ACCESSIBLE EUROPE 2019 – CONTRIBUTION

Audio Description Associates, LLC / Audio Description Project of the American Council of the Blind (USA)

Audio Description: Access To Media For People Who Are Blind

ACTIVITY COVERAGE

☐ Regional cooperation and stakeholder engagement: the activity strengthens and supports regional cooperation and the engagement of all relevant stakeholders, in line with the European Accessibility act, in the development and implementation of ICT accessibility policies and solutions in the European region.

☒ ICT accessibility policies: raising awareness and/or promoting relevant guidelines on public policies, including exchanging knowledge and sharing best practices on ICT accessibility. This may include the development of standards.

☐ Public procurement with accessibility features: promoting regional and in-country deliver of public procurement as a tool to improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities and specific needs.

☐ Web Accessibility: developing regional and in country capacity through web accessibility features and/or training to ensure that websites and related services are available and accessible to all citizens.

☒ Media Services Accessibility: raising awareness about accessibility possibilities of TV and video streaming on digital platforms, and promoting the implementation of appropriate solutions.

☒ Innovation and Accessibility: promoting the development of regional and in-country capacity building on programming for all, including persons with disabilities and specific needs. This may include embedding "accessible by design" in the product's innovation/development process.

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DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT/RECENT ACTIVITIES

Audio Description Associates, LLC, based in the Washington, DC area, grew out of Dr. Joel Snyder's work as a pioneer in the development of audio description, c. 1981, with Cody and Margaret Pfanstiehl at the Metropolitan Washington Ear, a radio reading service for people who are blind. In 1985, Dr. Snyder wrote and voiced the audio description for three of the first television broadcasts. Dr. Snyder founded the Described Media Program of the National Captioning Institute and produced the first-ever audio description for "Sesame Street" and dozens of other network broadcasts and feature films. In 2009, Dr. Snyder founded and continues to directs the Audio Description Project of the American Council of the Blind (ADP), the leading provider of information and resources on audio description [www.acb.org/adp]. As director of the ADP, he oversees the annual Audio Description awards, biannual international conferences on audio description, conducts the twice-annual Audio Description Institute, and directs the BADIEs (awards to blind children who write reviews of described media). Dr. Snyder produced and voiced extemporaneous and live audio description for the last three presidential inaugurations, nationally broadcast on ABC-TV; in August 2017, he produced and voiced the extemporaneous and live audio description of the total eclipse of the sun broadcast worldwide on ACB Radio. He is the holder of one of the few PhDs in Audio Description (2013-Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona) and is the author of "The Visual Made Verbal: A Comprehensive Training Manual and Guide to the History and Applications of Audio Description"--published by ACB in 2014. The publication is available as an audio book voiced by Dr. Snyder, in screen-reader-accessible formats, in English, Portuguese, Polish and Russian (Spanish edition under development) and has been published in Braille by the Library of Congress. He collaborates with the World Blind Union on various projects and is the author of the first-ever survey of audio description worldwide, sponsored by the World Blind Union and the American Council of the Blind.

Activity running in:

☒ 2016 or before   ☒ 2017   ☒ 2018   ☒ 2019   ☒ 2020   ☒ 2021   ☒ 2022   ☒ 2023

CALL FOR COLLABORATION/COMMITMENT TO FUTURE ACTIVITIES

1) research—
Throughout Europe and in several other countries outside the United States, significant research on topics involving audio description is being pursued—most of this work is university-based. One of the objectives of the ADP (ACB's Audio Description Project) speaks to the encouragement of research on audio description. Might there be some way for the european ICT community and the ADP to encourage/sponsor certain research projects? In particular, I would welcome a study that support the notion that AD for film

and video builds literacy—in all people. A number of studies in the U.S. have demonstrated the literacy boosting effect of captioning—what about AD? Another area for research might involve the effect of AD on employment for people who are blind—can it be shown that to the extent that people are more meaningfully involved with film and television and in a nation's cultural life those individuals are more employable?

2) online training in AD—

I am a member of a committee of the EU-supported ADLAB-PRO, an initiative aimed at building curriculum and materials for university training in AD (it's led by Professor Chris Taylor at the University of Trieste where I have had the honor of presenting an AD workshop). How can we make this work even more available? While I believe that AD training is most effective when it occurs "face-to-face", I think there's a place for on-line training. Perhaps the ADP/european ICT community could partner with a university in the development of a series of seminars that would be available on-line?

3) ensuring quality—

The ADP is a supporter of a describer certification effort being pursued by the ACVREP— the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals. About eight years ago, the ACB sponsored the development of a set of guidelines/best practices for audio description; it is a collection of the "best of the best" from various guidelines that exist in different countries. Could a certification effort be expanded to involve AD practitioners, producers and consumers in Europe and worldwide?

4) mandates for AD for broadcast television—

In the United States, the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act mandated description for broadcast television in 2012—the American mandate involves only about 7 hours per week for each of the top 9 broadcasters/cable providers; in the U.K., the mandate is far more broad—up to 20% of all broadcasts. The European Commission has promoted encouraging language in this area but falls short of requirements. Finally, our AD Survey (sponsored by the ACB/ADP and the World Blind Union) reports that less than half of the nations surveyed have some sort of mandate for

description, mostly on television. What can we do to educate legislators around the world to the importance of establishing and expanding these mandates?

5) broaden inclusion of AD in cinema, on DVDs, streaming and as "audio films"—

Encouragingly, most commercial films released in the U.S, now include an AD track. Unfortunately, that track is often not included in certain countries or on subsequent DVD or streaming releases. I also believe that there is a broad market for "audio films": audio files that include the original audio of a film along with the AD—an "audio film" that could be used by sighted people while driving or in the gym or on a jog. Can a collaboration boost efforts that would encourage film producers to broaden the availability of AD and surmount any legal barriers related to the release of "audio films"?

6) promotion of cloud-based distribution of AD for use via apps—

I am aware of a half-dozen apps that support the support the delivery of AD tracks via ones own smartphone. I believe that this is the future of AD availability—in the cinema or at home with a DVD or broadcast television. (In the U.S., the most promising version for cinema is Actiview; the Israel-based GalaPro has made great strides in this area with live performing arts presentations.) Here too the film industry has been slow to accept this development—what can be done to counter the concerns that have been expressed and champion the use of assistive technology that has implications for people who are deaf and speakers of alternate languages?

7) partnership with cultural ministries/NEA (the US-based National Endowment for the Arts) and/or major corporations or foundations—

Financial support for the spread of AD is critical, of course—is this even on the radar of the world's cultural ministries? People who are blind are clearly an underserved constituency and, at the same time, an untapped market. What can we do to encourage cultural ministries to offer initiatives that support AD at arts organizations? And corporations/foundations also need to discover AD: as one positive example, my own company has produced AD for close to 1,000 short videos developed by Microsoft! What about other major multi-nationals?

ORGANISATION INFORMATION

Organisation Name: **A**udio Description Associates, LLC and the Audio Description Project of the American Council of the Blind   Country: USA

Organisation/Activity URL: www.audiodescribe.com - www.acb.org/adp

Social Media Account (Twitter, Linkedin, etc): https://www.facebook.com/acbadp/