

OPEN: the Belgian Expertise Centre for Accessible Media and Culture

Nina Reviere and Aline Remael

University of Antwerp - Faculty of Arts - TricS research group
nina.reviere|aline.remael@uantwerpen.be

Abstract

The present paper presents a poster presentation for the 2nd Swiss Conference on Barrier-free communication, presenting a new Centre for Accessible Media and Culture, OPEN. The centre was established by the University of Antwerp and aims to raise the visibility of media and cultural accessibility in all its facets and contribute to the realisation of an inclusive society, by being a national point of contact for those who have questions about accessibility and by stimulating the exchange of experience and knowledge on accessibility in the media and cultural domains. This way OPEN hopes to contribute to bridging existing gaps and stimulate the transfer of knowledge. The poster presents the people and organizations involved, OPEN's mission statement, our areas of expertise and ongoing projects.

1 Introduction

Universal Design (UD) and the accessibility of culture and media more in particular have undergone substantial progress over the past decade(s). Accessibility for all is no longer just an aspirational idea, but it is slowly becoming a reality that increases social participation as tools and services are developed to make complex audiovisual products and events usable and enjoyable for an ever-growing and diverse target group. As Greco (2016: 11) argues, accessibility is to be seen as a proactive principle for achieving human rights; as an instrument that can increase access to a wide variety of human rights for all the citizens of a nation (the right to information, the right to culture, etc.).

Nevertheless, media and cultural accessibility remain work in progress and the field is still characterised by a high degree of fragmentation:

- in the types of accessibility services that are offered (certain services such as Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, SDH, are ahead of others such as Audio Description, AD, and Audio Subtitling, AST);
- in the degree of standardisation and the level of quality that is offered (some services are highly professional and can rely on local and European norms and guidelines, others mostly rely on volunteers and intuitive creation processes);
- in the degree of enforceability of accessibility legislation between countries (some countries enforce precise quota, others only stimulate the development of services);
- in research efforts across types of media accessibility and the comparability of research results.

In order to move beyond the current state of affairs, create a more coherent field and increase the adoption of Universal Design principles in media and culture, current knowledge needs to be consolidated. Key aspects in this process are transnational cooperation, interdisciplinarity and knowledge transfer, including training.

These keywords are clearly reflected in some of the most recent European initiatives in the field of Media Accessibility Studies, such as the EU-funded projects ADLAB, ADLAB PRO, ACT, HBBTV4ALL, ILSA, ImAc and the project of the conference organiser itself, the Swiss Centre for Barrier-free Communication. These studies put a strong focus on standardisation, knowledge-transfer and training.

It is against this background that the Faculty of Arts and the TricS research group (Translation, Interpreting and Intercultural Studies) of the University of Antwerp in Belgium have established a new Expertise Centre for Accessible Media and Culture called OPEN

(Expertisecentrum Toegankelijke Media en Cultuur in Dutch). The centre was launched in June of 2018, together with its Dutch website www.opentoeankelijk.be.

2 Aim of the project

OPEN aims to raise the visibility of media and cultural accessibility in all its facets and contribute to the realisation of an inclusive society. OPEN plans to do this by being a national point of contact for those who have questions about accessibility and by stimulating the exchange of experience and knowledge on accessibility in the media and cultural domains. We focus our activities within our own university and within the Dutch speaking regions in Europe, Flanders and the Netherlands, but aim to move beyond these borders and reach out to researchers and stakeholders in Europe as well. This way we hope to contribute to bridging existing gaps and stimulate the transfer of knowledge.

How do we aim to achieve these goals? By providing information and advice on accessibility, by entering into dialogue with users, service providers, government agencies and researchers who have complementary expertise, thereby building up an accessibility network, by translating research results into practical applications, by setting up research and demonstration projects, by organising seminars, workshops and training and by improving the accessibility of our own university.

3 Project Activities

Our activities currently focus on four domains:

- Stimulating excellence through **training**;
- Contributing to new research by applying for and participating in **funded projects** and by realising **pilot studies** in cooperation with MA-students;
- Initiating **demonstration projects** to test and optimise new tools and services and stimulate the development of best practices;
- **Raising awareness** by offering information and advice to stakeholders, as well as the general public.

Examples of current activities in these domains, about which more information is provided on

our Dutch website www.opentoeankelijk.be, are the following:

- Courses on Accessibility Management for the Scenic Arts (such as the MOOC “Accessibility to the Scenic Arts” developed by the ACT project and a local workshop at the University of Antwerp);
- A course on Audio Description for the theatre (building on the ADLAB and ADLAB PRO projects and a PhD project by Hanne Roofthoof);
- Tailor-made workshops for the industry (such as a workshop on TV Audio Description for the Flemish Public Broadcaster VRT, building on the PhDs of Reviere (2018) and Vercauteren (2016));
- A series of Masterclasses on specialist topics in the field of Media Accessibility.
- A pilot study on best practices for the accessibility of museums and exhibitions and the application of this knowledge in a demonstration project of an exhibition at the University of Antwerp entitled “Museum to Scale 1/7”;
- A pilot study on the (semi-automatic) translation of Audio Description scripts for a greater accessibility of films and television series across Europe;
- Participation in the EU-funded projects ADLAB, ADLAB PRO, ACT and ILSA;

A pilot project aimed at making our university courses more accessible through live-subtitling (in cooperation with a project funded by the University's Fund for Educational Development and the EU-funded ILSA project).

Spreading the word, by developing a fully accessible website, by publishing scientific and non-scientific papers and by offering consultancy services to stakeholders.

4 Structure of the poster presentation

With the poster we are presenting at the Conference on Barrier-free communication, we want to contribute to the development of a strong European network of researchers in media and cultural accessibility, stimulate the exchange of knowledge, foster new cooperation and contribute to bridging the gap between research and practice.

The poster will contain the following elements:

- Title
- People and organisations involved: University of Antwerp, TricS research group, Prof. Dr. Aline Remael (initiator), Dr. Nina Reviere (Coordinator), Brecht Daneels (Administrative support), Management Committee (prof. dr Reinhild Vandekerckhove, prof. dr. Isabelle Robert, dr. Sabien Hanouille, Hanne Roofthoof, dr. Gert Vercauteren);
- Mission Statement of OPEN;
- Areas of expertise of OPEN (as described above);
- Overview of projects for each area of expertise;
- The partners of OPEN;
- Contact information.

References

- “Accessible Culture and Training (ACT)”. Project Leader: UAB, Spain. Financed by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2 – Strategic Partnerships. <http://pagines.uab.cat/act/>.
- “Audio Description: A laboratory for the development of a new professional profile” (2016-2019). Led by the University of Trieste, Italy. Financed by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2 – Strategic Partnerships. website: www.adlabproject.eu
- “Audio Description: Lifelong Access for the Blind (ADLAB)”, (2011-2014). Project leader: University of Trieste. Financed by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2 – Strategic Partnerships. website: www.adlabproject.eu
- Greco, G. M. (2016). “On Accessibility as a Human Right, with an Application to Media Accessibility”. In Matamala, A & Orero, P. (eds.), *Researching Audio Description. New Approaches* (pp. 11- 33). Palgrave.
- “Hybrid Broadcast Broadband for All (HBBTV4ALL)”. Project leader: UAB, Spain. Funded by the European Union under the Competitiveness and innovation framework programme. website: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/191771_en.html.
- “Immersive Accessibility (ImAc)”. Project leader: UAB, Spain. Funded by the European Union under the Industrial Leadership programme. Website: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/211084_en.html.
- “Museum to Scale 1/7”. Permanent exhibition at the University of Antwerp, Belgium, City Campus, Building R. Website: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/campus-life/recreation-commitment/culture-and-events/art-on-campus/museum-to-scale/>.
- Reviere, N. (2018). “Audio-description in Dutch: A corpus-based study into the linguistic features of a new, multimodal text type”. PhD conducted at the University of Antwerp under the supervision of prof. dr. Aline Remael and prof. dr. Reinhild Vandekerckhove.
- Roofthoof, H. (2017-2020). “A stage for the world: towards an inclusive theatre experience”. PhD conducted at the University of Antwerp under the supervision of prof. dr. Aline Remael and prof. dr. Luuk Van Waes.
- Vercauteren, G. (2016). “A narratological approach to content selection in audio description”. PhD conducted at the University of Antwerp under the supervision of prof. dr. Aline Remael and prof. dr. Tom Paulus.