



*Audio Description:
Lifelong Access for the Blind*

**REPORT on
USER NEEDS ASSESSMENT
2012**

General information

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 WP Leader: Bayerischer Rundfunk (Partner 6)
 Project coordinator: Prof. Christopher Taylor
 Project coordinator telephone no.: +39 040 558 7603
 Project coordinator email address: ctaylor@units.it

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1 Executive Summary

The present report addresses the current situation in Europe regarding the accessibility to audiovisual products on the part of the blind and visually impaired population. The aim was to achieve a 'photograph' of the situation regarding **audio description (AD)** in Europe – particularly in the partner countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Germany, Poland) – which could help define the current state of play and inform the succeeding stages of the project. Work Package 1 (User Needs Analysis), conducted from October 2011 to March 2012, thus focused on the needs of end-users, particularly final end-users who are blind or partially sighted, and on what is available for them at this moment in Europe. To accomplish these goals, a detailed investigation into the current situation regarding audio description was carried out through both **desk** and **field research**. Key data have been provided also for other EU countries, although in less detail. As the investigated subject is vast and very complex, the present report can make no claim to completeness.

The blended desk/field research approach basically involved internet research, interviews and personal email and telephone correspondence with stakeholders and colleagues in higher education, study of the relevant scientific literature, and surveys from the major national and local blind organizations. In particular the service providers in ADLAB (BayerischeRundfunk, VRT and Senza Barriere) provided information gleaned from their long experience and many contacts in the field of AD. Each partner analysed the country-specific situations through a lengthy and tightly constructed **questionnaire** (Appendix 1) crafted by Bayerische Rundfunk (partner 6). The questionnaire was administered by each partner (one or more members were given the task of coordinating the work at local level) with the task of carrying out the survey simultaneously through the means described above. Thus, it was not sent as a whole to respondents, with the exception of section 5 which was administered to all possible national and local organizations. The final results from each partner were sent to BayerischeRundfunk, the partner responsible for Work Package 1, in order that a first draft of the final report could be prepared.

The questionnaire was designed to elicit detailed information regarding the current AD situation in all EU countries, with a closer focus on the selected countries, making sure that exactly the same aspects of AD would be considered across the board. The questions were designed i) to collect basic information on the definition and number of blind and visually impaired people, and the legal situation concerning them, ii) to investigate the role and availability of AD in each charted country, but also to give an overview of AD-related academic research and availability of specific training courses, iii) to enquire about perception studies in AD, and finally iv) to enquire about the role and stance of national and local blind associations regarding audio description, especially in terms of their lobbying power in promoting the practice. A map of active professional figures and voluntary service providers in each charted country is also given and included in the text, to show their current potential in providing AD.

The questionnaire included:

- open-ended questions allowing the participant to respond in free text and to expand on specific issues and situations (to encourage a full, meaningful answer). These were used abundantly throughout the questionnaire to get as clear a picture as possible of situations that at the moment are under-investigated;
- scaled questions, in which respondents were asked to rate their response on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating the lowest end of the scale, and 5 the highest;

- closed questions asking for a yes/no answer or for specific figures.

No multiple choice questions were used in the questionnaire. The answers cover the time period ranging from October 2011 to January 2012.

As explained above, the report is divided into **five** main sections:

1. Basic information: data on the definitions and numbers of blind and visually impaired people and the legal situation concerning them;
2. Availability of AD in the different countries;
3. AD research and training;
4. User reception studies and input from the national and local blind persons' organizations;
5. Conclusions and recommendations.

To report on the numbers of blind and visually impaired subjects, the amount of AD offered, and local demand for as well as the appreciation of the service, the partners relied on official figures and data taken from other European sources, or they resorted to data made available by national statistical agencies rather than re-attempting sporadic questionnaire-type surveys which in the past have not provided either plentiful or reliable data. All partners contacted national and local blind associations, professional and voluntary service providers, and academics working in accessibility.

As a result, **chapter 2** of the report offers basic information on the nature and the number of blind and visually impaired people in the countries involved in the project, and offers a broad idea of the type and quantity of AD-specific regulations existing in each country. When the questionnaire was drawn up, it was feared that the official parameters used to define blindness might vary in different countries, and this was confirmed by the results. The survey indeed demonstrates that various scales and systems have been developed to describe the extent of vision loss and define the condition of lacking visual perception. Likewise, to determine which groups of people may need special assistance because of their visual disabilities, various government jurisdictions have formulated different and complex definitions of legal blindness and other forms of visual impairment. In other words reliable or comparable figures were extremely difficult to obtain. It proved equally difficult to establish to what extent the phenomenon is increasing in each country. As for the specific laws and regulations pertaining to AD, here too there is much variation, ranging from countries that have no regulations to countries where very precise guidelines exist for some sectors (e.g. public television in Flanders) to countries that are known to have full legislation (e.g. the UK; even though this country is not represented directly in ADLAB, data have been collected concerning the situation therein). Yet in spite of this heterogeneous situation, each country appears to have made AD-specific arrangements at least with national broadcasters, which shows that a minimal degree of awareness of the need for accessible media products already exists.

Chapter 3 focuses on the quantity of AD available in each country for TV, DVD, museums, theatre, opera and ballet, cinema, and special events. Results show a somewhat comparable situation in all the countries involved in the research in that public television typically offers AD services to some extent while the private market is less interested in making its audio-visual productions accessible. In fact, in all the countries in question private TV broadcasters do not seem to be interested in offering regular services for the visually impaired audience, and although some DVDs including AD tracks exist in all countries under consideration, their number is quite limited. In a few countries, what is not

supplied by TV and DVDs is made up for by special institutions catering for the needs of the target group, e.g. Italy (cf. Cooperativa Sociale Senza Barriere Onlus) and Spain (cf. O.N.C.E.). The situation in museums seems consistently positive: a reasonable amount of AD is offered in museums and in some cases museums are even fully accessible. Furthermore, when ADs specifically designed for the blind are not available, other services can often be exploited by the blind e.g. audio guides, guided tours.

As far as theatre, opera and ballet are concerned, it appears that in all participating countries, mostly occasional one-off ADs are offered with the exception of Spain (and also the UK). Each charted country also makes a number of different special live events accessible through AD.

The situation at the cinema is also open to improvement: in the surveyed countries there are almost no cinemas offering AD on a regular basis. Special screenings with AD, all linked to single initiatives, cooperation with film festivals, film archives, and one-off projects, take place intermittently everywhere but the frequency of such screenings is far from sufficient, slight differences between countries notwithstanding.

Chapter 4 is devoted to research and training across Europe. Overall, our surveys show that in most countries (with the exception of Germany) research and educational training are closely linked, as both are typically carried out in universities. Therefore, it is difficult to tackle each area separately. Unfortunately, the findings also show that initiatives on this front remain limited.

Generally speaking, it is safe to say that AD is only very rarely part of the curriculum at higher education level. Sometimes training is offered in seminars taught by professionals. However, in most of the countries in our survey universities are involved in research in the AD sector, even if there are no specific professorships or chairs for AD experts. Some training is, however, available in-house within companies involved in producing AD commercially.

Chapter 5 of the report charts user-centered reception studies in AD gathering information about user needs and preferences. Reception studies have entered audiovisual translation studies only recently, and therefore they have been exploited for AD only occasionally even though they are generating increasing interest. Poland, for example, has been active in conducting reception studies using questionnaires to ascertain to what extent AD helps blind film-goers, what type of AD is preferred, what kind of voice is preferred, etc. and more detailed questions regarding the use of evaluative adjectives, the naming of colours, and the timing of the naming of characters. Spain has conducted comparative reception studies involving blind and visually impaired participants and subjects with no visual impairment.

Chapter 5 also investigates the position of national and local blind associations regarding audio description, especially in terms of their lobbying power in promoting the practice. The Report includes a list of organizations for each charted country with very varied and detailed answers provided by each. The trend seems to confirm the great importance ascribed to AD by each and every organization, even though their involvement and lobbying power varies and more cooperation is called for. It is generally felt that AD needs to be promoted more both among users and among decision-makers responsible for cultural events, and that politicians must be made aware of the limited access stakeholders have to AD today.

Chapter 6 contains the conclusions to the report and **Chapter 7** recommendations for

future action. These are followed by a bibliographical reference section.

2 Basic Information

2.1 Definitions of blind and visually impaired people in Europe

The ADLAB project focusses on the primary target group of the blind and visually impaired, but it is important to remember at the outset that audio description can be extremely useful for other sectors of the population such as the mentally impaired, new immigrants, children, and those following audiovisual material while multi-tasking.

2.1.1 United Kingdom

As regards the primary target group, the first set of data dealt with here, defining degrees of blindness, refers to the United Kingdom and, although the UK has no ADLAB partner, they are included in some detail because of the importance of the UK in the audio description field. Similarly data for the UK is included in all the subsections below.

According to the Future Sight Loss UK report (2009 – for the decade 2010-2020; see <http://www.rnib.org.uk/aboutus/Research/reports/prevention/Pages/fsluk1.aspx>) “partial sight and blindness can be broadly defined as a limitation in one or more functions of the eye or visual system, most commonly impairment of visual acuity (sharpness or clarity of vision), visual fields (the ability to detect objects on either side or above or below the direction in which the person is looking), contrast sensitivity and colour vision. Normal vision is recorded as 20/20 in Imperial measures (6/6 in metric), which means that a person can see at 20 feet (6 metres) what a person with normal vision can see at 20 feet. Degrees of partial sight and blindness are measured similarly, where the first number in the measure is the furthest distance at which the person can clearly see an object and the second number is the distance at which a person with normal vision could see the same object. For example, 20/40 vision means that the person can clearly see at 20 feet (but not more) an object that a person with normal vision could see at 40 feet (but not more)”. Thus the different groups of blind and partially sighted people are defined as follows.

Blindness (severe sight loss) is defined as best-corrected visual acuity of <math><6/60</math> in the better-seeing eye.

Partial sight is defined as best-corrected visual acuity of <math><6/12</math> to $6/60$ in the better-seeing eye, and is categorised as: mild sight loss – best-corrected visual acuity of <math><6/12</math> but better than or equal to $6/18$; and moderate sight loss – best-corrected visual acuity of <math><6/18</math> but better than or equal to $6/60$.

Sight loss is defined as partial sight or blindness in the better-seeing eye.
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As regards the member countries of ADLAB, similar definitions are available and are presented below.

2.1.2 Belgium (Flanders)

Belgium (Flanders) has no well-delineated definitions of the concepts visual impairment or blindness and usually refers to the classification of the World Health Organisation (also used by the European Blind Union):¹

Light visual defect: the upper level is 3/10; vision is at least 20/200 and it is possible to read big print.
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Severe visual defect: visual sharpness lies between 1/20 and 1/10.

Partial blindness: when one has binocular visual sharpness from 1/5 to 1/20 and a range of vision between 50° and 10°. The counting of fingers can be done from a distance of 3m and as far as reading is concerned one can read letters the size of headlines.
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Near total blindness: one can perceive light; sometimes masses, volumes or shapes can be perceived, fingers can be counted at 1m or less, hand movements at 5m, binocular visual sharpness is 1/50 or less and the range of vision is 5°.
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Total blindness. There is no visual perception whatsoever.

2.1.3 Germany

For Germany the definitions are provided by the German Association for the blind and visually impaired “Deutscher Blinden- und Sehbehindertenverband e.V.” (DBSV) Berlin.²

Someone is visually impaired , if he/she sees with his/her better seeing eye, even with glasses or contact lenses, not more than 30 % of what someone with normal sight can see.

Someone is severely visually impaired , if he/she sees with his/her better seeing eye, even with glasses or contact lenses, not more than 5 % of what someone with normal sight can see.

Someone is blind , if he/she sees with his/her better seeing eye, even with glasses or contact lenses, not more than 2 % of what someone with normal sight can see.
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2.1.4 Italy

In Italy the established classification of visual impairments is also based on that of the World Health Organisation (WHO) but identifies three different levels of partial sightedness and two levels of blindness;³ slight partial sightedness, quite serious partial sightedness, seriously partial sightedness, partial blindness and total blindness (Poli 2009: 16-17; Marchesi 2012, ch. 3).

Slight partial sightedness: those who have residual vision no higher than 3/10 in both eyes or in the better eye, also with possible correction; those whose binocular perimetric residual is below 60%.

Quite serious partial sightedness: those who have residual vision no higher than 2/10 in both eyes or in the better eye, also with possible correction; those whose binocular ⁴ perimetric residual is below 50%.

Serious partial sightedness: those who have residual vision no higher than 1/10 in both eyes or in the better eye, also with possible correction; those whose binocular perimetric residual is below 30%.
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Partial blindness: those who have residual vision no higher than 1/20 in both eyes or in

² <http://www.dbsv.org/infothek/zahlen-und-fakten/?style=0%29>

³ The terms ‘cieco’ and ‘non vedente’ in Italian are synonyms and either can be used; See www.nonvedenti.it; Saccomani 1998; De Mauro 1999; Sabatini Coletti 2006.

⁴ Binocular perimetric residue is the residual vision regarding the area of visual field simultaneously seen by both eyes (known as ‘area of binocular vision’). It is ‘perimetric’ in that that area is seen by the perimetral parts of the retinas of both eyes.

¹ Source: <http://kimbols.be/categorie/ooginfo/blind-slechtziend>

the better eye, also with possible correction; those whose binocular perimetric residual is below 10%.
Total blindness: those afflicted by total lack of vision in both eyes; those who have the merest perception of shadow and light in both eyes or in the better eye; those whose binocular perimetric residual is below 3%.

2.1.5 Poland and Portugal

In Poland, the most frequent categories regarding the blind include: congenitally blind, blind, partially sighted. A blind person is a person with visual acuity of not more than 0.1 of full acuity (expressed as 1) or with a visual field of not more than 30 degrees (whereas the full visual field is 180 degrees).

Portugal also follows the WHO (1972)⁵ definition of blindness and low vision.

2.1.6 Spain

In the case of Spain the typology of impairment/sight pathology can be best retrieved from the resources of the O.N.C.E. (Organización Nacional de Ciegos Españoles) [Spanish National Organization for the Blind], where they are divided into two main groups:

<i>ceguera</i> [blindness] – to be understood as the absolute lack of vision or only the ability to perceive light;
<i>deficiencia visual</i> [visual impairment] – in the case of people who maintain a certain percentage of residual vision with the use of necessary optical and electronic devices.

Concluding Remark

The importance of these definitions for the practice of audio description is to be seen in the fact that the various groupings put together account for a very large number of people, indicating the potentially vast demand (and market) that exists for audio described products.

2.2 Figures on blind and visually impaired people

It has proved to be difficult for each of the participating countries to obtain current, public, reliable figures about blind and visually impaired people. Some figures, provided by various national institutions and the national organisations for the blind and visually impaired, are available but they are not always complete or updated. Thus, only data that appeared trustworthy (because they were supplied by reputable institutions - see below) have been used in order to make projections and estimates. This is as close as one can hope to get to the real figures. A further difficulty, as mentioned above, is that the figures rely on different parameters used to define the different conditions of partial sightedness or blindness.

It is particularly worth noting that in every participant country the biggest and growing group of blind and visually impaired people is that of the 65+ age group. The most important cause of this phenomenon is, of course, the aging of European populations. This is also problematic because this group is not usually included in official figures for the legally blind or visually impaired.

⁵ See <http://www.who.int/blindness/Change%20the%20Definition%20of%20Blindness.pdf> for new 2010 WHO definitions.

The following table 1 provides an overview of the numbers of blind and visually impaired citizens in a representative number of European countries:

Table 1: Blind and visually impaired citizens in Europe

COUNTRY	POPUL.	OFFICIAL ESTIMATES	OTHER SOURCE
Belgium	11m	WHO: 13,200 blind	Ongeeziene Rijkdom (brochure edited by organisations for the blind in Belgium): 220,000 have low vision
Germany	81.8m	WHO: 1.2m visually impaired	according to the national organisation for the blind (DBSV): 150,000 blind 500,000 visually impaired ⁶
Italy	60.8m	ISTAT (state facility, 2010): 362,000 blind, approx. 1.5m visually impaired (estimated) ⁷	
Poland	38.2m	Poland Survey (state facilities, 2009): 1.4m people with some degree of visual impairment	Other sources' estimates: 350,000-500,000 visually impaired.
Portugal	10.7m	CENSOS (state facilities) 2001: 165,000 visually impaired	ACAPO (national organisation for the blind): between 130,000 and 140,000 blind
Spain	46.2m	Observatorio Estatal de la Discapacidad 2008 (state facility): 47,500 blind, 750,000 visually impaired ⁸	
UK	56 m	Access Economics: mild sight loss: 1,138,792 moderate sight loss 440,268 severe sight loss 217,930	

The first point to strike the observer of these statistics is that the figures are proportionally similar in all the countries investigated. The second point is that the numbers involved are compelling; the potential demand for audio described products can be seen in the simple mathematics. One point, however, that is not immediately apparent from a viewing of these statistics is that the numbers of the blind and visually impaired are skewed by age factors. Indeed, a large increase in the number of European citizens with sight loss is expected in the future, due to the ageing population and an increase in the incidence of causes such as diabetes and obesity. Projections in the UK, for instance, suggest that the number of blind and visually impaired people will rise to 2,250,000 by 2020 and to 4,000,000 by 2050. The age factor is also important, as will be seen later, in the preferred choices of older people when it comes to audio described media. It is to be expected, for example, that television will remain the most sought after channel and that demand for audio described TV programmes will increase, rather than visits to outside events such as theatre performances, cinema showings or museum exhibitions.

⁶ See <http://www.dbsv.org/infothek/zahlen-und-fakten/>

⁷ See <http://www.istat.it/en/>

⁸ See <http://www.observatoriodeladiscapacidad.es/informacion/estadistica/20110331/selecci%C3%B3n-de-indicadores-sobre-la-situaci%C3%B3n-de-las-personas-con-discap.>

It is also instructive to mention at this point the deaf and hard of hearing, another large section of the population with specific needs as regards access to audiovisual products. They are actually much more numerous than the blind and visually impaired, but their requirements in terms of specially subtitled products is increasingly considered in parallel with the audio description needs of the blind. The provision of subtitles and audio description as a package, along with extras such as trailers and explanatory videos, makes for economies in providing a range of facilities for, for example, DVDs, though television, cinema, museums, etc. could also benefit from the provision of a complete suite of such features.

2.3 Specific laws and regulations concerning AD

Regarding the special laws and regulations on AD there is wide variation. Some countries have provisions regulating specific forms of accessibility, others have only sector-driven regulations (e.g. for public broadcasting). Every country seems to have regulations on AD as provided by the national broadcasters. The E.U. country that is far ahead of all the others in terms of legislation is the United Kingdom (see section 4).

2.3.1 Belgium (Flemish region)

At the moment there are no laws specifically concerning AD. The so-called participation decree (2008) provides subsidies for institutions, associations or projects that render culture, sports and youth work more accessible for specific target groups⁹. This decree does not impose any obligations or quotas.

The Flemish government has made provisions only for accessibility in general, and made renewable agreements (*Beheersovereenkomst* or *BO*) with the Flemish Public Broadcasting Company (VRT). AD and spoken subtitling were first mentioned in the BO of 2007-2011, as part of what is called 'the core commitment of the VRT concerning content'.¹⁰

In the current agreement, which runs until 2016, the broadcaster's plans and obligations have been grouped under the label 'accessibility'. The task has also been specified: "Audio-description: the VRT will broadcast one high-quality fiction series a year". The first series was broadcast from January to April 2012 (cf. 2.1 Flanders) and is to be followed by the second series shortly. Thus VRT receives government funding for AD. Any other AD production, for example live events, has to be funded on an ad hoc basis by local councils or sponsors.

For commercial broadcasters there are no legal requirements at the moment.

Captions for the deaf and hard of hearing, having a longer tradition, are more readily available. VRT, the national broadcaster, is now obliged by contract to provide all news programmes and 95% of most other productions with open and closed subtitles by 2014. If AD could be included in this development as a 'package', everyone would benefit.

Subtitles on DVD, however, are often just intralingual subtitles in the same language as the spoken channel.

2.3.2 Germany

In Germany, which is a federal country, different laws (*Gleichstellungsgesetze*) exist, and they form the legal basis regulating blind and visually impaired people's use of the media. For example, in Bavaria, AD is listed explicitly with reference to the law on barrier-free media.¹¹

⁹ <http://www.cjsm.Vlaanderen.be/participatiedecreet>; Within this framework the non-profit organisation Intro vzw, for example, has received subsidies with which they offer, among other things, the audio description of live events.

¹⁰ It stated that "For the duration of the agreement the VRT will put maximum effort into making its content accessible for the visually and the hearing impaired.": For the visually impaired, the VRT will adapt its websites following the requirements of the Blind Surfer label; Through research the VRT will look into user-friendly ways to make its television programmes accessible for the visually impaired. If these are shown to be practically, technically and financially practicable, Ketnet [the channel for youngsters] will set up the first experiments.

¹¹ Bayerisches Gesetz zur Gleichstellung von Behinderten: Art. 14, Barrierefreie Medien. 1 Der Bayerische Rundfunk und die Bayerische Landeszentrale für neue Medien sollen ferner die Ziele aus Art. 1 bei ihren Planungen und Maßnahmen beachten. 2 Hierzu sollen insbesondere Fernsehprogramme untertitelt sowie mit Bildbeschreibungen für blinde, erblindete und sehbehinderte Menschen versehen werden. 3 Diejenigen Träger öffentlicher Gewalt im Sinn des Art. 9 Abs. 1 Satz 1, denen kommunikationspolitische Angelegenheiten übertragen sind, sollen darauf hinwirken, dass auch der von Art. 9 Abs. 1 Satz 1 nicht erfasste öffentlich-rechtliche Rundfunk im Rahmen der technischen, finanziellen, wirtschaftlichen und verwaltungsorganisatorischen Möglichkeiten die in Art. 1 genannten Ziele aktiv fördert und bei der Planung von Maßnahmen beachtet.

The public media is an entity that falls under the jurisdiction of the federal states. However, each state also falls under the "Rundfunkstaatsvertrag" (State broadcasting treaty) recently supplemented by the "Rundfunkänderungsstaatsvertrag" (State broadcasting modification treaty) which is an umbrella treaty having the force of law.

The latest important regulation for German public TV concerning AD is the "12. Rundfunkänderungsstaatsvertrag"¹² (2009) which states that, in addition to the already existing commitment, more barrier-free broadcasts should henceforth be offered. It is hoped that this will lead to voluntary self-commitment.

The combination of the 2009 treaty with the "14. Rundfunkänderungsstaatsvertrag"¹³ (which decrees that also disabled people will have to pay a fee for the public media from 2013 onwards) could provide the finance required for an increase in the number of AD broadcasts in the future.

2.3.3 Italy

Legal provisions for blind and visually impaired people are the following:

ACT 28th AUGUST 1997, no. 284 on "Measures for the prevention of blindness and for the visual rehabilitation and social and occupational integration of the plurihandicapped blind". This states that the 'Regioni' have the autonomy to institute specific centres or services aimed at the development of educational, training and work activities for those people "deprived of sight who have other sensorial, motor, intellectual and symbolic-relational disabilities".

Audio description is mentioned by the service contract between the Italian radio and television service and the Ministry of Communications (article 8 of the contract between the Italian radio and television service and the Ministry of Communications, 2007-2009), and forms part of the planning catering for disabled persons, more specifically aiming to promote access to multimedial products for visually impaired people (cf. 2.1 Italy).

2.3.4 Poland

The amended Polish Radio and Television Act defines audio description and stipulates that TV broadcasters are obliged to offer at least 10% of their programmes (counted on a quarterly basis) with accessibility. This includes AD, SDHH and sign language.

2.3.5 Portugal

Art. 38, line 3¹⁴ of the revised Television Law (2011) mentions AD as one of the "obligations" that free-to-air channels (RTP/SIC & TVI) have to comply with. Such obligations are set by a ruling body (ERC – Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social) in "pluriannual plans" that take into account the state of the art in service provision.

Previous to the law itself a Deliberation (Deliberação 5/OUT-TV/2009) had ruled in the

¹² <http://www.telemedicus.info/article/1355-Aktueller-Rundfunkstaatsvertrag-in-der-Fassung-des-12.-RAESTV.html>

¹³ <http://www.telemedicus.info/article/1789-JMSTV-14.-Rundfunkaenderungsstaatsvertrag-veroeffentlicht.html>

¹⁴ Artigo 34.º Obrigações gerais dos operadores. A Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social define, ouvidos o Instituto Nacional para a Reabilitação, as demais entidades representativas das pessoas com deficiência, os operadores de televisão e os operadores de serviços audiovisuais a pedido, com base num plano plurianual que preveja o seu cumprimento gradual, e tendo em conta as condições técnicas e de mercado em cada momento por ela verificadas, o conjunto de obrigações relativas à acessibilidade dos serviços de programas televisivos e dos serviços audiovisuais a pedido por pessoas com necessidades especiais, nomeadamente, e atenta a natureza do serviço, o recurso à legendagem, à interpretação por meio de língua gestual, à audiodescrição ou a outras técnicas que se revelem adequadas, bem como à disponibilidade de menus de navegação facilmente compreensíveis.

same direction. ERC drew up the pluriannual plan for 2009-2011 but the private channels (TVI&SIC) did not comply, appealed to court and won their case. So none of the legal decisions have actually been put into effect.

2.3.6 Spain

As far as AD legislation goes, in Spain there are many legislative provisions and other initiatives¹⁵ concerning audiovisual accessibility. According to the list provided by CESYA (Spanish Centre for Subtitling and Audio Description):¹⁶

- *Ley general audiovisual* (Ley 7/2010, March 31st):
According to this law, by December 31st 2013, public TV channels should provide 10 hours of audio description though this may include repetitions of the same programme. This is very limited compared to the availability of subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (HOH), though the 100% provision of subtitles is not all designed for the HOH.
- *Norma UNE 153.020 Audiodescripción para personas con discapacidad visual. Requisitos para la audiodescripción y elaboración de audioguías* (January 26th, 2005):
This norm constitutes a set of best practices for audio description script creation and production.
- *I Plan nacional de accesibilidad (2004-2012)*:
This initiative campaigns among others for a broad promotion of subtitling and audio description, as well as for vocational training for audio describers.

2.3.7 United Kingdom

In the **UK**, the Broadcasting Act of 1996 required a minimum proportion of digital television programmes (roughly 10%) to be audio described, The Communications Act of 2003 reintroduced the 10% threshold for the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, S4C and subscription television services such as BSkyB, to be achieved by 2010 (Channel 5 by 2008).

In 2004 the regulatory body Ofcom (Office of Communications), with the publishing of the 'Code on Television Access Services' also recommended the 10% threshold to be reached within five years.

In 2008 153 members of Parliament signed an Early Day Motion, a petition in favour of extended use of AD.

In 2009 Ofcom opened a consultation on raising AD to 20% of programming, passing the decision to government.

In 2010 the Minister for Broadcasting issued a statement supporting the motion for 20% coverage.

(see RNIB website <http://www.rnib.org.uk/>)

The UK figure of 20% is currently the highest in Europe. One of the reasons for this is that the UK was one of the first countries to go completely digital offering AD as broadcast mixed where the user activates the option. Secondly a large number of films, childrens' programmes, documentaries, etc. has been accumulated over the years and are often repeated. Thirdly the UK has an efficacious lobby for the blind community particularly

¹⁵ See also: Ley de fomento y promoción de la cinematografía y el sector audiovisual (BOE, July 10th 2001); Ley del Cine (BOE, December 29th 2007); Ley de igualdad de oportunidades, No discriminación y accesibilidad universal de las personas con discapacidad (Ley 51/2003, December 2nd); Ley de medidas urgentes para el impulso de la televisión digital (Ley 10/2005, June 14th); Ley de Financiación de la Corporación de Radio y Televisión Española (Ley 8/2009, August 28th).

¹⁶ Centro Español de Subtitulado y Audiodescripción <http://www.cesya.es/es/normativa/legislacion>.

through the work of the RNIB. Some producers, such as BSkyB, voluntarily exceed the legal quota.

2.3.8 Other European Union countries

In France Law n. 102, 2005 required television channels with more than 2.5% of the audience to guarantee access for the deaf and hard of hearing by 2010. This measure was extended to the blind and visually impaired by the 'Plan Handicap Visuel 2008-2011'.

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive of the European Union monitors the situation regarding accessibility to audiovisual products on the part of the blind and visually impaired and provides information on all E.U. countries. It is interesting to note that legal provisions and obligations on both public and private broadcasters to provide audio description were, at least until very recently, absent in Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Slovenia. Ireland has legislation in place to guarantee 1% of public broadcasts and Sweden also has legislation in this regard.

It is also interesting to note that the situation regarding the provision of subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) is somewhat better all over the continent. There are still some countries with no legal provisions or obligations regarding SDH (Cyprus, Estonia, Slovenia) but elsewhere the picture is more encouraging. For example in the Czech Republic, public broadcasters are obliged to provide 70% of programmes with subtitles, and in the Netherlands 100%. German public TV channels subtitle 50% of programmes and private channels also provide some subtitling. Where obligations do not exist, or are not enforced, broadcasters voluntarily provide subtitles (Cyprus, Slovenia). However, it must be pointed out that in many cases the subtitles provided are not specifically made for the deaf and hard of hearing but are for the general audience, for example in Slovenia.

Table 2: AD legislation in Europe

COUNTRY	With AD legislation	Without AD legislation
Belgium		x
Germany	x federal	
Italy	x	
Poland	x	
Portugal	X but not in effect	
Spain	x	
UK	x	
France	x	
Cyprus		x
Czech Republic		x
Denmark		x
Estonia		x
Finland		x
Latvia		x
Luxembourg		x
Slovenia		x
Ireland	x	
Sweden	x	

3 Availability of AD in the participating countries

3.1 Television

"Research shows that blind persons watch lots of television, or would certainly like to do so. In order to benefit fully from viewing, they need aural inputs to help them understand who the characters are and the social and physical context of the dialogue." Making Television Accessible, ITU, 2011.

Most of the participating countries are at the moment in the middle of the digital switchover, which brings new opportunities to the broadcasting and receiving of AD. The advent of digital television means that no special equipment is necessary to receive AD. The equipment to receive TV via cable, satellite or terrestrial antenna is sufficient though set top boxes may be required.

The television sector and audiovisual translation traditions differ greatly in the participating countries. To make broadcasts available to the (sighted) public Germany, Italy and Spain usually resort to dubbing, Portugal and Flanders use subtitles (even though documentaries are now voiced over in Portugal and a combination of subtitles with off-screen translated commentaries is used in Flanders for the same products), and in Poland foreign language programmes are translated by means of voice-over. The exceptions are children's programmes, especially for a pre-school target audience: to make these accessible, Flanders, Portugal and Poland also use dubbing.

Clearly, AD presents additional challenges for countries using subtitling and voice-over to translate foreign language programmes since any AD added to such programmes (say in Portuguese) would have to function with dialogues in a different language (say English). Dubbing countries are not faced with this problem. Consequently it does not come as a surprise that Portugal, Flanders and Poland focus on native broadcasts with AD for the time being, whereas Germany, Spain and Italy can provide AD with foreign language feature films more easily, fitting the AD in between the dubbed dialogues.

When comparing the different countries it is striking to notice that at present only public broadcasters provide AD whereas the private broadcsaters seem to be less interested (see Table 3). Financial reasons may lie at the bottom of this, although there are some exceptions: some private broadcasters, e.g. in Flanders, receive subsidies that are meant to promote accessibility. As long as there is no legislation in place, however, there is no way to force accessibility. The very rare exceptions (offering only very little AD) are the private companies TVN in Poland and Disney Channel in Spain.

Table 3: Broadcasters offering AD in Europe

	Public broadcaster	Private broadcaster
Flanders	VRT	-
Germany	BR, Arte, NDR, WDR, MDR, ZDF, 3Sat, HR, RBB, SWR	-
Italy	RAI 1,2,3	-
Poland	TVP	TVN
Portugal	RTP	-
Spain	RTVE, Televisión Pública Andalucía, TP de Catalunya	Disney Channel Antena 3 Televisión
The UK	BBC	BSkyB, ITV, Ch. 4, S4C

3.1.1 Italy

Among the participating countries, **Italy**, which has provided AD for 7 years now, is the one which today offers the larger amount of hours of AD broadcasts (Diaz Cintas, Orero, & Remael, 2007; Marchesi 2012). But the programmes are usually quite old feature films and reruns of TV dramas and series. Reception of AD is also difficult: RAI broadcasts through an interactive double audio channel (receivable via radio or computer), but not all receivers are able to pick up the frequencies and the audio quality is often poor. To solve this problem the audio descriptions can also be heard as live-stream on Internet (available on http://www2.relazioniesterne.rai.it/it/audiodesc_4). The fact remains that the user still has to synchronise two different sets: TV and radio or TV and computer.

3.1.2 Germany

Germany is the country which has provided AD regularly for the longest period of time (since 1993) and through a large number of (public) broadcasters. According to a rough estimate on the basis of dates of AD-broadcasts, nowadays the average broadcast per week is about 20-30 films (app. 93,600- 140,400 min per year) (roughly 5 are premieres, and the others are re-runs), and there are approximately 2000 broadcasts of different kind and length. The figure refers to the list which is updated regularly by one of the biggest AD-providers in Germany (i.e., Hörfilm e.V.; cf. <http://www.hoerfilmev.de/> and the Hörfilm Datenbank), but they can make no claim to completeness. The AD broadcasts in Germany are mostly feature films (and mostly local productions with foreign programmes accounting for 10-20%), the very popular crime series “Tatort”, some documentaries, but no sports or other live-TV-events (note, however, that ORF in Austria broadcasts a lot of AD sport and other live TV events, which can sometimes be received in Germany). AD can be accessed digitally only via DVB-S (satellite TV) or DVB-C (digital cable TV), and at times via DVB-T (terrestrial digital television). The digital switchover however is complete.

AD is funded by the producing television companies and the DVD companies, sometimes in collaboration. Some AD on DVD is financed by sponsors. In fact no films are produced already with AD, and no ADs are translated.

3.1.3 Spain

AD on **Spanish** TV also has a fairly long history and nowadays a wide distribution. It started in 1995 with several AD projects on TV (cf. Utray et al., 2009 for an overview). From 1999 onwards TV3 (Catalan public TV channel) began to broadcast the series “Plats

Bruts” and films with AD, from 2007 the series “La Gran Pellicula” was added, and every Friday a film is made accessible. In 2008 children’s cartoons were added to these broadcasts, and from 2010 the daily telenovela “La Riera” (Cf. TVC Audio Description Evaluation Report, point 3, Spain 2°). In 2002, the public broadcaster RTVE, together with BRB International and O.N.C.E., produced the series Nicolás, a cartoon for children which took the requirements of AD into account from the production stage and which was aired with open AD, and it continues to broadcast films with AD in the Cine de Barrio cycle on an irregular basis (TV-special for Spanish films; cf. <http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/cine-de-barrio/>). In 2010, the total number of hours of audio description on Spanish TV was 881 (52,860 min H.V.) (Informe de Accesibilidad, 2009, 2010) public TV (i.e., RTVE, Canal Sur Televisión, Canal Sur 2 Andalucía and TP de Catalunya) provided 868 hours of AD, and private channels (Antena 3 Televisión and Disney Channel) offer 13. Another private broadcaster TVC has now surpassed public TV provision. It also offers home productions with AD whereas most TV programming involves foreign products. Several Hollywood films are audio described each year for DVD and many more for television. Also in Spain no locally or foreign produced films come already with AD. The digital switchover is complete.

3.1.4 Portugal

In **Portugal** only one public broadcaster (RTP) offers AD on free-to-air television with a very limited supply. Initially only Portuguese classics (feature films) were audio described, though now audio description is offered on Portuguese series as well. On average, people are getting 45-60 mins AD per week via a radio channel (RDP/Antena 1 – medium wave). A few dozen feature films were audio described by Lusomundo (Gallery /TVcine2) but the service was suspended and at present they are only offering reruns, which the user can receive via a set top box. It is expected that a significant change is about to take place due to the current digital switch-over. Private broadcasters (TVI and SIC) are now addressing the issue of providing AD on some of their programmes, a condition that is demanded by Deliberation 5/OUT-TV/2009 that makes it mandatory that all broadcasters provide at least one and a half hours of AD per week, although this has not been enforced (see section 2.3.5).

3.1.5 Poland

In **Poland** TVP (the public broadcaster) had until recently screened two series with AD. Previously, before the introduction of digital terrestrial television, these series (along with a few others) were available with AD via an online player. Currently, TVP offers episodes of Polish TV series (2-3 weekly for 2-3 hours) and Polish films (1 or 2 weekly for 5-6 hours) with AD to meet the statutory target (approaching 10%) (see 1.2 Poland). The additional soundtrack can be accessed via DVB-T (terrestrial digital television), via DVB-S (satellite TV) or DVB-C (digital cable TV). The same films and TV series with AD are available online (<http://www.tvp.pl/dostepnosc/audiodeskrypcja>; the files are password protected and the password can be easily obtained from the Polish Association of the Blind. TVN is the first and the only Polish private broadcaster offering AD – currently for four locally produced talk shows (Szymańska, 2011).

3.1.6 Belgium (Flanders)

In Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain television is a federal matter. **Belgium** is a special case where TV is the responsibility of the communities. Therefore the Flemish, the French-speaking and the German-speaking communities have their own media policy. In the following we will focus on the situation in Flanders.

Flanders has only just started AD, being professionalised only in 2008. Before, spoken subtitling was (and still is) available via teletext page T889 (but it is not comparable to AD with a proper speaker and mixing, and is only a purely technical solution). In the next four years the public broadcaster VRT will produce one popular crime series a year with AD (Cf. 1.2. ACM). Existing programmes (mainly feature films) with AD that are available on the market will also be bought and broadcast. The AD will be maintained in re-runs of the programme. To receive AD on digital television a set top box is necessary (digitalisation has reached about 75% of homes). However, the programmes are also broadcast with AD for everybody to watch and hear on Saturday at noon on the main channel one. The system adopted is broadcast mix to make accessibility as easy as possible and in order to ensure a high quality output. A new soundtrack is prepared in postproduction (original mix with AD) and the audience can easily swap between the two audio tracks. It must be pointed out that the alternative receiver mix is also versatile and viewer-friendly. The AD productions are also added to the DVD for the commercial market. AD is free of charge, be it on DVD, on the VOD-platform, or live broadcast. VRT is researching whether the upcoming web player can also supply AD and has also negotiated with the providers to make AD as accessible as possible. For example, one of the providers has made it possible to change the setting of the set top box in order to make it swap automatically to the AD-audio tracks when programmes with AD are broadcast. For Flanders about 10,000 viewers have changed the set-up of their set top box since the start of broadcasting with AD in January 2012. This gives an idea of the use of AD for TV broadcasts. The AD programmes are also available on VOD (Video on Demand) for €2,00/episode. It should be possible to receive Flemish TV with AD in the Netherlands, as a good example of resource sharing, but for the moment technical problems are preventing this. Data on the UK and France will be offered to complete the picture.

3.1.7 The United Kingdom, France and Denmark

- **The UK**

In **the UK** there are five national BBC channels, a number of national private channels (ITV1, ITV2, Channel 4, etc.) and a large number of regional TV services, both public and private. The digital revolution is in full swing with some areas already devoid of analogue TV. Cable and satellite services exist, for example BSKYB. Foreign language films are not frequently shown, but when they are, they are almost invariably subtitled.

On TV, the kind of programmes principally audio described remain films and television series, though documentaries also figure. A quick look at ITVs list of audio described programmes for the weekend of 17th-18th March, 2012, shows films (Live and Let Die, A Clockwork Orange, Mermaids) and TV series (Midsomer Murders, Benidorm, Scott and Bailey). A more comprehensive list, however, for the single day 17th April, 2012 shows a more eclectic choice:

BBC ONE (1)

- 2:25am Scientific Documentary: To Boldly Go
- 1:45pm Drama: Doctors: Pass Notes
- 7:30pm Soap: EastEnders
- 8:00pm Drama: Holby City: Ribbons
- 9:00pm Drama: The Syndicate

BBC TWO (2)

- 6:20am Childrens: Timmy Time: Squeaky Timmy
- 8:00am Childrens: Bear Behaving Badly: Two Bears and a Baby
- 8:50am Childrens: Little Charley Bear: Charley and Bellarina on Ice
- 1:00pm Nature: Nature's Top 40
- 8:00pm Cookery: Hairy Bikers' Bake-ation
- 9:00pm History Documentary: Meet the Romans .
- 11:20pm History Documentary: The 70s: Get it on 70-72

ITV 1 (3)

- 7:00pm Soap: Emmerdale

Channel 4 (4)

- 6:15am Childrens: The Hoobs: Llama Farmer
 - 6:40am Childrens: The Hoobs: Record Breaker
 - 4:00pm Game Show: Deal or No Deal
 - 6:00pm Comedy: The Simpsons: Grift of the Magi
 - 6:30pm Soap: Hollyoaks
 - 9:00pm Documentary: The Undateables
 - 11:10pm Drama: Desperate Housewives: She Needs Me
- #### **Channel 5 (5)**
- 1:15pm Soap: Home and Away
 - 1:45pm Soap: Neighbours
 - 5:30pm Soap: Neighbours
 - 6:00pm Soap: Home and Away
 - 9:00pm Drama: CSI: Crime Scene Investigation: Freaks and Geeks
 - 10:00pm Drama: CSI: New York: Holding Cell
 - 11:00pm Drama: CSI: Miami: Show Stopper
 - 11:55pm Drama: CSI: Crime Scene Investigation

Sports broadcasts are also being increasingly described.

According to the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) (2010) "Sky, BBC, Channel 4 and ITV have all committed to audio describing 20 per cent of their programming. So for some years now, hundreds of hours of audio described programming has been provided every month on digital television, cable (eg. Virgin) or satellite. AD is received on digital television, on cable (set up box) and by satellite.

- **France**

Information is also provided for **France**, which has private and public broadcasters, including the European culture channel ARTE (an international joint-venture) and TV5, a global TV network of French language programming. The programmes are accessible through cable, satellite, digital terrestrial, ADSL, VDSL. The broadcasts include dubbed and subtitled original versions, some with closed caption subtitling for the hearing impaired and audio description. Programmes include movies, television films, documentaries, documentary series, fictional television series, short movies, children's programmes. About 600 programmes exist in total. The average broadcast per week is 2 premieres and 3 re-runs.

- **Denmark**

Mention should also be made of Denmark, long a front-runner in the subtitling field. In fact spoken/audio subtitles are used extensively as a complement to AD in making foreign language products accessible. Speech synthesis is also used in this process particularly

for news programmes and documentaries.

Table 4: Amount of AD provided on TV in the participating countries

	AD provided since	Mins per year
Flanders	2012	780
Germany	1993	93.600-140.400
Italy	1997	218.400
Poland	2011	15,000
Portugal	2009	3120
Spain	1995	accurate figures not available

3.2 DVDs/BluRays

As far as DVD and BluRay productions are concerned, the good news is that in each participating country AD is typically not included in special editions (with the one exception of the Dutch Zwartbroek DVD), but it is part of the regular discs for sale on the market.

Having said that, the figures are disappointing. They suggest that distributors may be interested in the production of AD, as part of an international market embracing other services of post-production (captions, subtitling, dubbing, etc.), but that in many European countries this has not yet become reality. The commercial interest in adding AD tracks to their discs has yet to become clear in many cases, as opposed to the UK, and the English-speaking world in general, where the idea of the suite of services is well established. The provision of AD in Hollywood products, for example, is practically 100%. This is reflected in the fact that the audio describing of original English-language cinema productions and its insertion in DVDs is beginning to go hand-in-hand, especially in the USA and Australia. This cannot be said to be the case yet either with European-language productions or with the translated versions of English-language films.

As a result, each surveyed country can only count a few commercial DVDs and BluRays with AD on offer (with Germany as the exception, see below). Table 5 below summarises this situation. The production of commercial DVDs with AD started very late in some countries (considering that DVDs entered the market at the end of the 1990s), i.e. in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Poland and Flanders, which appears to be slowly catching up. In many cases, the films with AD that are made available are comparatively old (here Flanders is the exception). The findings for the Italian market are of special interest: the antipiracy policy makes it impossible for whoever might wish to create an audio description of a new film to work on its digital copy (Scuccimarra, 2010). The ones that are on the market now seem to be initiated by special interest groups or sound studios which have developed a personal interest and not by the distributors. This is also the case for some of the DVDs in the other countries.

Table 5: Number of DVDs and BluRays available in Europe

	Commercially available DVDs and Blu Rays	Special DVDs which cannot be accessed by the general public
Flanders	13 + 5	-
Germany	130 + 20-30	-
Italy	5 + 2	388
Poland	21	-
Portugal	3	-
Spain	37	-
The UK	500+	-
France	70	-

3.2.1 Germany

The exception is **Germany**. DVD production with AD started in 1999 – though VHS-production started earlier in 1993 and went on to 2001, but there are only 6 cassettes available today – while there are now about 130 DVDs with AD available; the newest films are also available on BluRay (<http://www.hoerfilmev.de>). The genre is mostly fiction, only 4

documentaries have been audio described. Normally only the film is described, but almost every DVD contains spoken information on how to access the film, and 3 DVDs come with spoken menus. The relatively large number of DVDs available with AD is mainly due to the efforts of BayerischeRundfunk, which is often co-producer of (cinema-)feature films and therefore able to get the necessary material to produce an AD just in time for the DVD release. Also the Deutsche Hörfilm gGmbH (subsidiary of the DBSV, the national organisation for the blind) manages to produce some DVDs.

3.2.2 Spain and Italy

In **Spain** and **Italy** two different initiatives provide the same answer to the lack of initiative of the distributors. These initiatives produce AD-films themselves, but for the blind and visually impaired only, and not for the commercial market.

In **Italy** the “Cooperativa Sociale Senza Barriere Onlus” in Scurelle had a catalogue of 388 titles by the end of 2011 covering AD-films produced from January 2004 to December 2011. These have been distributed on a hire basis to Italian blind and visually impaired persons since 2004. They are distributed on audio CD (not DVD), they do not have the DVD structure, and thus have no pictures, and do not include audio described special contents.

In **Spain** the beginnings of recorded AD are to be traced back to 1987 when the O.N.C.E. recorded the AD of the film *El último tango en París* (dir. B. Bertolucci 1972) on a VHS tape (Díaz Cintas, 2010). O.N.C.E. has a service called AUDESC for its members with over 500 films with AD which can be borrowed by them but cannot be accessed by the general public (or non-members) or distributed commercially. The first commercial DVD with audio description to be released in **Spain** was the TV3 series *Plats Bruts* (2003) in Catalan. Some Spanish film directors are including ADs in their DVD authoring. The commercial project *Cine Accesible* (Accessible Cinema), a joint initiative of Fundación Orange (mobile phone company) and Navarra de Cine, needs to be mentioned because it is responsible for having adapted a number of feature films and over 150 short movies produced or directed in Spain between 2003 and 2009. So far the catalogue of the productions adapted within the project contains 37 films (Cf. <http://www.cineaccesible.com/secciones/catalogodvd.html>). Since 2007 there are releases with audio navigation.

Italy has far fewer discs to buy on the market: three DVDs (published in 2008, 2010, 2011) and two BluRay (The King’s Speech and J. Edgar, 2012).

3.2.3 Portugal

Portugal has three DVDs (family movies) released in 2007, 2008 and 2010: *Nativity Story /O Nascimento de Cristo* (Catherine Hardwicke 2006/AD 2007); *Atrás das Nuvens* (Jorge Queiroga 2007/AD 2008); *Artic Tale / Uma Aventura no Ártico* (Adam Ravetch & Sarah Robertson 2007 /AD 2010).

3.2.4 Poland

Poland has 21 commercially available DVDs on offer (<http://www.audiodeskrypcja.org.pl/index.php/baza-wydan-dvd-z-audiodeskrypcja>), which comprise some feature films (mainly Polish language films) and 2 seasons of TV series.

The first DVD with AD (*Katyń*, directed by Andrzej Wajda) was published in 2008. The rest have been released between 2008 and 2011. What is special about the Polish situation is that at least 8 of the DVDs are documentaries published by the Polish Forest Directorate, the Institute of National Remembrance or another institution that does not specialise in releasing DVDs.

3.2.5 Belgium (Flanders)

In **Flanders**, or rather, as far as DVDs published in the Dutch language are concerned, there are 13 commercial DVDs with audio description available (including 5 BluRays). All have been released since 2009 (two are children’s cartoons, the others mostly drama). Only 4 of these are Flemish productions, the others are films from the Netherlands.

3.2.6 United Kingdom

In **the UK** more than 500 DVDs are now available with AD ranging from the latest box-office successes to old favourites. A list of titles can be found on the RNIB website. The site <odeondirect> has a search facility for rentable DVDs with AD. Looking at the latest films offered on DVD and Blu-Ray with audio description, it can be seen that there is no predilection for particular genres. The only consideration seems to be that some films are not suitable for audio describing. Furthermore, AD is not necessarily on every copy. Audio described films have the following wording in the information box: Audio Described English/Audio Description/Audio Descriptive track/AD logo. In terms of total accessibility, a number of DVDs have talking menus. Otherwise you must activate the on-screen menu though many DVD players have an audio button on the remote control.

3.2.7 France

Finally, **France** has about 70 audio described DVDs/BluRays, the majority French films. The AD is on every copy.

3.3 Museums

Compared to TV, DVD and cinema, AD in museums is used by a much smaller number of people, and it constitutes quite a small part of the market, though the provision of the service perhaps shows the greatest percentage increase. In order to discuss the issue of audio description in museums, one has to take into account a number of characteristics that make this sort of AD different from that found in film (or TV) and live performances (theatre, opera, concerts, etc.). Whereas in the first, AD needs to cohabit with the original text (and in particular with speech, music and sound effects) in a subordinated manner (AD is introduced after the original text is produced), in museums audio description is specifically made as an original text, with extra-textual references and with time constraints of a different nature. It seldom has to "fit in" with a pre-existing audiovisual text; it can become a simple or a complex multimedia/multimodal whole, particularly when composition and style lead to the creation of complex audio-guides that may contain one or more elements – the description itself, a narrative with facts, comments (with a personal interpretation/comment), music and sound effects, among others. This allows us to advance the hypothesis that AD in museums needs a specific framework, even if it shares a number of points with AD in other contexts.

In order to understand the present situation of AD in museums, a number of parameters need to be defined.

In terms of mode of presentation, several options are available: 1) live unscripted/scripted AD – when a curator, museum worker or tourist/museum guide describes (freely or with a pre-established script) an exhibit/exhibition for the benefit of an individual/group of blind patrons; 2) recorded AD – made available through an electronic device/mobile technology such as audio-guide, multimedia guide, ipod, etc.

In terms of intended receiver, we have 1) audio description (exclusively) – the audio description is directed toward the specific target group (blind or visually impaired visitors) and it is made available as a solution for patrons "with special needs"; 2) integrated audio description – the AD is integrated in the general audio guide as part of the information provided to anybody using it.

Several types of AD in museums are available based on their primary aims. These include 1) Instructions - Description of how to use the equipment; 2) Function - Information about the venue (where to find the toilets, shops, cafeteria, etc.); 3) Direction - Guiding people through the museum, giving directions on how to move inside the building; 4) Information - Information/Description of the exhibition proper /exhibits; 5) Exploration - Guidance on how to explore an exhibit through touch; and 6) Hybrid - a mix of any of the above.

Further categorizations are based on the AD text format/type, which generate Descriptions, Narrations, Commentaries, Dialogue, or any mix of the above.

ADs in museums can be multimodal and combine words and speech, sound effects and music.

Any approach to understanding what is on offer in different contexts would require a detailed account of the approach which is taken towards audio description. An audioguide that might not be presented as "audio description" for blind patrons, may, in practice, offer

AD in less conventional forms. Furthermore, many museums which do not have technology based audio guides with AD may offer live tours with hands on experiences and live audio description, or audio description may simply be embedded in "normal" (live or recorded) museum guides. Considering the issue of AD in museums one has to emphasize that, in the following, reference is only made to special guided (audio-) tours for blind and visually impaired people. In recent years audio-guides for sighted people have become very popular in the museum sector, but for blind and visually impaired people they are only of limited help, as they normally do not describe the exhibit itself.

3.3.1 Belgium (Flanders)

In terms of its population it is striking how many museums **Belgium** has that are permanently able to provide specific adjustments for the visually impaired, including tours with audio description. However, most of these museums only offer live tours with extra verbal description of all or certain parts of the museum. These descriptions are sometimes scripted, but very often they are unscripted or *ad hoc* whenever a blind or visually impaired visitor makes him/herself known upon arrival. Only one out of the 16 museums in Belgium that offer special adjustments has a special (recorded) audio-guide that is intended for blind and visually impaired visitors only.¹⁷ The special tours for the blind and visually impaired are often multisensory and include feeling and smelling as well (scale models, relief drawings). The 16 museums that offer AD are museums of Fine Arts and cultural history museums. The art and history museum in Brussels has special exhibits for the blind and visually impaired that are changed every two years. Usually the museums have highly specialized tours of the permanent collection or specific parts of the museum (e.g. with specially trained tour guides, sometimes in collaboration with a blind or visually impaired guide, special tours that make use of all the other senses, and websites with the "Anysurfer" label, "Guidelines of Art Education for the Blind"). However, these tours are usually only directed at blind and visually impaired audiences (there is no integrated audio description) and they are usually only available on request (often for groups and/or on certain days of the week only). Some museums offer special orientational help, (the way to the museum is explained on the website, there are special knobs on stairs and steps, special markings on the floor, brochures in Braille are available, etc). Besides museums there are also some temporary exhibitions for which tours are organized for the blind and visually impaired.¹⁸ These initiatives often come from Flemish organisations for the blind (like VeBeS VZW).

3.3.2 Spain

Spain also offers a lot of AD in the museum sector and also at other tourist places of interest. The first museum in Spain which was made completely accessible for the blind and visually impaired people opened in 1992. It was the ONCE *Museo Tifológico* (Madrid, Centro Bibliográfico y Cultural de la ONCE; cf. <http://museo.once.es/home.cfm>). This is a museum specially designed for the blind, and it was not adapted, but created from its beginnings as a "Museum for the Blind". It has an accessible elevator with buttons in Braille, orientation relief plans for each floor, special colour illumination, and textile

¹⁷ Apiculture Museum, Diamond Museum, Prison Museum, Huis van Alijn, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, exhibitions in the Museum for the Blind, Museum of Musical Instruments, Magritte Museum, MuseumM, Museum of Old Techniques, Museum of Fine Arts Ghent, Museum Plantin-Moretus, St. Janshospitaal damme, Sportionium.

¹⁸ Körperwelten 4 (2009) In cooperation with Zicht op Cultuur en Licht en Liefde (Views on Culture; Light and Love), nocturnes were organized during which statues could also be touched. The walk laid out for the target group was quite varied and allowed the visitors to touch plastinates. All obstacles were eliminated from the tour and for each plastinate there was a guide who described the bodies verbally (Tutanchamon 2010).

systems, as well as pamphlets in Braille and electronic guides. In 2004 audio-guides were introduced. A two-level (basic for the tactile exploration of the works and advanced for the information on the epoch, architectural style, etc.) audio-guide is available for the showroom of 36 scale models of (inter)national monuments.

According to the survey called *Guía de monumentos, museos y puntos de interés turístico Accesibles para Todos* prepared by PREDIF (2010) (<http://www.spain.info/es/turismo-accesible/>), apart from guided visits for non-disabled visitors, tours adapted to the needs of the visually impaired are organized in approx. 25 museums of all kinds, one planetarium (Pamplona), two aquariums (Roquetas de Mar, Donostia- San Sebastian), 8 cathedrals and approx. 30 other places of interest, such as botanical gardens, monuments, monasteries etc.

3.3.3 Italy

In **Italy**, while there are provisions which are useful for the blind and visually impaired, they are not always specifically designed with only the blind in mind. However, some measures, which are available in many museums, do address the needs of the blind (signs, captions and guides in Braille, reproductions of works of art which at times are accompanied by simultaneous live description, tactile paths, relief maps, etc.). The local sections of the Italian national 'Unione Ciechi' are often involved in creating some means of access for the blind. As in other countries, most museums provide audio-guides for the general public (e.g. Il Bargello in Florence, the Vatican Museum in Rome, Museo Egizio, Turin), though some kind of payment is usually requested or the patron downloads to his/her own device. Some museums provide specialized guided tours for the visually impaired, other museums provide the above-mentioned audio-guides to be listened to in complete autonomy, and others provide the possibility to follow a tactile tour of the exhibits and listen simultaneously to a description on CD. None of these, strictly speaking, are audio descriptions, as pointed out by Vera Arma of CulturAibile (www.culturabile.it). The types of museums in question are principally Art Galleries, but also most Museums of Archeology and many History museums. An exhaustive list of accessible museums for the blind is available on the website of the Biblioteca Italiana per i Ciechi <http://www.bibciechi.it/enti/musei/archeologici.htm>. In terms of temporary exhibitions, provision for the visually impaired is mostly limited to art events, in particular paintings and sculpture.

3.3.4 Portugal

In **Portugal** the Museu Nacional do Azulejo in Lisbon (Portuguese tile museum; www.culturabile.it), and the Museu da Comunidade Concelhia da Batalha (Local community museum; www.museubatalha.com/) offer technology based recorded audio-guides with audio description of various exhibits in their permanent exhibition. These two museums are the only ones which have deliberately included AD in their audio-guides. They do not have special guides for blind patrons. They have taken the inclusive approach. The AD is introduced within the general audio-guide and is used by any visitor, regardless of whether they may need AD or not. It is common practice in Portugal for museum personnel to provide *ad hoc* audio description whenever blind visitors make themselves known upon arrival or request special tours beforehand. Most of such special tours are previously arranged with the educational department. Interestingly, a number of experimental audio described audio-guides has been offered and tested, mainly by researchers, using recorded material that is made available through the visitor's personal mobile technology: mobile phones, mp3 and mp4s, ipods, or online: among them, the

multisensory painting exhibition ("Olha por Mim"; <http://bailalopes.wordpress.com/projecto-olha-por-mim/>.) has toured the country; a photo exhibition ("The Gift"; <http://visual-audio.org/noticias.php>) was audio described, and the SENTI(N)DO exhibition (<http://movimentodeexpressaofotografica.wordpress.com/2010/11/14/exposicao-sentindo/>), produced by professional audio describers, has also travelled to various venues. At the time of writing, a new virtual exhibition is being prepared ("40 anos da Biblioteca Sonora do Porto"; <http://www.cm-porto.pt/gen.pl?p=stories&op=view&fokey=cmp.stories/18360>) to be made available exclusively online.

3.3.5 Poland

In **Poland** various recorded audio described guided tours prepared by foundations as part of their accessibility projects are available. One example is "Beyond Silence and Darkness", a project organised by Fundacja Dzieciom "Zdążyć z Pomocą". This foundation also prepared the recorded AD for three museums in Warsaw (the Warsaw Uprising Museum, the Royal Castle, an exhibition in the National Museum). Other museums that also offer guided tours with recorded AD are the Military Museum in Białystok (Białystok: the seat of the Audiodescription Foundation), the Nature Museum in Drozdowo (the guided tour can be downloaded or a visually impaired visitor is offered an mp3 player with the recording) and the Raclawice Panorama in Wrocław.

3.3.6 Germany

Germany's AD offer for museums is rather limited. Considering the country's population and its financial prosperity, it is surprising that even large museums do not offer AD as a matter of course (e.g. the "Deutsche Museum" in Munich does not). For some museums in the big cities there are special AD tours but most have to be requested. The best overview of what is available AD-wise is provided on the internet for Berlin; for Munich, by contrast, what is on offer remains unclear. Patrons would have to check nearly every museum separately. The situation is similar for Hamburg.

United Kingdom

Hundreds of museums and galleries in **the UK** offer some kind of assistance to the blind and visually impaired. Resources for the blind and partially-sighted include the traditional verbal descriptions, audio tours, descriptive tours and touch tours. Some of the most famous London museums provide guides trained to deliver audio descriptive tours for visitors with visual impairments; "art through words" sessions, each beginning with a description of the painting and ending with a visit to the National Gallery. Just to mention a particular case, at the Old Royal Naval College "an intricately handcrafted rug has been specifically designed to help blind and partially sighted visitors experience Sir James Thornhill's magnificent painted hall ceiling. In tailored sessions, the fascinating characters of the ceiling are brought to life through different materials, textures and tales. Touch objects, large print and tactile books are available in a number of galleries. In general, facilities are provided in art galleries, city museums, stately homes, and for temporary exhibitions. For example, audio descriptions are available at almost all exhibitions but **they are not always audio descriptions created ad hoc for the blind**; they are often audio-guides providing competent information relating to each single exhibit. Guided tours with human guides, which can be for individuals or for groups, are on offer in some venues; sometimes they are free or cost a small sum.

The data reported for museums are wide-ranging but far from complete. This particular AD type would benefit from independent analyses.

3.4 Theatre/ Opera/ Ballet

In all the participating countries one-off AD performances are offered, but this offer only covers a fraction of the different types of performances and the number of performances open to the general public, even in the case of Spain, which appears to be ahead of the other participating countries as regards live AD. Generally speaking, the blind and visually impaired audience is very limited in its choice when it comes to the performing arts.

Given the novelty of AD in this domain, it is often found that blind people do not attend live performances unless they are specifically invited to do so and/or offered the ticket. This may be the case because there is no tradition and people are not used to having AD. AD providers in Portugal have stated that they realise people need a "learning period" and this finding is echoed by other countries, e.g. Flanders. It is also true that the ageing population, whose members make up a disproportionate number of the blind and visually impaired, tend not to venture out for their entertainment but to watch television at home.

The technical solutions used for the AD of live performances fall broadly into two categories: wireless radio technology or infrared reception through the use of wireless headphones or earphones, similar to the systems usually used for interpreting. The advantage of this wireless radio technology is that it can offer barrier-free accessibility not only to the theatre but also to the foyer, for instance, providing a pre-recorded description of the theatre facilities (e.g. café, wardrobes, bathrooms) besides the theatre itself. Few theatres have their own AD technology (see below for details for each of the countries covered) and must rely on companies or subsidised providers for the equipment.

Where the AD reader/narrator sits depends on the venue. Either (s)he is seated in a (movable) interpreting booth placed at the back of the theatre or in the direction room overlooking the theatre and the stage from behind a window. If such spaces are not available the describer sits in a separate room and watches the performance via monitors.

A comparison of the state of affairs in the various participating countries yielded the following results.

3.4.1 Spain

Leading by a clear margin with eight theatres offering AD for theatre plays and one theatre offering permanent opera performances with AD, **Spain** is the country which provides most AD for live performances for its blind and visually impaired inhabitants. On the basis of the AUDESC audio description system developed by the O.N.C.E. in 1994, AD has been introduced to both professional and amateur theaters (Hernández-Bartolomé & Mendiluce-Cabrera, 2004). In 2001 the O.N.C.E. and INAEM (Instituto Nacional de las Artes Escénicas y Musicales) signed an agreement, as a result of which three major theatres in Madrid (Teatro de la Comedia, María Guerrero, and La Zarzuela) enjoyed the permanent installation of the equipment. A large number of other initiatives, both one-offs and permanent, are operative both in Madrid and in Barcelona, and they pertain to theatre and also opera, in which "El Gran Teatre del Liceu" in Barcelona is very active. Like Madrid, the Barcelona opera house uses the FIGARO system with earpieces.

3.4.2 Belgium (Flanders)

Flanders has at least one theatre offering permanent AD, with two in the planning stage. There is no AD equipment available in any of the Flemish theatres; a subsidised non-profit organisation, INTRO, provides this. The performances that are described go from classical theatre performances to stand-up comedy, circus, monologues, etc. In Flanders, AD is only offered for theatrical performances, not for opera or ballet. The performances usually take place in theatres, though sometimes AD is available for performances at open air festivals and at temporary locations. Limited subsidies for AD are available. The performance with AD is usually preceded by an introduction of about 10 minutes, which is read aloud (live or via a system with headphones). This introduction contains background information about the performance, credits, a description of the theatre, the costumes and the setting, practical information about the duration of the performance, etc. This introduction can be combined with a touch-tour on stage and an introduction of the actors, who then usually present themselves. In some cases introductions are made available in advance on the website or via mail (in mp3 format). At the moment this is only the case in Toneelhuis, Antwerp. In exceptional cases it is possible that the AD is limited to an introduction, for instance for concerts or monologues where there may not be room for AD and the dialogues/music speak for themselves.

3.4.3 Germany

It is striking that **Germany**, given its size, offers relatively little live AD. At the moment it has two theatres offering opera and music permanently with AD. In Germany theatrical performances with AD very much depend on the commitment of Hörfilm e.V. (www.hoerfilmev.de) which organised almost every one-off performance with AD in Germany. Typically, before the start of each play the blind and visually impaired are allowed to go on stage and touch the stage design and costumes. Like in Flanders, a brief introduction, focusing mostly on the appearance of the characters in the play and the stage design is provided. As far as technique is concerned, the guidePort system by Sennheiser is often used, i.e. wireless radio technology.

3.4.4 Italy

Italy seems specialized in opera performances with AD, which are offered in three venues permanently (Messina, Napoli, Macerata). Italy is the only country that also works with pre-recorded clips in the live-performance sector. In Italy mostly opera performances are offered with AD. 'L'Ente Teatro' in Messina, with the collaboration of the Italian Association for the Blind (Unione Italiana Ciechi) has provided AD since 2006. This theatre project has now transferred from Messina to a highly prestigious musical venue, that is the 'San Carlo' in Naples. Also in Messina the 'Teatro San Carlo' provides permanent AD seats and gives the blind audience a device to listen to AD. The 'Associazione Arena Sferisterio' in collaboration with the Italian Association for the Blind and with the University of Macerata has provided a special description service at the arena in Macerata for blind and visually impaired opera lovers since 2009. This is a pilot initiative at national level which has provided 2 performances a year since then. One-off performances were offered in the "Teatro No-Limits" project, on the occasion of the fiftieth edition of the "Plautus Festival 2011". In Forlì-Cesena AD was proposed in the theatre (ancient drama) and in the 'Teatro Vittorio Emanuele' in Messina in March 2009 AD was provided for the show "Pipo il Breve". CulturAbile audio described a ballet for the first time on 5th December 2010 for the First National Day of Art 'senza barriere' in Rome). In Italy too, the technique used is wi-fi or infrared, through the use of wireless headphones or earphones.

3.4.5 Portugal

In **Portugal** (commercial/formal) live audio description is a recent phenomenon even though ACAPO, the national blind association has had the odd performance with "commentaries". Worth mentioning is, first of all, the unscripted AD delivered at a modern dance performance – O Depois – at Teatro São Luiz in Lisbon in December 2010. In that particular case, interpreting equipment was used. In that same month another live performance in Leiria – Gala da Inclusão – was also described using the same equipment and technique. The dance and music performances were accompanied by visits backstage and onstage, touch tours of the stage sets, AD of the theatre and overall setting. In addition, Braille sheets with information were provided. In Portugal, a group of actors have set up an audio description company that provides AD for plays. Their first audio described performance took place in September 2009, and since then they have offered AD in odd performances throughout the country. There are no theatres/concert halls or other live performance venues with permanent audio description equipment. Whenever a performance is to be audio described, the audio description team has to hire and take all the equipment needed.

3.4.6 Poland

In **Poland** theatre performances are organised sporadically as part of accessibility projects implemented by various foundations. No theatre offers regular performances with AD. But one-off projects are quite numerous e.g. "Beyond Silence and Darkness" organised by Fundacja Dzieciom "Zdążyć z Pomocą" which organised 26 theatre performances in 2008-2011 in 9 Polish theatres (mainly Warsaw based).

3.4.7 United Kingdom

In **the UK** more than one hundred theatres offer audio description, and many provide pre-performance notes giving a description of the set, scenery, props, etc. These can be visited on stage before the performance in some cases. Visually impaired theatre-goers are equipped with a headset or earpiece before the performance and the description is relayed from a soundproof booth where the describer sits to the headset/ear-piece via an infrared or radio sound system.

3.4.8 Other countries

France, Sweden, Lithuania and Finland also have AD in theatres.

Apart from the traditional cultural events referred to above (theatre, opera, etc.), every participating country has a number of special events where AD takes place and that cannot be easily categorised. Though it is now too early to get meaningful data, it is worthwhile to mention that special events typically include religious events, all types of performance, sports events, cycle tours, ceremonies, etc.. As regards **the UK**, Lord's Cricket ground provides AD, as do many Premier League football stadiums and some rugby grounds. RNIB planned audio description facilities for the 2012 London Olympics.

3.5 Cinema

In none of the participating countries is there a cinema offering AD on a regular basis, a state of affairs that stands in stark contrast with the situation in the U.K. (see below). Although special screenings with AD, for example at festivals or during yearly events, are welcome, an ideal situation would see the blind and visually impaired attending the normal cinema together with sighted friends in a fully integrated manner. The countries getting closest to this aim of inclusion are **Spain** and, in this specific case, the Dutch speaking areas of **the Netherlands and the Flemish region** (data provided by the same-language team from **Flanders**). In the other evaluated countries AD offered in cinemas depends on single initiatives, cooperation with film festivals and very often on one-off-projects.

By way of comparison, in none of the participating countries are intralingual subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing provided. Films are subtitled interlingually, particularly in Portugal and Belgium, but not specifically SDHH. However, in Germany, things are changing rapidly. A new government regulation (the "Filmförderfonds") will from now on force anyone demanding public funding for shooting a film in Germany to offer "barrierfree" versions, that is with subtitles and AD. Both will be in cinemas soon.

3.5.1 The Netherland and Flanders

In the **Netherlands** there are now 6 cinemas with the relevant technical facilities where AD is sometimes provided. Another 6 cinemas are in the planning stage, but, due to the fact that there are so few films available with AD in Dutch, these venues only offer AD once in a while and at a specific moment (for example when a new movie with AD is released).

As special events, recently (2011 and 2012) two one-off screenings with AD took place with open AD (hearing AD through the loudspeaker).

In **Flanders** the "Cinemathek", an art-house cinema that is part of Het Koninklijke Belgische Filmarchief (Royal Belgian Film Archive) in Brussels offers open AD on a regular basis. It shows one film with AD on a monthly basis, alternating Dutch and French. In addition, there have been some one-off initiatives with closed description using headphones.

3.5.2 Spain

In **Spain** Cine Accesible (see point 2.2. Spain) has provided monthly AD projections in various cinemas across Spain since 2007. The blind and visually impaired patrons receive their own wireless headphone sets at the entrance to the cinema (closed AD). Films provided with AD are aired in commercial cinemas (cf. <http://www.cineaccesible.com/secciones/calendario.html>). Another initiative comes from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and its recent cycle of accessible cinema. This is a joint initiative of the Facultat de Traducció i Interpretació, UAB's research group Caiac and the Unitat d'Estudiants i de Cultura; the first film was shown at the university campus in 2011 (for more details: <http://www.etc.uab.cat/serveis-interior.php?cat=2&servei=169&subapartat=742>).

3.5.3 Germany

In **Germany**, no regular cinema offers AD. From 2006 to 2008 there used to be the promising "DTS Projekt", in which BR, technicians, cinemas and distributors worked together and wanted to advance AD in cinemas in order to achieve a situation similar to that of the Netherlands, but after a few films were shown in several cinemas throughout Germany, the project died for various reasons. Nowadays besides some initiatives which offer some "special screenings" on a regular basis, there have been a few one-off projects

which started in 2002. Regular monthly screenings (October-May) with open AD organised by the BBSB (Bavarian association for the blind and visually impaired) with the support of Elmar Dosch, the "AD commissioner" (Hörfilmbeauftragter) of BBSB, have been held since 2002 in the "Hörfilmkino", a conference room in the BBSB with a beamer. Here mostly BR-films or BR-co-productions (cinema releases, AD produced for the DVD) are shown. A few comparable projects and some film festivals provide blind audiences with ADs.

3.5.4 Italy

In **Italy** cinemas do not offer AD either. According to Marchesi (2012), there is a lack of legislative provision to provide incentives for cinemas to set up permanent facilities for the use of the blind. As a result, screenings with AD are a rare event, and up to now the projection of audio described films is available only at some sporadic initiatives and special cinema screenings and some film festivals. The first in Italy to provide this service was the "Cinema Senza Barriere" Festival organised at the Oberdan in Milan beginning in 2005. Since then the province of Milan has produced a continuous cultural service for the visually impaired with the showing, every year, of more than 20 audio described films for the blind and visually impaired. A number of other projects organize events sporadically.

3.5.5 Poland

In **Poland** in 2006 the first screening of an audio described film took place in Białystok, the seat of the Audiodescription Foundation. In 2008-2011 the "Beyond Silence and Darkness" project organised by Fundacja Dzieciom "Zdążyć z Pomocą" prepared the AD for 22 films and organised screenings that attracted 3000 blind viewers in Polish cinemas (mainly Warsaw based). Nowadays there are two film festivals offering AD screenings: The Polish Film Festival in Gdynia provides approx. 2-3 films with closed AD (read live by the audio describer, sound via simultaneous interpreting equipment), and at the HumanDOC Festival of Documentaries in Warsaw 2011 films with AD were shown, with films also available online. Various special screenings (sometimes monthly) are organised by foundations as part of various accessibility projects (approx. 30 per year).

3.5.6 Portugal

In **Portugal** special screenings were held in various cinemas throughout the country when the three DVDs with Portuguese AD were released (2007/2008/2010). The films were shown with open AD. Other than this, no AD is provided in cinemas.

3.5.7 United Kingdom

In **the UK**, as RNIB research shows, more than 300 mainstream cinemas have facilities to screen the latest films with audio description. "Many cinemas are equipped with a system that delivers audio description through a headset, which is provided when you collect your ticket. The audio description runs each time the film is shown and is undetectable to anyone not wearing a headset. This means you can attend any screening of films with audio description and sit anywhere in the auditorium." Examples can be retrieved from the Yourlocalcinema website (<http://www.yourlocalcinema.com/ad.films.html>). Most audio described films in the UK are mainstream, popular choices.

3.5.8 General comment

The Czech republic and Sweden are other examples of countries with some AD in

cinemas, but the general picture is very variegated across Europe, ranging from those countries with a wide network of availability (UK, Spain) to others with as yet no access all.

4 Research and training in AD

4.1 Research

As regards research in AD, which still remains rather limited overall, in most countries it is the universities that are involved. They are usually in contact with the industry but most research is done in departments of translation, linguistics and cognitive psychology. Up to now, there are no professorships or chairs in AD.

In **Belgium** most of the research is conducted within the translation and interpretation departments of universities, more specifically within the AVT modules, especially at Artesis University College. There are some BA and MA theses (from Artesis University College & University College Ghent), and there are some more important research projects at Artesis University College.¹⁹ Theses include, amongst others, a PhD by Gert Vercauteren 'A narratological approach to content selection in Audio Description' and a 1.5 year pilot project supervised by Aline Remael on "Audio Description in Dutch: initiating corpus research in a new form of multimodal translation". In addition, Aline Remael is carrying out research into the use of AD in combination with audio-subtitling for multi-lingual Dutch films, and into the integration of sound and sound effects into the AD script. Collaborative research with the public channel VRT (on audio-subtitling and the incorporation of AD into the production process of TV series) is in the planning stage.

Another promising area of research is that relating to the translation of ADs between languages. A preliminary case study by Remael and Vercauteren (2010) indicates that some conditions may have to be fulfilled. Their case study was based on the Dutch translations of two English audio descriptions commissioned by the Dutch sound studio Sound Focus (www.soundfocus.nl) at a time when no Dutch AD scriptwriters were available. Remael and Vercauteren (2010: 156-157) demonstrated that AD has quite a few features in common with other forms of audiovisual translation, such as subtitling, in spite of obvious differences. A summary of the preliminary findings of their analyses of the Dutch AD translations of *Black Book* (Verhoeven 2006) and *Blind* (van den Dop 2007) is given below, with some additional comments. The researchers came across three potentially problematic areas. Firstly, the analysis of the translations revealed that AD scripts have features that distinguish them from other texts and that translators need to be aware of these. One particularly striking and recurring phenomenon was the expression of temporal simultaneity which in English was taken care of through the use of specific conjunctions (e.g. "as") in combination with ING-forms, but required a myriad of alternative solutions in Dutch. Another phenomenon, also common to other types of translation, was the translation of extralinguistic cultural references (as defined by Pedersen (2011): cultural items described in the AD that might not be obvious for the new target audience of the translated version and therefore needed to be adapted in the translation.

Issues identified as potentially related to AD scriptwriting traditions involved changes in the length of sentences, with the Dutch AD tending to opt for shorter sentences and including

¹⁹ PhD Gert Vercauteren: "A Narratological Approach to Content Selection in Audio Description" (Artesis/UA), supervisor Aline Remael; PhD Nina Reviers: "Aanzet tot corpusanalyse van audio-beschrijvingen in het Nederlands (Artesis/UA) (corpus analysis of Dutch audio descriptions), supervisor Aline Remael; Both PhD's are co-supervised by specialists from the University of Antwerp, from the Departments of Literature & Film and the Department of Linguistics respectively. Research into AD and AST, as well as AD and the description of sound by Aline Remael (Artesis University College), with the collaboration of members of TransMedia Benelux, Nevero (AD production) and Sound Focus (sound techniques and recording of AD), see: <http://www.transmediabenelux.com>. This research group, a subsidiary of the TransMedia Research Group has also published guidelines for live AD on its website (in Dutch), http://www.transmediabenelux.com/images/AD-Kwaliteitsgarantie_DEF.pdf.

less information than the English AD. It is not clear to what extent this was the result of a conscious decision on the part of the translators or the translation brief they were given, or the result of intuitive preferences.

Issues identified as related to AD quality identified problematic passages in the English source AD in the sense that important information was sometimes not included in the description. In some instances these shortcomings were noticed by the Dutch translators (both experienced audiovisual translators, if not audio-describers), in some instances they were not, meaning that the shortcomings were then carried over into the Dutch version.

The findings suggest that more insight into the specificities of AD scripts would allow universities to tailor their courses to the needs of AD script translators, identifying the problems they are likely to encounter. Some of these problems will be issues that any (audiovisual) translator may have to deal with, others will be specific to AD. The type of research required here is corpus research into the linguistic and intersemiotic functioning of AD scripts.

Research in **Germany** is in its infancy. Up to now a few (unpublished) MA theses have been written in the field of cultural studies and social education²⁰. Ulla Fix published a study in 2005 which analysed AD from the point of view of several different academic disciplines (Fix, 2005). Research at PhD level has just begun with Bernd Benecke's thesis on the relationship between Audio description and Translation, to be published in 2012.²¹

In **Italy** there are three departments where research takes place: the Department of Linguistic, Literary and Philological Research, at the University of Macerata, with Elena Di Giovanni in charge; the Dipartimento di Scienze Giuridiche, del Linguaggio dell'interpretazione e della traduzione dell'Università di Trieste, with Christopher Taylor and Elisa Perego in charge; the Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza", Facoltà di Sociologia (Cattedra di Sociologia della Comunicazione). Theses include Dell'Orto Mariapaola, "Tradurre per l'accessibilità: audiodescrizione e audio introduzione del film *Slumdog Millionaire*" and Marchesi Vera, "Audio descrizione: la traduzione al servizio dell'accessibilità".

In **Poland** there are four university departments which do research in AD: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Department of Translation Studies; Warsaw University, Institute of Applied Linguistics, Department of Translation Studies; Jagiellonian University in Kraków, UNESCO Chair in Translation Studies and Intercultural Communication; Catholic University of Lublin, Centre for Adapting Educational Methods for Students with Visual Impairment.

In **Portugal** three research projects are under way, one an MA on AD in the cinema at the Universidade do Porto, Faculdade de Letras/Curso de Mestrado em Tradução, Secondly, a PhD on audio description in museums is being conducted at the Universidade de Aveiro, Departamento de Línguas e Culturas, and a Post-Doc on the same subject is being followed jointly by Imperial College London and the Universidade de Aveiro.

Two research groups in Portugal – iACT – Inclusion and Accessibility in Action (www.iact.ipleiria.pt), at the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, and Transmedia Portugal

²⁰ And in a few other fields, but more information could not be found.

²¹ http://www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2007_Proceedings/2007_Benecke_Bernd.pdf. It is supervised by Professor Gerzymisch of Saarland University, Saarbrücken and is based on the RASU-Project (Research on Audio Description at Saarland University) at that University, directed by Gerzymisch and her team together with Benecke

(portugal.transmediaresearchgroup.com) are committed to the study and development of audio description both as a research subject and as a service in contexts such as the media, live performances and education. Joselia Neves has published the book 'Imagens que se Ouvem' on guidelines for AD.

In **Spain**, most of the university research has come out of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, conducted by teams and individuals headed by Pilar Orero (but see below for university courses in AD offered elsewhere). For example ongoing PhD theses on the subject include:

- La (re)construcción de los personajes fílmicos en la audiodescipción [English translation: The (re)construction of film characters in the audio description];
- L'audiodescipció de pel·lícules en català [English translation: Film Audio Description in Catalan];
- Audiodescipció i tecnologies: estudi sobre la semiautomatització de la traducció i locució d'audiodescipcions [Audio description and technologies: study on the semi-automatization of AD translation and voicing]
- A completed MA thesis bears the title 'Tecnologies per a l'audiodescipció. Estudi sobre l'aplicació de la traducció automàtica i la síntesi de parla a l'AD en castellà [English translation: Technologies for AD: study on the application of machine translation and speech synthesis to Spanish AD]

General Comment

Audio description is a young discipline from the research angle, though attracting ever more adherents from the world of audiovisual studies. **The UK** is active on the research front as well as on the practical side of AD. Work is carried out in various universities – e.g., Surrey, Roehampton, Imperial College, though there are no professorships or chairs especially for audio description. Sabine Braun's 2008 article *Audio Description Research: State of the Art and Beyond* gave a clear picture of the research areas being pursued. Braun herself, at the University of Surrey, has looked at AD from a discourse perspective finding useful sources outside the strictly AD field, ranging from Umberto Eco (2003) on how words render the visual, to Christiane Nord (1988) on text analysis to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) on multimodality. Still in the UK, Hyks (2005) has worked on translation questions in AD, Holland (2009) on AD in the theatre, York (2007) on opera, Salway (2007) on corpus-related studies, Pettit et al (1996) on experiments involving blind end-users, and Diaz-Cintas of Imperial College (often together with ADLAB members Remael and Orero, eg. 2007) on various aspects of the discipline. More recently, work on AD introductions is being carried out at Roehampton and Goldsmith's College by Romero Fresco and Fryer.

It is interesting to note that the researchers cited in Braun's article are to be found in most of the articles on AD written both before and after 2008. This points to the validity of this body of work but also to the relatively limited amount of material available still today. As well as the themes mentioned above covered by scholars in the UK, research has been carried out in Europe on access issues (Diaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007), translation (Bourne & Hurtado, 2007), and in particular intersensorial or intersemiotic translation (De Coster & Mühlies, 2007; Benecke, 2007; Braun, 2007; Orero, 2005), guidelines (Vercauteren, 2007), AD in museums (Neves, 2012) and multimodality (Perego & Taylor, 2012).

Outside Europe interesting work has been carried out, for example, in the USA: on guidelines (Axel, 1996), on experimentation (Schmeidler and Kirchner, 2001) and in generally promoting the practice of audio description (Snyder, 2008). Elsewhere Kruger (2009,

2010) has worked on translation and narrativity in South Africa, and colleagues in Brazil (Franco, 2006, Araújo Santiago, 2008) have also been very active.

With this final comment, while not exhaustive, this chapter has attempted to indicate the contributions made by the partner countries and the particular areas that have interested researchers around the world. Turning to the most recent publications on audio description, these include *Emerging Topics in Translation: Audio Description* edited by ADLAB member Elisa Perego containing contributions from Spain (Orero on film reading), Germany (Mälzer-Semlinger on narration and Benecke on audio subtitling), Italy (Arma on Italian AD), Poland (Chmiel & Mazur on reception studies and Szarkowska & Jankowska on text-to-speech audio) and Finland (Lahtinen & Palmer on environmental description). Also in 2012 the long-awaited edition of *Perspectives*, edited by Mazur & Kruger, containing the results of the Pear Tree project and its relevance to audio description, originally launched by Orero et.al, came out. Articles by Mazur & Kruger, Mazur & Chmiel, Taylor & Mauro, Gronek, Gorius & Grerzysch-Arbogast, Vilarò et al, Kruger, Vandaele and Igareda & Matamala deal with various aspects of the project ranging from the path to pan-European guidelines, to cultural issues, to the role of eye-tracking to narratology. This would thus be a convenient place to close this section with the words of Mazur and Kruger, taken from this volume: "AD research is developing fast and in many different directions that promise to contribute towards the further development and deepening of the field of AVT." (2012: 3).

4.2 Training in higher education institutions

In all countries, university training distinguishes between the scriptwriting phase and the recording phase, with most training focusing on the scriptwriting phase. Whenever possible blind end-users are consulted. As regards providing extended know-how in a seminar of average duration (as opposed to short one or two-day seminars), Spain and Belgium are the only countries offering this service at university level.

4.2.1 Belgium (Flanders)

In **Belgium** two universities offer specialised seminars:

- 1) The Department of Translation and Interpreting Artesis University College, Antwerp - Master in Translation, AD theory and research: the practice of AD is taught in the course entitled "Media accessibility" (which also includes SDH).
- 2) Department of Translation and Interpreting, Hogeschool Ghent - Master in Interpreting and Master in Translation: AD is part of the optional course Audiovisual Interpreting. AD is also part of the Master in Translation, within the course entitled 'Dutch Audiovisual Translation and Screen Translation' which gives a general introduction to AD.

Guidelines used for audio description:

- 1) Translators and Interpreters, Artesis: the students receive a survey of different international guidelines (RNIB) and internal guidelines written by Aline Remael and Gert Vercauteren (2010).
- 2) Hogeschool Ghent: Translators' course - the students receive (in the printed course) the guidelines that have been established in the UK, USA, Spain (AENOR) and France (Charte de l'audiodescription). Interpreters course - guidelines based on the Spanish norm UNE 153020 and relevant articles.

Software used:

- 1) Translators and Interpreters, Artesis: The students use Softel SWIFT and ADEPT software which allows the students to record their ADs.
- 2) Hogeschool Ghent: Hogeschool Ghent works with a software called Reaper. The Reaper programme allows students to use markers on the sound file and to record AD on a second sound channel.

Besides these two university colleges, three other colleges with Translation Studies departments have occasional (short term) courses that offer brief introductions, within various master courses, usually courses involving audiovisual translation.²²

4.2.2 Germany

In **Germany**, between 2005 and 2010 Saarland University offered five training periods for its students in translation theory, hosted by Bernd Benecke and Elmar Dosch. This was part of the RASU-Project (Research on Audio Description at Saarland University), that led to a number of masters theses. There has also been collaboration with the University of Applied Sciences in Winthertur, Switzerland, an example of shared language exploitation.

4.2.3 Italy

In **Italy**, in september 2011, the University of Macerata organized and hosted the first training seminar for audio describers - a three-day intensive course with lectures and workshops. At the University of Trieste, a module on AD is incorporated in the MA in Specialised Translation.

4.2.4 Poland

In **Poland**, training is organised by universities and includes the creation of AD for films or visual arts. Some theoretical introduction usually precedes a hands-on session. The duration of the courses varies:

1. a two-semester post-graduate course (currently organised by the University of Białystok);
2. a semester-long university course (e.g. Catholic University of Lublin);
3. a couple of contact hours (if part of larger audiovisual translation programmes, e.g. University of Poznań)

4.2.5 Portugal

In **Portugal** at present AD is not part of any curriculum at higher education level. It was part of a course in AVT taught at the Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (Undergraduate Degree in Translation – from 2003 to 2007)²³; and as a course in AVT at the University of Coimbra (PHD course in Translation Studies – 2005-2006)²⁴.

²² 3° Erasmus Hogeschool: one session of theory (2 hours, taught by a guest speaker) within the MA in TS, in the future they also plan to organise practical exercises. 4° HUB: Short (theoretical) introduction for MA students in Translation (2 hours, taught by a guest speaker): what is AD, who writes AD scripts and what does the technique involve, with analysis of one example. 5° Lessius: Workshop of 4 hrs in the context of their EMTS, English postgraduate in TS (not only about AD). Taught by a guest lecturer, the practice remains limited to creating awareness of some of the difficulties involved.

²³ Contents a general overview of AD for films (8-10h)

²⁴ Contents a general overview of AD for films (6h)

4.2.6 Spain

In **Spain** one seminar at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid in association with Antena3 deserves special attention because it combines the skills of AD and the skills needed to implement it in user-friendly technical applications.

According to CESyA (<http://www.cesya.es/es/formacion/universidades?a=8#e8>), the following universities include AD in their curricula (as of 2008-2009):

- Universidad de Granada, Andalucía: within its master course on translation and interpretation (Master en Traducción e Interpretación);
- Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Catalunya: within its master program on audiovisual translation (Master de Traducción Audiovisual), there is a course on AD. Both the online module (European MA in AVT) and the face-to-face module (MA in AVT) include teaching on AD;
- Universidad de A Coruña y Vigo, Galicia: within its program called *Licenciatura en Traducción e Interpretación*, there is a module on AD.

Other higher education initiatives include:

- Universidad Pompeu Fabra de Barcelona, Catalunya: as a part of the master studies program on literary and audiovisual translation (Master en Traducción Literaria y Audiovisual), the university offers a course on AD and subtitling;
- Universitat Jaume I de Castelló: in February 2011 the university organized a 4-day-course on AD and SDHH (V Curso de Accesibilidad y Traducción Audiovisual: Subtitulación para personas sordas y audiodescripción para personas invidentes). The content ranged from a general introduction to AD in Spain, and an overview of AD norms and guidelines, to a workshop on content description;
- Universidad Carlos III de Madrid: this university offers an online 6 month course on AD and subtitling (Especialista en Tecnología de Subtitulado y Audiodescripción). It targets students with an interest in accessibility, as well as professionals from the audiovisual sector;
- Instituto Superior de Estudios Lingüísticos y Traducción de Sevilla: in November 2011, this institution offered a 2 week online course for translators on AD techniques (Técnicas de audiodescripción para invidentes. Curso para traductores).
- Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (in association with Antena3): as an addition to its master studies in audiovisual companies management (Máster en Dirección de la Empresa Audiovisual), from January till July 2012 this university organizes a course for technicians in TV accessibility (Programa de Técnico de Accesibilidad a la TV). A total of 500 hours is distributed between 180 hours of theory (web accessibility, audio description SSDHH, TV in Spain, etc.) and 320 hours of practice (pre-employment workshops and practical training). The ultimate goal of this course is to train professionals in developing audiovisual accessibility systems for TV and the web;
- Centre d'Accessibilitat i Intel·ligència Ambiental de Catalunya (UAB): from 2010 this research centre has offered a PhD course on Ambient Intelligence and Accessibility. Among others, the following research lines are covered: AD, SDHH, voice-over, speech technologies, video games localization, etc.

4.2.7 United Kingdom

Also in **the UK**, educational training is mostly the concern of universities e.g. the postgraduate course offered by the University of Surrey (MA in Monolingual Subtitling and Audio Description). The accent here is on practical training based on a theoretical

background as this brief description of the course illustrates:

MA Monolingual Subtitling and Audio Description

This is the only UK Masters programme dedicated to monolingual subtitling and audio description. As the prospectus says "You will learn from professionals and academics in a supportive environment. We will prepare you for a growing professional market and new research opportunity which are emerging in audiovisual disciplines. Professional subtitlers and audio describers who are active in the market bring their real-world experience and standards into the classroom as tutors. Modules are practice-based and embedded in the context of a sound linguistic, cultural and semiotic framework. The programme offers 24/7 access to computer labs and the latest professional audio description and subtitling software".

Imperial College London offers regular short courses on Audio Description. An example is illustrated below:

Advanced practice in audio description workshop, 3 March 2012. This was open to professionals as well as students.

Course Trainer Dr Josélia Neves. Researcher in Translation at Imperial College London/Lecturer at Instituto Politécnico de Leiria, Portugal

The brochure reads "Who Would Benefit? Freelance translators, undergraduate and postgraduate translation students with basic (theoretical or practical) knowledge in audio description.

Course Content. During this workshop, you will be given the opportunity to develop practical skills for audio describing film. You will be taken through the different tasks AD requires: reading film, establishing AD style (according to film genre, rhythm and stylistics), identifying elements to be audio described, timing, scripting and voicing. [Website www3.imperial.ac.uk/humanities/translationgroup/translationtechnologycourses](http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/humanities/translationgroup/translationtechnologycourses)".

Roehampton University also offers an MA course in Audiovisual Translation with a module on Audio Description.

4.3 Training outside HEIs

Notwithstanding the growing interest in AD in universities and other HEIs and the training opportunities that some institutions offer, the bulk of training work is done by access companies that train in-house, even though the presence of such realities is very varied across Europe. Red Bee is an example of a large company working in the media industry which has expanded greatly its interest in AD. Based in the UK, where the bulk of AD activity is carried out in Europe, Red Bee operates throughout the continent. It provides "creative services", which include audio description in the UK for the BBC, Channel 4, Channel 5, etc.. In October 2008, Red Bee Media acquired Mundovisión, the largest independent subtitling and audio description company in Spain. Alongside the recent acquisition of Titelbild in Germany, the addition of Mundovisión consolidated Red Bee Media's position as Europe's largest supplier of subtitling, signing and audio description services to the media industry. Typically Red Bee combines its audio description provision with an array of other services ranging from subtitling to signing to interactive television. This kind of packaging makes AD a practical and financially feasible option.

4.3.1 Belgium (Flanders)

In **Belgium**, three organisations/private companies offer training:

- INTRO trains volunteers to describe football matches.²⁵
- NEVERO offers AD for live events and film, and gives training to co-workers.
- ZICHT OP CULTUUR organised a few workshops on audio-description in museums in 2008.
- FARO (a Flemish body for the cultural heritage) organises courses on "How to deal with people with a visual handicap" with guidelines for audio-description.

4.3.2 Germany

In **Germany** training takes place on an irregular basis. 1997 saw the first training for describers in cooperation with DBSV and BR, followed by two in 1998 and 1999 (duration 4 days). During the training, describer-teams of three people were formed, including 2 sighted persons and one blind. The training was held on the basis of the guidelines from Dosch and Benecke (2004).

In 2001 the first training organised by Hörfilm e.V. in cooperation with ARTE, BR and BBSB took place, followed by seminars in 2005, 2009, 2011.

Basically producers such as BR and Deutsche Hörfilm train new describers when they need them.

The private language school SDI in Munich has offered training conducted by Bernd Benecke of Bayerischer Rundfunk since 2009.

²⁵ INTRO works with volunteers only and receives subventions from the Flemish government to make all sorts of events accessible, but they offer mainly material support (e.g. headphones for theatre performances). They offer training to volunteer commentators, to make sporting events - especially football - accessible through description. Their workshop focuses on how to describe what is happening on and around the field, the technique to be used, how to prepare for a game, being fluent in all manner of communications with the blind, etc. The training takes half a day, but also includes attending a few games and evaluating the games afterwards with the trainer. Students do not work with guidelines, but with a course of Intro vzw of about 6 pages. The focus is on practical training. The describers work in teams of two who alternate every 2 to 3 minutes. They describe via an intercom system. The blind and visually impaired use headsets that receive the descriptions via antenna. The organisation regularly evaluates and processes comments of users.

4.3.3 Italy

Training in AD is not common in **Italy**, only within the private company that provides audio description for the RAI television station, Cine Television Team (CTT) or the online training provided by 'Senza Barriere'. Providers of AD in Italy all have their own guidelines, which are more or less detailed and not easily available. Cinema Senza Barriere has its guidelines on the web. They consist of only a few general principles, some of which are in contrast with more standardized European guidelines (Ofcom). SubTi has its own guidelines, developed both for the cinema and the DVD market. CTT, i.e. the provider of AD for RAI Television, has been doing AD for over 25 years according to internally developed standards.

'Culturabile' is a recent non profit-making organisation with self-taught describers.

For live events, i.e. AD at the Sferisterio Opera Festival in Macerata, internal guidelines have been developed and the audio describer has been the same for three years.

Blind people are only involved in the Senza Barriere Onlus AD creation (No claim of completeness). For film festivals and live events, time is limited and there is often no time to consult a blind person (Di Giovanni, personal communication).

4.3.4 Poland

In **Poland** non-university training is available on an ad hoc basis in non-profit organisations (foundations), and sometimes culture institutions (i.e. museums, galleries).

The first guidelines for AD for films in Poland were authored by Tomasz Strzyński and Barbara Szymańska (Audio Description Foundation) – they are available online (see Szymańska, 2011).

4.3.5 Portugal

In **Portugal** training courses (Curso Livre) were held in 2006 at the Instituto Politecnico de Castelo Branco, held by Bernd Benecke, in May 2010 at the Instituto Nacional para a Reabilitação (Lisbon),²⁶ in June/July 2010 at the Companhia de Actores (Lisbon)²⁷ and in December 2011 at the Instituto Nacional para a Reabilitação (Porto).²⁸ The May 2010 and December 2011 courses used the Portuguese Guidelines published in 2011 – "Imagens que se Ouvem".

In all of the above workshops, audio descriptions are usually only scripted by one audio describer and voiced by the same person (live AD) or by a voice talent. Some audio descriptions go through a test run with blind people before being finalised.

4.3.6 Spain

In **Spain** training in AD takes place at different levels and through various organizations.

The Spanish Centre for Subtitling and Audio Description (CESyA), which belongs to the Spanish Ministry of Social Affairs, organizes courses. They have no creditation and are taught by practitioners, usually from the company Aristia, provider of ADs for DVDs for the Spanish Blind Association ONCE.

TVC (Catalan national public TV) employ describers trained at the University of Surrey (see above). The describers also provide captions for the deaf and hard of hearing as a combined (cost effective) package.

Other Spanish broadcasters outsource to companies such as Red Bee Spain (see above). Red Bee's describers typically hold an MA from a Spanish or British university.

²⁶ Contents a general overview of AD for films and for museums (18h)

²⁷ A general overview of AD for films

²⁸ Contents a general overview of AD for films and for museums (18h)

4.3.7 United Kingdom

In the UK, apart from Red Bee, a number of AD providers exist ranging from major media players (BSkyB, SDI Media, Independent Media Support) to more local operations (Acrobat TV, CCTC Cardiff) to individuals such as Veronika Hyks. A full list is available on the RNIB website:

http://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/solutionsforbusiness/tvradiofilm/audiodescriptionproviders/Pages/audio_description_providers.aspx

Training in AD for the theatre, television and the cinema is provided by the Audio Description Association and Audio Description Association Scotland, both accredited by the Open College Network.

A recognized national qualification exists in the UK – Certificate in Audio Description Skills.

4.3.8 Other countries

The Swedish Film Institute provides funding for short audio description courses. At least one course has also been held in Finland.

5 User Reception Studies

In Poland Chmiel and Mazur conducted an AD reception survey with questionnaires among 18 VIPs (visually impaired persons) immediately after screenings of films with AD. Within this framework the survey provides answers to a number of questions:

In answer to the first question *Does AD help in receiving the film?* most participants (89%) agreed that it did.

When asked *What type of AD description do you prefer?* half the participants indicated only elements important for the plot and important characteristics of people and places, though 28% requested more detail.

On a scale of definitely yes - 5, definitely not – 0, in answer to the question *What are the barriers to receiving AD?* the most indicated barrier was overlap with dialogue. Too slow reading and the filling of all gaps between dialogues also scored quite highly. Too fast reading and non synchronisation with the picture were considered less of a barrier.

When asked *Which voice do you prefer?* between male and female, most (78%) declared that it made no difference.

The next question concerned the use of evaluative adjectives (*beautiful, awful, ugly*). As evaluative adjectives reveal subjective interpretations of the visual material on the part of the audio describer, viewers may have different perceptions of what is beautiful, awful or ugly. These adjectives provide concise descriptions but may be treated as a manipulation of the film. The response to this question (71% in favour) was perhaps surprising.

To examine the issue further, the authors asked the same respondents to judge whether specific evaluative adjectives are objective or subjective in their opinion. The term *sexy brunettes* was considered subjective by most participants, while *attractive singer* and *smart clothes* were considered objective. But paradoxically, 54% of respondents claimed that, in general, they do not accept audio description with subjective interpretations. The results are inconclusive and more research is needed on larger populations.

60% of participants said they wanted *colours* to be named.

Another reception study conducted by Chmiel and Mazur (work in progress, so far – 33 respondents) posed the following questions:

How much audio described material have you seen? Most had seen less than 5 hours and 21% had never seen a programme with AD.

When asked *At what point should characters be named?* half requested immediate naming while the other half asked for naming only when the character appears in the film.

Most would like detailed *descriptions of clothing when clothing plays a fairly important part in the scene*.

In this survey 64% declared themselves in favour of *evaluative adjectives in AD*, and 98% asked for *colours* to be included.

Opinions were split on the question *Should AD should include similes?* (e.g. a building as tall as 10 elephants placed one on top of the other).

Finally, a small-scale reception study was conducted by Mączyńska and Szarkowska to find out if the visually impaired audience would accept text-to-speech audio description (i.e. AD read out by a speech synthesizer rather than pre-recorded or delivered live by a human) of a documentary. They managed to reach 54 visually impaired respondents, 55%

of whom preferred AD read by a human. Almost half, however, were happy with the speech synthesizer or expressed no preference. Interestingly, approx. 80% of all respondents would accept TTS AD as a temporary technical solution.

In order to outline the preferences of AD users in **Spain**, two surveys conducted so far have been consulted: the survey carried out by *CEIAF* within the *Cine al Alcante de Todos* project (2005-2006), and the *TVC Audio Description Evaluation Report* prepared within the DTV4ALL project (2010). The data retrieved from the first study are summarised below:

- Most of those surveyed prefer only one voice for the audio description, the quality of the voice being more important than sex or age (the RNIB found a similar response in the UK).
- However, the audio describer's gender turned out to matter in the case of children's programmes.
- Visually impaired subjects are quite happy with an open AD with the original film audio and the dialogues, but at the same time they find the possibility of a closed AD user-friendly and "perfect".
- All subjects would like cinemas to offer some kind of film accessibility service.
- Detailed ADs are generally considered tiring, although this particular aspect depends on the film genre. What the subjects do consider tiring is the loss of synchrony, long time listening and long pauses.
- Stereo AD is preferred over its mono counterpart.
- The option of downloading ADs from the Internet and synchronizing them with the film in the cinema was generally rated positive. However, not all users have a computer and some of them are not familiar with the Internet;
- Half of subjects are not willing to pay more for receiving AD in the cinema.

The 'characteristics of an AD user' according to the *TVC Audio Description Evaluation Report* which targeted blind and visually impaired users of the TVC channel in Catalonia are listed as follows:

- They experience some difficulty in accessing AD on television, leading to some subjects not being able to watch accessible programmes. They would like the AD channel to be continually activated. Others are not aware of TV3's AD offer.
- They consider AD publicity before the start of an accessible program helpful.
- The majority of the subjects normally watch the programmes that TV3 broadcasts with AD, and say there should be more AD available. Only a small minority claim to be satisfied with the current offer.
- Had TV3 to widen its AD offer, the subjects would like the following contents to be accessible: films (84%), TV series (72%), documentaries (48%), humour (26%), news (22%), cartoons (20%), debates (2%).

In **Flanders** little or no research has been done in the field of AD looking into appreciation and demand. Museums and theatres do inquire informally if visitors are satisfied. Usually the response is positive, although some museums indicate that there is not much interest (especially in the case of very specialized exhibitions). For the theatre there is close cooperation with VeBeS VZW, a cultural organisation for the blind and visually impaired. They regularly make it known that AD is really appreciated, and the organisation is expanding the service to other regions (beside Antwerp). AD as subject of master theses is

sometimes tested with target groups but such reception studies have always been very limited and informal.

Germany also records no reception studies concerning AD. There is only one survey (Ohrens, 2009) that touches the issue of AD analysed the television habits of blind and visually impaired children and adolescents in comparison with their sighted counterparts of the same age. Christian Ohrens based his evaluation on an internet survey of blind people aged between 12 and 19 and analysed 97 answers.

Christian Ohrens comes to the following conclusion: the habits of the blind differ only a little in the amount of time they watch TV and in the broadcasts they choose. So almost similar to their sighted counterparts TV plays a routing role (*Leitfunktion*) for them. Its important for reflection, communication and mostly used for entertainment.

The second survey often quoted in Germany dates back to the time when AD was hardly available (Dosch & Benecke, 2004), so it simply was not possible to ask sophisticated questions on AD itself. In 1996 Benecke and Dosch looked at the type of use of blind and visually impaired adults concerning TV. The result was 1166 analysed answers, two thirds of the answering people were blind, one third visually impaired. Almost all those who responded (97,3%) own a television set, 81,1% use it regularly.

Equally in **Italy** and **Portugal** no surveys looking into AD appreciation and demand are available, as the issue is only addressed in unpublished graduation theses (e.g. Antifona, 2002).

In **the UK**, The RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) is very active in all fields of research concerning the blind and sight impaired but as regards reception studies, S. Braun says in *Perspectives: Studies* in Translatology, 2010 - Taylor & Francis: "... Only **reception studies** involving visually impaired users will eventually be able to shed light on this problem. ..."

5.1 ADLAB user needs questionnaire: summary

In the same vein as the previously mentioned reception studies, the project ADLAB partners have, from the beginning, contacted a considerable number of the national and local blind persons' organisations to inform them of the project and involve them in the research. Said organisations were asked for their position regarding AD, especially in terms of their lobbying power in promoting the practice.

The questions posed were the following:

1. How important is AD for the blind and visually impaired people in your country in coping with their everyday life? Rate from 1-5 (5: very important)
2. What is your organisation actually doing to support AD?
3. Are the users themselves involved in the process of AD?
4. What is the most important area (e.g. television, theatre, museums), where more AD would be highly appreciated?
5. What must be done in terms of your lobbying power in promoting the practice?

The many responses from the organisations/institutions approached in each country are summarised here below:

6. As there is no reliable material for Belgium concerning the figures for blind and visually impaired people (see 1.1), the Belgian partner also asked for figures regarding membership of the organisations.

The organisations/institutions approached in each country are listed below together with a summary of the responses received.

1. How important is AD for the blind and visually impaired people in your country in coping with their everyday life? Rate from 1-5 (5: very important)

Recent discussion shows that there is still some diversity of opinion. For many people, audio description answers the problems that many people have to deal with when it comes to watching television, going to the cinema, attending plays, etc. For them, audio description is important and the score should be high. Institutions in Germany and Italy, for example, gave a score of 5.

However, there are also people who do not opt for this form of accessibility (or to a lesser extent). In Poland, for instance, "some people claim that the blind have more important things to do and AD is a waste of time and effort", though this is not, of course, a universal opinion. The only Portuguese informant said that jobs and better education should come before AD.

There is general agreement that "5 is what we should aim for" (Belgium), but this essentially depends on the individual and a reliable general consensus does not exist at the moment.

2. What is your organisation actually doing to support AD?

Useful information is provided to people creating descriptions and organising described events (film, theatre, television), and contacts are established with both service providers and interest groups, users and initiators.

Belgium, Germany, Poland, Spain and Italy inform target groups and advise them as to initiatives and audio described events. A number of screenings with AD are also organised in all countries.

As regards lobbying work, Belgium pursues "all possible channels" in lobbying to get AD on the political agenda, Germany promotes dissemination amongst political, social and public figures and Italy carries out 'sensitising operations' though in many places 'little' has been achieved. Portugal too has had little success.

3. Are the users themselves involved in the process of AD?

"Our work is based on contacts with visually impaired people and the personal experience of our collaborators" says the Belgian institution *Braillelīga*. Indeed users have been involved to some extent in the process in all countries. In Germany blind persons work on the describer teams, as they do at *Senza Barriere* in Italy. In Portugal a blind member assists in research work. In general the involvement of blind users in the AD process within each country is sketchy, highly developed in some places, non-existent in others. It should be pointed out, however, that the blind are not involved in the actual making of ADs, or in the script-writing, but rather in the editing and evaluation processes.

4. What is the most important area (e.g. television, theatre, museums), where more

AD would be highly appreciated?

Television was seen to be by far the most popular option, possibly because many areas converge on TV (entertainment, news, sports, etc.), and also because older people in particular (those more likely to have visual impairments) prefer to stay in the comfort of their homes to be entertained.

Theatre also figured highly in all countries while cinema and museums were also mentioned. Some organisations suggested that all areas should receive attention.

5. What must be done in terms of your lobbying power in promoting the practice?

Governments at all levels should be approached to support AD initiatives with, for example, financial subsidies. Authorities, broadcasters, production companies, distributors, organizers of media events should all be contacted and financial resources sought. It is suggested that the blind associations themselves should be involved in organising initiatives, though the following quote from a German institution that "unfortunately even the associations for the blind are absolutely inactive" is echoed elsewhere. Many responses were rather generic, such as 'to spread good practices' and 'to do our best to promote audio description'. Poland stresses the need to strive for legal regulations and makes the important point that "we have to work more with visually impaired children to convince them that going to the movies can be fun, to raise awareness and educate future audiences".

5.2 Participants in the questionnaire

The organisations and institutions which contributed to this survey are listed below:

5.2.1 Belgium

- BCBS Belgische Confederatie van Blinden en Slechtienden (Belgian Confederation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, bilingual federal organisation)
- Vereniging voor Blinden en Slechtienden Licht en Liefde VZW (VeBeS) (Association for the blind and visually impaired Light and Love)
- VRIENDEN DER BLINDEN ("Friends of the Blind")
- Braillelīga
- Licht en Liefde

5.2.2 Germany

Two "AD commissioners" (Hörfilmbeauftragter; Elmar Dosch for BBSB (Bavaria) and Gerd Schwesig for BVN (Niedersachsen)) of the federal state organisations of Bavaria and Lower Saxony were approached. The DBSV (Deutscher Blinden- und Sehbehindertenverband - national organisation for the blind) did not respond.

BVN - Blinden- und Sehbehindertenverband Niedersachsen e.V. (Lower Saxony association for the blind and visually impaired)

BBSB- Bayerischer Blinden- und Sehbehindertenbund e.V. (Bavarian association for the blind and visually impaired)

5.2.3 Italy

Unione Italiana Ciechi, sede Nazionale, sedi Regionali e Provinciali.

Aniomap (Associazione Nazionale Istruttori Orientamento Mobilità Autonomia Personale)

Istituto Rittmeyer di Trieste

Biblioteca Italiana Ciechi

Anfamiv (Associazione Nazionale Famiglie Minorati Visivi)
 Culturabile (Associazione Onlus Audiodescrizione e sottotitolazione)
 ANS Associazione Nazionale Subvedenti
 Several organisations did not reply to the questionnaire but the response from the local organisations was very encouraging.

5.2.4 Poland

FSZ - Fundacja Siódmy Zmysł (Seventh Sense Foundation)
 FDF - Fundacja De Facto (De Facto Foundation)
 FK - Fundacja Katarynka (Katarynka Foundation)
 FD - Fundacja Dzieciom
 PZN Polski Związek Niewidomych (Polish Association of the Blind)

5.2.5 Portugal

ACAPO (President of the Portuguese Association of the Blind): <http://www.acapo.pt/>

5.2.6 Spain

O.N.C.E. (the national blind association)
 CESyA

5.3 Overview of active professional organisations and voluntary service providers in the field of audio description.

5.3.1 Flanders

- Public television broadcaster VRT since January 2012: TC, VOD and DVD
- The Audio Description Company (part of the Subtitling Company), Brussels, has provided 2 or 3 films with AD on DVD
- Soundfocus (the Netherlands): does sound recording, some 7 films, some on DVD some only for cinema, AD for the internet.
- Nevero (Brussels): provides AD scripts (e.g. for Soundfocus) and provides live AD in collaboration with INTRO (cf. above: subsidizes organisation that takes care mostly of infrastructure and the practical organisation of AD events)
- AudioTales (Mechelen): provides live AD for the theatre mostly

Remark: the majority of people writing the scripts have a degree in translation, some are scriptwriters.

Some organisations are operating on a voluntary basis:

- PHK vzw, (a non-profit organisation, Hasselt, Belgium), records talking books and other publications for daily players. They have recently received project funding (Fonds Beeckman) to try out AD recordings. For their recordings they have used the AD scripts written by students from Artesis University College. They are looking to develop the activity and go commercial.
- De Vrienden der Blinden vzw (non-profit organisation "Friends of the Blind"): they produce one film with AD each year, in "open" AD; They do not start from an AD

script but make the recording in a studio with a voice-talent and a blind person who gives advice as they go along. The result often leaves something to be desired and has been criticized by users who have become acquainted with professional AD. The organisation's working method is very idiosyncratic and does not take any AD guidelines into account.

5.3.2 Germany

- Bayerischer Rundfunk (Bavarian Broadcasting: www.br.de/hoerfilme), public broadcaster,
- Production of around 30 percent of all described programmes on German TV and DVDs and some AD for Swiss and Austrian TV.
- Arte, public broadcaster, produces about 30 premieres (fiction) per year²⁹
- NDR, public broadcaster, produces about 20 premieres (fiction) per year, starts to broadcast series with AD³⁰
- WDR, public broadcaster, produces about 12 premieres (fiction) per year and several documentaries³¹
- Deutsche Hörfilm gGmbH (subsidiary of the DBSV, the national organisation for the blind),³² produces all broadcasts for ZDF, 3Sat, RBB, SWR, some for MDR, organises the award ceremony for the "Deutscher Hörfilmpreis" every year since 2002 in Berlin, produces DVDs, regular cinema-screenings with open AD in the "Kleisthaus", Berlin
- Hörfilm e.V. - Vereinigung deutscher Filmbeschreiber (non-profit-organisation)³³
- Descriptor-teams work for BR, Arte, MDR and NDR and organise theater AD and various AD-Events
- Andersicht e.V. (non-profit organisation) organises in cooperation with Hörfilm e.V. special AD events³⁴
- Project "Hör.Oper" initiated from the Blinden- und Sehbehindertenverein Gelsenkirchen e.V. in cooperation with the city Gelsenkirchen; offers regular performances every month at the "Musiktheater Gelsenkirchen".³⁵
- Theater Bielefeld, Regular performances approximately twice per month³⁶
- Michael Heumann, sound designer for TV, motion picture and new media, does sound post production for AD in his studio

5.3.3 Italy

Apart from the institutions and entities already mentioned in the report, the following are of interest:

- The site www.audiodescrizione.it is a project that will emerge fully in 2012 with proposals for theses, interviews, thematic dossiers and studies on audio description, talks at conferences, etc. It is thus currently in the planning phase, but is the

29 <http://www.arte.tv/de/2153564.CmC=3657686.html>

30 http://www.ndr.de/fernsehen/sendungen/neues_aus_buettenwarder/videos/buettenwarderhoerprobe101.html

31 http://www1.wdr.de/themen/infokompakt/videotext/zusatzdienste/videotext_sehbehinderte106.html

32 <http://www.hoerfilm.de/>

33 <http://www.hoerfilmev.de/>

34 <http://www.andersicht.net/>

35 <http://www.musiktheater-im-revier.de/Spielplan/Foyer-Extras/HoerOper/>

36 http://www.theater-bielefeld.de/journal/detail.php?id_text=130507&id_language=1&bereich=start&subbereich=

only existing site exclusively devoted to audio description. And which will be accessible to the blind (Arma, personal communication)

- Pulsante Radio Web: <http://www.internettabile.org/pulsanteradioweb>
il link per ascoltare la radio in diretta e' questo
<http://www.internettabile.org/prw/main/ascolta.m3u>

5.3.4 Poland

- Individuals and small companies – they offer AD to films, theatre plays, museums when approached by NGOs, foundations or other organisations wanting to introduce AD.
- AD researchers and students sometimes volunteer to produce AD for film festivals or other smaller events.

5.3.5 Portugal:

- RTP – uses inhouse staff (to script and to voice)
- TVCine2 (Zon)- works with a professional (free-lance)script writer (José de Matos-Cruz) and uses well-known actors (in particular, Nicolau Breyner)
- ZON /Lusomundo – DVD – researcher does scripts/interpreter, radio person, actress (voices)
- Theatre – Companhia de Actores (www.audiodescricao.pt) – actors script/voice
- Museums/Exhibitions -VA Soundpainting/Realisassom (sound studios) working with in-house professionals and AD researchers.

5.3.6 Spain

Apart from the institutions and entities already mentioned in the report, the following companies report activities in the field of AD:

- *ARISTIA* Madrid, España: audiovisual production, postproduction, AD scripts development, dubbing³⁷;
- *Centro Especial De Integración Audiovisual Y Formación CEIAF S.L.L.* Sevilla, España: subtitling, live/recorded audiodescriptions³⁸
- *ONDA EDUCA* Zaragoza, España: professional AD of documentaries, films, and live events³⁹
- *Centro Español de Subtitulado y Audiodescripción CESyA*: AD and SDHH research observatory and promotion, accessibility awareness support, creation of a database with reviews of audio described and subtitled works⁴⁰.

5.3.7 United Kingdom

The main point of reference in the UK for the blind and visually impaired is undoubtedly the previously mentioned Royal National Institute of Blind People, whose range of

37 More at: <http://www.audiodescripcion.com/index.html>.

38 More at: <http://www.ceiaf.com/>.

39 More at: http://www.ondaeduca.com/pagina.php?id_paginas=901&id_tipos=9.

40 More at: <http://www.cesya.es/es>.

activities is wide and varied and includes the promotion of audio description. There are also many regional associations throughout the country though an examination of their individual websites suggests they are not actively involved in AD.

The RNIB provides a list of Audio Description providers together with all contact details. See below a selection:

Acrobat TV

Website: www.acrobat-tv.co.uk

BSkyB

www.sky.com

CCTC Cwmni Cynhyrchu Teledu Caerdydd Cyf. (Cardiff TV Co.)

Email: mjcrossctv@aol.com

Description in English and Welsh.

Deluxe: Digital Studios

Email: mazin@bydeluxe.com

IBF Ltd

Email: stephenf@ibf.co.uk or martinr@ibf.co.uk

www.ibf.co.uk

Independent Media Support Ltd.

Email: mark.lutitt@ims-media.com

www.ims-media.com

ITFC

www.itfc.com

Minds Eye

Email: mindseyedescription@gmail.com

Red Bee Media

stephen.taylor@redbeemedia.com

www.redbeemedia.com

SDI Media

Email: delphine.thornton@sdimedia.com or Jackie.ball@sdimedia.com

Website: www.sdimedia.com

The Talking Picture Company

Veronika Hyks

Email: v.hyks@clara.co.uk

6 Conclusions

6.1 The results obtained regarding the number of users are indicative, and therefore useful, but the obtaining of comprehensive and totally accurate results is still hampered in all countries by the fact that users may have different degrees of disability, may have more than one disability or may simply be old (the highest percentage of low vision recorded is for the over 65 age group, who often do not figure in the official statistics). Furthermore, in many countries the classifications for "blind" and "low vision" are different, as in the many user associations.

6.2 Television

Television can definitely be seen as the most sought-after mode in terms of audio description and should therefore receive a proportionate degree of attention. This is the case also outside Europe where, for example, Australia and Canada are prime movers. It will be necessary to follow developments closely in this field, especially as they unfold first in particular countries. For example Bernd Benecke of BayerischeRundfunk talks of imminent 'heavy changes' in television as regards Germany. Other countries will follow.

6.3 DVDs, VHS and online broadcasting

While DVDs with AD seem to be on the increase across Europe, films with AD for broadcasting are the most popular format. With the advent of cloud computing, DVDs, Blu-Rays or VHS formats are not necessarily representative of market trends, and this has been seen by the sluggish growth, in some areas, of DVDs with AD compared with broadcasting films and TV series with AD. For example, DVDs are no longer a popular format in Spain, where the model is changing to cloud computing. At present there are some 20 films on DVD with AD while there are hundreds of downloadable films with AD online, particularly in English. Interestingly, in other parts of the world, for example in Australia, the amount of AD on DVD is very high whereas there is practically nothing available online. In Europe the picture is patchy but, as in other spheres, the ever increasing availability of film material online is bound to have an effect. Naturally the production of the AD in all cases goes back to the film itself; the online availability is merely a subsequent phase, but capable of changing viewing habits.

6.4 Museums

There are two issues here:

A. Museum access and target groups

Some museums are specifically designed for a blind audience, while many others provide audio-guides for their permanent exhibitions. These are not specifically designed for the blind but are certainly of assistance. A further option provided by some museums and galleries is that of the itinerary exhibition, also addressed to all patrons but specifically for the blind and visually impaired, with audio description.

B. Accessible services

Audio description live on demand is available at some venues with human guides, either as a permanent facility or for special occasions. Otherwise, audio-guides are often provided as mentioned above. Other services include the providing of Braille documents and the introduction of 'touch tours' where the blind or visually impaired person has audio and tactile assistance.

6.5 Theatre and cinema

Apart from theatres and cinemas belonging to user associations delivering open audio

description, there are practically no theatre or cinema facilities purpose built for delivering closed AD. AD in theaters/cinema (cfr. opera) is often an anecdotal service, and therefore difficult to verify by a potential audience.

While the organisation of special screenings with AD is commendable, the desired aim of integration is for the blind person to go together with sighted friends to a normal screening in a normal cinema. If we assume that the biggest target group is the 65+ age group, perhaps regular theatrical and opera performances are even more desirable. The latter consideration is based only on some of the results of the previously mentioned questionnaire, and needs further investigation.

6.6 Opera

While popular consideration of this genre is that of an elitist activity, this is where most live audio description is delivered, where opera houses are wired to offer the services on a regular basis, and where opera has been on offer and on a permanent basis for many years (cfr. theatre and cinema).

6.7 Training

No comprehensive study has yet documented the various training scenarios that could be activated for audio description, with a systematic consideration of the number of credits or teaching hours to be allotted, with a reasoned approach to course content or to the technologies that can be applied, etc. This is a gap that ADLAB would like to fill.

The few courses available are mostly found in universities as undergraduate or postgraduate studies. A number of universities also provide workshops and short seminars on AD, some on a regular basis. In addition some training is provided by service providers (e.g. the Audio Description Service in the UK, Senza Barriere in Italy), but a comprehensive, regulated training apparatus has yet to be established.

6.8 Research in AD

The amount of and the quality of the research carried out so far on audio description can best be ascertained through a survey of the now many publications dedicated to the subject. These works can be roughly divided into the descriptive and the experimental. The former category includes books, papers and articles (many first presented at conferences and seminars held throughout Europe and the world) on AD training, on attainable standards, on legislative norms and, crucially, on the creation of reliable, universal guidelines. The language of audio description and the techniques and skills involved have also been covered at length.

In terms of experimental research, work has been carried out on user needs, on the application of linguistics (corpus linguistics, systemic linguistics) to AD, on eye-tracking and AD, and on cultural constraints.

6.9 User associations

Traditionally media access was the concern of user associations and the welfare arrangements of each country. Since 2003 and the Greece Declaration of Accessibility as a Human Right, media access has become a human right and within the political agenda of all EU countries. Media access has thus become inclusive, and not exclusive, with the motto 'Media for All'. This offers the paradox of accessibility practices meant for all but with terminology such as 'subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDHH)' or 'audio description for the blind (AD)' making those services seem exclusive. SDHH and AD should be for all, though especially for those with sensorial problems. While associations have been lobbying for the services, and this is their role, they are at times more ambitious

and in some cases they ask to be involved in research exercises to validate data or results.

An important conclusion will be to establish areas of responsibility. While universities are experts in research and training, user associations should look more to the welfare of their users and pursue a political objective through lobbying, while remembering of course that collaboration is both highly desirable and necessary, in order to obtain satisfactory results for all.

6.10 The general conclusion is that AD is still a media access practice lacking critical mass in terminology, practice, and training. Until there is a solid research background to turn to for data, and results, all activities related to AD should be considered as anecdotal. Raising awareness at all levels is the first recommendation made by the ITU Audiovisual Media Focus Group, and ADLAB will be looking to take forward this recommendation leading to its work on creating guidelines and curricula, and on promoting the practice of audio description whenever and wherever possible.

7 Recommendations and future directions

a) Research on AD would benefit from an accurate collection of national data about the number of people with various types of visual impairments. This would confirm the fact that a highly significant number of people need audio description, and that obstacles to its provision should be overcome. Governments and policy-makers need this kind of information to justify any action on accessibility matters: Valid comparisons can be made between different European countries and those whose progress is slow can be stimulated to act.

b) The data collected for WP1 shows that various countries have various strengths and competences as regards AD types (for instance: AD in opera is well ahead in Spain as compared to other countries, Germany has developed professional procedures for AD for television). It is thus recommended that European countries exchange experiences and share the best practices as regards the development of various AD types for mutual benefit, bearing in mind that priorities exist and that different skill sets are required. It is clear that television is the most sought-after audio described medium and that the modalities involved in the broadcasting procedure are different from those in the much less demanded area of opera, theatre and live performance where the AD is live.

Very important in terms of inter-European cooperation is the fact that certain European countries share languages (Belgium/France/Luxembourg, Belgium/Holland, Austria/Germany) which means that sharing AD-ed materials across those nations could provide the visually impaired with more access to AD. Language sharing has been extremely successful in the English-speaking world and has led to the provision of ever more AD. The sharing of products in Spanish between Spain, Latin America and, ever more importantly, the USA, is certainly an area that should be further explored. Where languages are not shared, research on the feasibility of AD translation must be intensified. The practice of translating audio descriptions is in fact an under-researched area. However, as the implementation of recorded AD increases, i.e. AD for film and television, this practice is likely to increase exponentially, since it may be seen as a cost-cutting exercise by broadcasters and film producers. Diana Sanchez, General Manager for RedBee Media Spain confirmed in a personal communication to Aline Remael (30/07/2012) that the company was certainly considering the matter as they expected to have to produce audio descriptions in different languages in the near future. Such AD's

would then also involve the use of audio-subtitling for which the use of synthetic voices would certainly be an option. Synthetic voice production will undoubtedly gain in importance, as experiments in Poland have indicated. It is already widely used in the audiobook sector. The technology involved has already created convincing sound quality and can be expected to improve in future. Both practice and research will have to reveal whether the translation of AD is indeed a cost-cutting operation that would then allow a better circulation and dissemination of films with AD.

c) The influence that different AD scripting traditions have on translation is another important issue. Since AD scriptwriting is a very young field at present, it is important for research projects such as ADLAB to establish the requirements for effective AD scripts (about what and how much to include, when and how) and to disseminate this information since the adoption of comparable approaches across Europe can only facilitate translation. It would also seem that even for the translation of existing AD scripts it is desirable to use trained AD scriptwriters and to give them access to the film, not just the AD script, for their translations. Only adequate source material and professional insight will allow them to spot mistakes or inaccuracies in the source text scripts and allow them to adapt them where so required.

It is our hypothesis that a certain degree of uniformity in AD scripting traditions and training in AD scripting, or even insight into slightly different traditions, if uniformity cannot be fully achieved, would promote the efficient and speedy productions of AD translations. Research in this area will be pursued by ADLAB members.

d) The issue of copyright as regards AD should be regulated on the European and on national levels to offer greater exposure to AD for European citizens.

e) The AD landscape regarding training and research is slowly changing but a strong recommendation is for the training and research community to intensively work on developing research methodology and training techniques in all AD related areas including AD translation, as described above. ADLAB hopes to fill in the gaps as much as possible by cooperating with commercial suppliers in order to wed vocational training and academic insights.

f) Publicity and awareness raising are the activities that should always be significant in any activities related to AD – this pertains both to raising awareness among the visually impaired as to their rights and opportunities for media access and to policy-makers and other stakeholders who can make a vital contribution to the development of AD.

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This report was produced by Haide Völz based on the research reports of:
 Belgium/Flanders: Aline Remael, Erik De Snerk, Gert Vercauteren, Nina Reviere
 Germany: Bernd Benecke, Haide Völz
 Italy: Christopher Taylor, Elisa Perego, Eraldo Busarello, Fabio Del Missier, Mascia Fedele,
 Francesca Pecoraro, Jane O'Grady, Selene Sordo
 Poland: Agnieszka Chmiel, Iwona Mazur, Katarzyna Nwicka
 Portugal: Joséia Neves
 Spain: Anna Matamala, Anna Maszerowska, Pilar Orero

Supervisor: Christopher Taylor

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION OF AUDIO DESCRIPTION IN YOUR COUNTRY?

These questions should make results comparable between the different countries. For your answer please use the number of the question. If you can't describe the situation in your country based on these questions properly, please don't hesitate to add more information.

1. BASIC INFORMATION

- 1.1. Define the **different groups of blind and partially sighted people** according to the different definitions in your country.
- 1.2. Establish a **reliable figure** as to the number of the different groups.
To what extent the phenomenon is increasing?
- 1.3. Are there any **laws and/or regulations** concerning audio description in your country?

2. HOW MUCH AUDIODESCRIPTION IS AVAILABLE IN YOUR COUNTRY?

Fill in the items which already exist. Please note: The names of the providers will be asked under point 5.

2.1. Television:

Please give a **short description**, how television works in your country:
Are there public and/or private broadcasters? Anything else?
How do you receive television? Cable? Satellite? Anything else?
Are the broadcasts dubbed? Subtitled? Anything else?

Please refer to **Audio description in television**:

- 2.1.1. What kind of broadcasts? Movies? Sports programmes? Documentaries? Anything else?
- 2.1.2. How much audio described material exists up to date?
- 2.1.3. Average broadcast per week? How many premieres and how many reruns?
- 2.1.4. How does the user receive them?

2.2. DVD/ Video/ BluRay/ Video on demand:

- 2.2.1. How many audio described DVD/ Video/ Blue Ray exist in your country?
- 2.2.2. What kind of movies?
- 2.2.3. When were they published (year)?
- 2.2.4. Are there only "special editions" with the audio description or is it on every copy?
- 2.2.5. Is the whole DVD/BluRay accessible for blind people (e.g. spoken menu?) or just the film?

2.3. Museum:

Please refer only to **special guided (audio-) tours for blind and visually impaired people**:

- 2.3.1. What kind of museum?
- 2.3.2. What type of exhibition?
- 2.3.3. How often have there been audio described exhibitions?
- 2.3.4. Does the description refer only to the exhibits or does it also describe the way to get there (e.g. for a person with a cane or a dog)?
- 2.3.5. Is there a special guidance system for blind and partially sighted people?
- 2.3.6. How can the user receive the audio guided tour?

2.4. Theatre/ Opera/ Ballet:

- 2.4.1. What kind of performances?
- 2.4.2. How often have there been audio described performances?
- 2.4.3. Are there any audio described specials apart from the "pure" performance (e.g. the costumes, the stage setting, the foyer etc)
- 2.4.4. What kind of technique is used for the reception of Audio description?
- 2.4.5. Where is the speaker seated?

2.5. Cinema:

- 2.5.1. What kind of cinema (art house/ mainstream)?

2.5.2. What kind of movies?

2.5.3. What kind of technique? Live? Or "open" audio description everyone can hear?

2.6. Special Audio descriptions

Please describe any special kind of audio description that took/take place in your country.

2.6.1. Special Events with pre-recorded audio description

e.g. City-Audio guides (especially for the blind!), Sand World Exhibition Open Air, Horticultural Shows, Audiovisual Show in a Planetarium etc

2.6.2. Special Live Events

e.g. slide shows, Sports events etc

2.7. Research and educational training of audio description in your country

2.7.1. Research

2.7.1.1. What kind of institution?

2.7.1.2. Which department?

2.7.1.3. Are there any professorships/chairs especially for audio description?

2.7.2. Educational training

2.7.2.1. Who offers educational training? University/Provider/Non-profit-organisations? Any other?

2.7.2.2. What is the content of the training?

2.7.2.3. Duration of the training?

2.7.2.4. Do they have guidelines for the audio description?

2.7.2.5. How do they describe? Just one audio describer? Are blind people involved in any way?

3. RECEPTION STUDIES ON USERS

to show the extent to which Audio description is appreciated and, by extension, how much it is desired and demanded.

As agreed in our first meeting in Trieste: Please refer only to existing material!

Look for surveys, statistics, guidelines etc

4. CONTACT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL BLIND PERSONS ORGANISATIONS

Refer to the current situation of audio description in your country and contact the National and local blind person's organisations and ask for their position regarding audio description, especially in terms of their lobbying power in promoting the practice.

Please mention: What's the name of the organisation, what kind of organisation, whom do you ask?

4.1. How important is audio description for the blind and partially sighted people in your country to cope with their everyday life? Rate from 1-5 (5: very important)

4.2. What is your organisation actually doing to support audio description?

4.3. Are the users themselves involved in the process of audio description?

4.4. What is the most important area of life (e.g. television, theatre, museums), where more audio description would be highly appreciated?

4.5. What must be done in terms of your lobbying power to promoting the practise?

5. MAP ACTIVE PROFESSIONALS

Map active professional and voluntary service providers to see how high the current potential to provide Audio description is.

Who is offering audio description? What kind of organisation?
What are they offering?

Example:

Who? Bayerischer Rundfunk (Bavarian Broadcasting), public broadcaster,
What? Around 30 percent of all described programmes on German TV and DVDs and some AD for Swiss and Austrian TV.