaliditetom, bez obzira na vrstu teškoće, dob, spol i prebivalište. Izdvojila se skupina sudionika s oštećenjem vida, kojima je zbog neprilagođenosti glasačkog listića, više nego osobama s tjelesnim invaliditetom i intelektualnim teškoćama, onemogućeno samostalno i tajno, a samim time i ravnopravno glasanje.

Ključne riječi: biračko pravo, mogućnosti glasanja, politika, osobe s invaliditetom