

RISE 2 project

WORKSHOP: THE DIVERSITY OF AUDIENCES AT LIVE PERFORMANCES AND IN THE
ONLINE ENVIRONMENT: HOW TO ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY FOR DISABLED PERSONS?

REPORT

Pearle conference Copenhagen, 2 June 2017

P7193

Silke Lalvani – Introduction: how to deal with new European rules on web accessibility

Lars Holm Sørensen – Accessibility of websites from a users' point of view

Andreas Buhl – The texting app initiative created by the CHP Stage Festival

Introduction

When talking about accessibility in the live performance sector, one has to make a difference between the performance itself and online offers and services that go with it, such as e-ticketing, streaming activities, and other online information about the programme.

In the workshop, we want to address both: the accessibility of performances and online services and ask about the state of play in our sector – how accessible are we? – and how can we make our services better accessible so that persons with disabilities can benefit from the cultural offer.

As to online services, it is to be noted that there is a new European Directive on web accessibility for public sector bodies which comes into force in September 2018. As cultural services are partly included in the scope of the text, we are inquiring about the impact for the live performance sector in the coming years.

The workshop is divided in three parts. After a general introduction on accessibility and what it means in the live performance sector, two experts will give an insight into various kinds of services for disabled people, show good practices and explain what is needed to ensure accessible services online and live.

1. Accessibility – what is the legal frame and what does that mean in practice?

At international level, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was adopted in December 2006 and came into force in May 2008. The treaty, which should protect the rights and dignity of disabled persons, was signed by 172 states and the European Union. Following this text, the EU adopted its own Strategy on Disability 2010-2020 and took a number of initiatives, such as the pilot project on a European Disability Card which gives EU wide access to leisure and cultural events. The Directive on web accessibility and apps of public sector bodies was adopted in December 2016 and will enter into force in September 2018 (see analysis for the live performance sector [P7130] in the Pearle dropbox).

Today, nearly all Member States have guidelines or legislation on accessibility which are based on the international standards called WCAC. EU legislation is based on WCAC as well, however the EU is currently developing its own standards.

As mentioned above, in the live performance sector the term “accessibility” can refer to venues and live performances or to online services.

In the first case, buildings are made accessible, as well as the performance for different group of people. For blind and visually impaired persons, the show can be audio-described. Deaf and partially hearing visitors can benefit from captioned performances (see chapter 3 of this report) and those with autistic spectrum conditions, anyone with sensory and communication disorders or learning-disabled people can enjoy so-called “relaxed performances” during which the house lights will often stay on and no loud noises or unexpected music would unsettle the audience.

As to websites of live performance organisations, attention should be given to the design of the website and texts (using headlines for links and texts, naming photos, contrast of the site etc.), sub-title audio-visual material and adapt online ticketing services so that they can be used by people with disabilities (see chapter 2).

2. Online accessibility: the case of people with visual impairment

Presentation: **Lars Holm Sørensen**. Accessibility Consultant. Pragmatic accessibility nerd and co-founder of the Danish digital accessibility consultancy Diversa.

Lars who is legally blind presented ways of navigating through websites which are not necessarily adapted for people with visual impairment. The example of an online ticketing service was shown with the result that (in this case) it was not possible for a blind person to get tickets without help, as essential information on the performance and on the seats was not available and boxes to agree with the general conditions or the price indicated could not be ticked off.

The following points were named to make a website better accessible:

- Programme page with a HTML format to make **heading structures** readable with a special programme for blind people
- Make **links** user friendly → give them a name what to expect under a link and not name them only "link"
- Adapt word **texts** to make it easier to go through the headlines
- Name **pictures** to describe what can be seen. Do not name them "picture".
- Increase **contrasts** of the website
- Do not show available seats in different **colours** as this cannot be distinguished by colour-blind people

To make a website accessible for disabled people has also benefits for other groups of society and can enhance the user-friendliness of the page. For example, a better contrast of the website

helps elderly people and even younger audiences when they use their computer outside in the sun.

According to Lars, in total 80 million people in

Europe could benefit from a better design of websites.



3. Accessible live performances: the case of people with hearing impairment

Presentation: **Andreas Buhl**. Educated lighting designer from the Danish National Theatre School, production manager, video programmer, teacher. Working as project manager for CPHstage festival with the THEA text app.

Andreas Buhl introduced participants to the text app THEA which was produced by a Swedish company and is currently used by the CPH Stage Festival to allow access to live performances to people with hearing impairment.



Initially, the app was created for foreign people not speaking the language of a performance. In this sense, the app can be beneficial to diverse groups of audiences.

How does the app work?



Once a theatre piece is finished (most of the time shortly before the show), it can be translated/written down for the app. During the performance, the audience can follow the show by reading the text on the app, in the same language or in translation. At the CPH Stage Festival 4 live performances are available through the text app THEA.

For a demonstration of how the app works, Pearle members used their mobile phones and tablets distributed by Andreas to follow his presentation in Danish in an English translation.

Questions from the audience were asked about the financing and the practical use of the app:

- The Copenhagen Stage Festival finances the app through marketing and event management (around 10,000€). Ticket prices do not increase.
- As the light of the app is very low on the phone, it shouldn't distract other people sitting in the audience. It is clear to the audience that people following the performance with the app do not use their phone for private purposes.

Conclusions

The workshop gave an insight into practical tools and innovative ideas how to best provide access to performances and online services of cultural organisations for people with disabilities.

The following general advice can be given to organisations in the live performance:

- Think of adapting your website when you create a new one for an organization as changes can be done by web designers. It would be more difficult to adapt the page afterwards
- Get in contact with local disability organisations and your government to prepare the implementation of the Directive on web accessibility and assess what has to be changed (especially bigger public bodies)
- Making a website or a live performance accessible to persons with disabilities has positive "side effects" for the wider audience and increases the accessibility in general

Regarding the Directive on web accessibility which has to be implemented in Member States by September 2018, the cultural sector partly benefits from exemptions which have the aim not to add a financial or organisational burden to smaller entities. Private companies are not

covered in the scope of the text; however, Member State can decide to include them into the scope.

Pearle will follow up on the topic and provide information for members and a platform for exchange on how to best deal with European legislation and create accessible online services in the live performance sector for people with disabilities.

Practical information

EU: European Disability Forum

Belgium: Website anysurfer.com – information, accessibility audit and consultancy in Brussels

Denmark: consultancy online accessibility: diversa.dk

Note: The workshop on accessibility was filmed and speakers agreed that the material can be further used in the context of the RISE-project under the condition that they are informed about it.

Speakers

Andreas Buhl

Educated lighting designer from the Danish National Theatre School.

Working freelance as lighting designer, production manager, video programmer and teacher. Mostly doing both lighting design and production management at midsize theatre and dance productions. Since '99 part of the independent collaborative ensemble Flyvende Grise. Since '07 lighting designer and production manager for Danish Dance Theatre's annual Copenhagen Summer Dance in the Police Headquarters in Copenhagen. In addition working as project manager for CPHstage festival with the THEA text app.

Experienced in: Lighting design, lighting programming, video programming, projection calculation, project management, international touring, crew management, financial management and telemark skiing.

Lars Holm Sørensen

Accessibility Consultant. Pragmatic accessibility nerd and co-founder of the Danish digital accessibility consultancy Diversa.

Lars is legally blind and an experienced user of assistive technologies such as screen readers and screen magnifiers. His personal experience combined with a background in computer science and years of testing, advising and teaching in the field of digital accessibility gives him a broad knowledge of what works when it comes to users with special needs.

www.diversa.dk