Intellectual Output 1: Accessibility Profiling

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1. Overview

This report provides a summary of the work conducted for Intellectual Output 1: Accessibility Profiling. Firstly, the overall aims and methodology of this initial stage of the ACT project are established including presentation of the different phases and components of the research. Secondly, with reference to work across the various partner countries detailed accounts are given of each of the different components of the research relating to the primary stakeholders involved in access to the scenic arts: (1) accessibility profiling of arts venues; (2) accessibility profiling of users; (3) accessibility profiling of the artistic team. Each of these sections includes discussion of the specific objectives and data collection techniques employed. Finally, the outcomes of the research thus far are presented.

2. Overall aims of IO1

The primary aim of IO1 is to explore the current landscape within the scenic arts in the partner countries across Europe in terms of access provisions and training in order to inform the development of an online training programme for cultural accessibility managers. As part of this general goal, a key objective is to strengthen links between researchers and the various stakeholders in the process of translating and providing access for all to the scenic arts, as well as the target audiences. Such collaboration between academics, arts venues, access providers (e.g. captioning companies, audio describers, sign language interpreters), user associations (e.g. RNIB, Mencap, Arts and Disability Forum, ONCE), and users (e.g. blind and partially-sighted patrons, sign language users, autistic audience members) is

fundamental to the promotion of social inclusion and ongoing improvements in access to cultural events. Therefore IO1 aims to encourage continued dialogue between these various players to raise global awareness of access provisions so that wider audiences can enjoy an inclusive experience of the arts. Furthermore, building on the work that has already been conducted at local level, this research aims to open up the discussion to an international level through the comparison of access provisions and exchanging of ideas relating to the accessibility profiling information gathered in each partner country.

3. Methodology

An ethnographically-oriented research approach has been adopted for IO1 using a mixed methods design combining questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The work includes 3 phases: (1) survey design, compilation, editing and translation; (2) data collection; (3) data organisation and analysis. The target audience of the study is also tripartite with surveys investigating accessibility from the perspectives of: (1) arts venues; (2) users; (3) the artistic team.

Various techniques were used to distribute the questionnaires and collect the data across the partner countries including via e-mail, post, phone, in person, TurningPoint, online platforms such as SurveyMonkey and Qualtrix, and social media including Facebook and Twitter. Additional methods were used to encourage responses, such as an RNIB podcast. This broad range of techniques was used to maximise responses and to ensure accessibility to as wide an audience as possible by providing varied formats for respondents with diverse linguistic, sensory and cognitive abilities. For instance, the opportunity to provide feedback via video was offered, especially taking into consideration participants whose first or preferred language is sign language. Interviews and focus groups were also conducted in most partner countries in order to give people another opportunity to provide feedback by responding to the questionnaire and/or discussing their experiences of accessibility. Different approaches were adopted for the focus groups in each country according to individual needs, as detailed in section 5. In each case, these events provided an ideal forum for dissemination of the project, furthering the aims of promoting collaboration, dialogue and global awareness. With regard to ethical research practice related to issues of confidentiality, anonymity and consent, full approval of the research design was sought and obtained at institutional level.

4. Venues survey

For the venues survey, a questionnaire enquiring about access facilities in scenic arts venues was designed, edited, translated and distributed in various locations across the partner countries in order to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. In some cases this was followed up by phone calls and meetings with staff members of venues who requested further information and expressed a desire to share knowledge. For instance, in the UK, requests included a meeting to discuss options for the development of touch tours and more information about web accessibility, and a newly appointed Access and Inclusion Coordinator in a district of Northern Ireland contacted the researchers to share information

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about this job role which involved managing access across several venues. Furthermore, investigations into accessibility in venues and dissemination of the ACT project provoked responses from experts in other fields. For example, researchers at QUB were contacted by an architect particularly interested in creating places that provide a unique sensory experience conducive to Deaf culture as well as people of all abilities.

4.1 Objectives and questionnaire design

The objective of the survey distributed amongst various cultural venues in the partner countries is to investigate the accessibility facilities and training currently available within the context of live performance. The specific issues examined include the following: (1) to what extent are the various access facilities (e.g. audio description, easy-to-read materials, sign language interpreting, audio subtitling) offered in the different arts venues in each partner country and how does this vary?; (2) how are access facilities promoted?; (3) who is responsible for accessibility?; (4) what access quality control measures are in place?; (5) what type of accessibility training is offered if any?; (6) what challenges are faced by venues regarding accessibility?. These questions are all explored with a view to informing the profile of the accessibility manager and the training to be developed in later intellectual outputs. For instance, regarding challenges faced by arts venues relating to accessibility, are there any predominant problematic areas and is training desired in these areas? Furthermore, in each case the variance between the results from the different countries is analysed.

The questionnaire was designed to take approximately twenty minutes to complete, with a majority of closed-ended items requiring the ticking of boxes to allow quick and easy feedback, some questions requiring graded responses using a variation on the Likert scale technique which replaced the standard set of responses (strongly agree to strongly disagree) with a numerical scale and a few open-ended questions for further details. Moreover, in order to gather further qualitative data to complement the quantitative data collected, each question included an open-ended item in the form of room for comments.

4.2 Data collection

Whilst the same data collection methods were used across the partner countries (i.e. questionnaires), there were some variances in quantities. Therefore, scaling is used in the comparative analysis across partner countries. The University of Antwerp and NTGent distributed questionnaires to 365 venues across Belgium and 22 responses were received. The Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona and the Catalan government distributed 46 questionnaires across Catalonia and received 44 responses. The University of Vienna sent out questionnaires to 65 venues across Austria and received 3 questionnaire responses. Replies were also received from two other Austrian venues stating that they do not have accessibility services but would like to improve. Queen's University Belfast distributed 65 questionnaires to venues across the UK and Ireland and received 20 responses.

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5. Users survey

For the users survey, two methods of data collections were used to optimise the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data and to support the overall aims of IO1: (1) a questionnaire asking the general public about their experiences of accessibility to the arts; (2) a focus group. Focus groups were organised as a complementary method of data collection and different approaches were adopted in the various partner countries. For instance, in Belgium, the focus group involved an open discussion exploring some of the issues from the questionnaire in more depth such as problematic areas relating to communication and professionalization of translators providing access. This event was attended by representatives from 4 user associations (for the blind and partially-sighted, the deaf and hard-of-hearing, and people with mental disabilities). In the UK, the focus group was part of a larger event including accessible entertainment such as a sign language interpreted stand-up comedy performance. The purpose was to provide a social event that offered an opportunity for people to respond to the questionnaire and give additional qualitative feedback in a relaxed environment and using various methods such as specially adapted keypads for blind and partially-sighted patrons as well as sign language interpreters, thus maximising responses and optimising the accessibility of survey.

5.1 Objectives and questionnaire design

The main objective of the users survey is to gather feedback from the general public, including people with varying linguistic, sensory, and cognitive abilities, about their experiences of accessibility facilities. In particular, the study aims to examine users' familiarity with a range of access facilities as well as their opinions of current access provisions, and attitudes towards accessibility and inclusion. Furthermore, the survey intends to contribute to identifying the profile of users of access facilities, for example regarding diversity in linguistic, visual, hearing, and cognitive abilities.

The questionnaire design was similar to the venues questionnaire with an estimated completion time of around twenty minutes and a prevalence of closed-ended items with space for qualitative comments. One open-ended question 'What improvements would you like to be implemented in current and future accessibility provisions at live events?' prompted elaboration from those wishing to give further details. Additional information was provided, for example definitions of audio subtitling and captioning, for purposes of clarity and in order to raise awareness of the diverse types of access facilities. In line with the survey objectives, the parameters of familiarity and satisfaction with access facilities, as well as general attitudes to accessibility, formed the basis of the items in the questionnaire in addition to questions gathering demographic details.

5.2 Data collection

In conjunction with the various distribution methods enumerated in section 3, such as social media etc., several user associations were contacted and asked to circulate the information and questionnaires. The University of Antwerp and NTGent distributed the questionnaires to 633 users, contacted 4 user associations, and 92 responses were received. 7 representatives of user associations attended the focus group in Antwerp. The Universitat

Autonoma de Barcelona contacted 12 users associations and received 20 responses. A focus group was carried out with a young blind people association and was attended by 9 people. The University of Vienna contacted the Austrian association for disabilities for assistance in reaching users and received 21 responses from users. Queen's University Belfast contacted 35 users associations and received 102 responses from users. Around 100 people attended the social and focus group event including users with diverse linguistic, sensory and cognitive abilities, venue managers, audio describers, sign language interpreters, representatives from Mencap, the BBC, Action for Deaf Youth amongst others.

6. Artistic team survey

In order to gather feedback from other key stakeholders in the provision of arts accessibility, NTGent and Inter conducted interviews and focus groups with various members of the artistic team with a view to investigating their experiences, awareness, approaches and attitudes regarding accessibility. NTGent held a focus group which included 8 representatives from the following members of the artistic team: director, dramaturge, production manager, sound designer, lighting designer, overall artistic technical coordinator and actor. Transit conducted interviews with 11 members of the artistic team including scenographers, cultural managers, producers, and assistant directors. Information in the venues questionnaires was adapted to help structure the discussions.

7. Research outcomes

During the research process connections have been established with various stakeholders involved in the ongoing process of developing training for arts accessibility managers, and awareness has been raised about the diversity of users and variety of access facilities on offer. Furthermore, the data collected provides an up-to-date profile of accessibility in arts venues across the partner countries including currently available facilities, as well as details about existing training and people responsible for accessibility provisions at present. The rich set of quantitative and qualitative data collected offers the opportunity for further in-depth analysis of the findings for additional insights. For further information about these findings, please see the second report at http://www.actproject.eu/deliverables/io1-accessibility-profiling and forthcoming publication by Eardley-Weaver et al which will be available on the ACT project webpage in due course.

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