



I-LanD Journal

Identity, Language and Diversity

Chief Editors: Giuditta Caliendo & Maria Cristina Nisco

Collaborative Media Accessibility: Theory, Methodology and Practice

I-LanD Journal
peer-reviewed
annual journal
n. 1/2023 - December 2023

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Authorisation n. 60 issued by the Court of Naples on 20/12/2016

Collaborative Media Accessibility: *Actors on the Collaborative Stage*

DOI: 10.26379/IL2023001_001

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Abstract

Notions of participatory accessibility (Di Giovanni 2018), universal accessibility (Wang et al. 2022), co-accessibility (Okyayuz/Kaya 2020), integrated access (Fryer/Cavallo 2022), creative media access (Romero-Fresco 2021), and access as conversation (Romero-Fresco/Dangerfield 2022; Dangerfield in this special issue) are responses to perceived shortcomings of traditional approaches to media accessibility (MA) that were, in the past, devolved to the accessibility professional. Instead, these more recent approaches lay emphasis on collaborative processes and practices. Collaborative Media Accessibility (CMA) is in part an attempt to reframe MA, in recognition of the slogan used by disability activists since the 1980s “nothing about us without us”. This introductory essay and the articles in this special issue aim to assess what these collaborative approaches have in common and how they mark a shift in approach from MA created ‘for’ a certain type of end user (most commonly a non-disabled expert creating access ‘for’ disabled audience members) to MA created ‘by’ or ‘with’ a certain type of end user. First the groundwork is laid by reconsidering definitions of MA and its aims, before considering the many actors (literal and figurative) on the participatory stage and how their inclusion affects the style of access as well as its content, delivery, and consequently the audience response. The content of the articles in this special issue is presented critically, in relation to the notions and issues raised in the sections below.

'Access as a Conversation' and Participatory Approaches in Media Accessibility

DOI: 10.26379/IL2023001_002

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Abstract

The future of media accessibility (MA) is defined by collaborative partnerships and mutual understanding (Carroll/Remael 2022). Considering this changing landscape, the body politic offers interesting insights to potentially develop the idea of 'access as a conversation' (Romero-Fresco/Dangerfield 2022) on the basis that a better understanding of the relation between individual and collective agency considering human and non-human entities is needed due to the changes in society and the ecological crisis (Latour et al. 2020). In this article, I discuss these ideas in relation to participatory approaches in the field of media accessibility, while using an essay film as a case study to question ocularnormativism and logonormativism in academia, the industry, and wider society by recognising the value of embodied languages and experiences.

Keywords

body politic, collective, conversation, inclusiveness, individual, participatory, accessibility

Collaborative Media Accessibility: Insights from Media Accessibility Experts

DOI: 10.26379/IL2023001_003

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Abstract

Media accessibility services, and the related research, mainly focus on individuals with disabilities. As a consequence, they require a comprehensive understanding and acknowledgment of their needs and capabilities. In media accessibility research, there have been distinct turns: initially, the focus was on the end users, which subsequently led to numerous studies on comprehension, appreciation, and reception (Di Giovanni 2021). A significant turn, started a few years ago and still thriving, is related to collaborative and participatory practices involving media accessibility professionals at various levels: their skills, specialised training, the tools they utilise, their tasks and workflow. These topics are currently subjects of active debate worldwide, as there appears to be no homogeneous approach. After examining the training programmes that are currently available, this paper presents the findings of a survey carried out with media access professionals in the European Union and the United Kingdom. The goal was to identify the competencies essential for accessibility professionals, delineate their responsibilities, detail the tools they use, and, most importantly, assess the involvement of individuals with different abilities in the entire process of designing, testing, and evaluating media accessibility services to shed light on the nature of collaborative media accessibility practices and processes.

Keywords

translation studies, audiovisual translation, media accessibility, accessibility, professionals, collaborative processes and practices

Beyond Preservation: Embracing Participatory and Accessible Practices in the Archive

DOI: 10.26379/IL2023001_004

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Abstract

As the rate of digitalisation of archival material continues to grow, accessibility to important historical records is a pressing concern for the heritage sector. Traditionally, trained professionals have provided transcriptions of archival material. This article presents a new initiative in Northern Ireland, in which a group of blind and partially blind people were invited to work on transcriptions of archival material from the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) as part of the CollabArchive project (2022). Four participants with varying degrees of blindness were trained on how to transcribe audio and audiovisual material from PRONI's collection. Drawing on the concept of "access as a conversation" (Romero-Fresco/Dangerfield 2022), an individual access plan was created in consultation with each volunteer. In this paper, we will present the project, and its aims, after which we will detail the training, technical solutions and workflows followed, which facilitated volunteers in their archival work. Drawing on reflections from the authors as trainer and project coordinator, as well as those of volunteers, we will locate this initiative within the wider field of participatory accessibility (Di Giovanni 2018a), highlighting the evolving role of the end user, as they move beyond the role of consumer to producer of accessible content. Finally, we propose future research avenues and participatory practices that challenge traditional notions of the end user as a passive receptor of information and instead highlight their potential as access service providers.

Keywords

participatory archive, participatory accessibility, transcription, training

A Participatory Approach in Enhancing Accessibility at a Film Festival: A Case Study

DOI: 10.26379/IL2023001_005

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Abstract

This paper explores the potential of a participatory approach in enhancing accessibility at film festivals, with a primary focus on engaging deaf and blind audiences. The investigation utilises a case study¹ conducted over the last four years of the international documentary film festival One World – the largest and oldest documentary festival in Slovakia, and at the same time, the first Slovak film festival addressing the access needs of visually and hearing-impaired audience. Having the opportunity to continuously observe access strategies at the festival from their inception, the study aims to provide insight into why and how a creative and organising team transitions from traditional, add-on access strategies towards a more integrated, inclusive, participatory approach – and what the benefits of such a development can be. It analyses findings gathered from participatory observation, direct access to the festival organisation, and semi-structured interviews with the festival management, access professionals and participating communities, providing an analysis of an applied strategies, their planning and implementation. Key findings offer valuable insights into practical applications of the more integrated, inclusive, participatory approach in the context of film festivals, demonstrating its effectiveness in creating a more inclusive environment for festival attendees.

Keywords

Film festivals, organisation, accessibility, inclusion, participation

Accessible Dance Spaces: Intersensory Translation Strategies in Traditional and Integrated Audio Description

DOI: 10.26379/IL2023001_006

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Abstract

The growth of Audio Description (AD) has gained momentum in the past few years, spurred on by a massive regulatory and standardisation process, combined with growing research and training interests. At the same time, a strand of scholarship within Media Accessibility is turning a critical view to AD, questioning underlying assumptions of access and disability. This has led to new approaches that rethink the dominant standards of Media Accessibility, such as Integrated Access (Fryer/Cavallo 2022), Creative Media Accessibility (Romero-Fresco 2021) and participatory Media Accessibility (Di Giovanni 2018), to name but a few. These approaches have in common their transformative power, interrogating the nature of standard access provision and emphasising the collaborative nature that seems to be at the heart of many of these initiatives. Against this background, the present article explores the labour of the dance describer, a domain that has received little academic attention so far. The discussion in this paper contrasts two distinct case studies: the standard AD of the Goldberg Variations, by the Belgian dance group Platform-K and the integrated AD created for the performance Gravity, created by the European collective Un-Label. By analysing both case studies through the concept of Achievement Spaces (Neves 2020), we make visible how different levels of collaboration lead to different accessible dance spaces and we identify the textual traces of participation, inclusion, creativity, and universalism. The analysis illustrates the impact different types of direct and indirect collaboration can have on access creation. The article also argues that the differences between the approaches cannot be reduced to a difference in AD style or translation approach, but also reveal how different views on disability and access translate into different types of accessible dance.

Keywords

media accessibility, integrated audio description, dance, accessibility, intersensory translation

A Network of Actors Contributing to Arts Accessibility in New Zealand: A Case Study of Arts Access Aotearoa

DOI: 10.26379/IL2023001_007

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Abstract

Compared to the short history and low growth of subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing and audio description on TV in New Zealand, accessibility services provided for audiences in museums, art galleries, theatres, and live events have been developed well by New Zealand local communities supported by the government, though no relevant legislation has been established. Arts Access Aotearoa, a New Zealand charitable trust focusing on increasing New Zealanders' access to arts, has been established for 28 years with a vast group of Arts For All Network members all over the country as well as many patrons, funders, supporters and donors from governments, organisations, or communities. Drawing from the Actor-Network Theory, an inclusive and extensive network of actors is mapped out to explore how it contributes to developing arts accessibility in New Zealand, which has been acknowledged internationally. A documentary research method is adopted to collect data stored on Arts Access Aotearoa's and other related actors' websites as well as any concerned information published online.

Keywords

arts accessibility, media accessibility, accessibility, audio description, Actor-Network Theory

Design Principles for a Smart, Descriptive Guide for Blind and Partially Sighted Visitors

DOI: 10.26379/IL2023001_008

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Abstract

This paper presents key design principles underpinning the design of a smart descriptive guide, that is, an interactive, customisable voice-driven guide that can provide audio descriptive guided tours, assistance, navigational information and answers to free-format questions for blind and partially sighted (BPS) visitors in various museum contexts. In collaboration with Titanic Belfast, a world-leading tourist attraction, we customised our smart descriptive guide system to create a Titanic Belfast Bot (TBot), for part of the Titanic Belfast experience. To evaluate the TBot, we demonstrated it to a focus group of BPS participants online. The evaluation identified a number of useful guidelines for museums as they use our system to create their own smart descriptive guide for BPS visitors.

Keywords

chatbot, BPS visitors, museum accessibility, voice-driven, descriptive guide