



eInclusion@EU

Strengthening eInclusion & eAccessibility across Europe

IST-502553

Learning Example:

**Deutsche Hörfilm GmbH – Accessible movies and more for
blind people**

GERMANY

1 Introduction

The eInclusion@EU project has identified learning examples for each of the topics in focus of the project work:

- Topic I: The eAccessibility component of eInclusion [For more information about this topic see <http://www.einclusion-eu.org/Document.asp?MenuID=126>].
- Topic II: eAccessibility and eInclusion in relation to work and employment [For more information about this topic see <http://www.einclusion-eu.org/Document.asp?MenuID=125>].
- Topic III: eAccessibility and eInclusion in relation to online services [For more information about this topic see <http://www.einclusion-eu.org/Document.asp?MenuID=124>].

In eInclusion@EU, a learning example is defined as successful practices which will often represent leading edge experience, though not necessarily the best, ideal or unproblematic. Learning examples are also those which can provide useful learning experiences for others, likely to stimulate creativity, ingenuity, self reflexivity and the transfer of good ideas. A learning example is thus defined in a qualitative sense, i.e. that the case is relevant to the eInclusion@EU project and:

- has fully or substantially achieved its own objectives
- has had a beneficial impact on its environment
- most importantly, provides relevant and useful learning points and lessons, which act as a reservoir of ideas, guides, checklists, etc., of good practice which others can use as input to their own learning and implementation processes.

Thus, a good learning example study is one which is 'good for learning', which means that it can include cases which made mistakes, and do not score high on conventional benchmarks, as long as the case has learnt useful lessons which are carefully described and presented so that others can learn from their experiences. Valuable learning also depends upon a clear understanding of the context and assumptions surrounding a particular case, as well as a clear description of what happened and the results obtained. All these should be standard items in any case study report.

Learning examples result from highly specific and unique conditions and contexts, which mean that there can be no one-to-one transferability to other circumstances. Examples mentioned in one country as good or innovative might not be mentioned in other countries, not only because they are not available but also because they are already established as a regular service. However, they represent an important learning potential if contextual considerations are borne in mind and they are used to create a dialogue between peers facing similar challenges and goals.

The selection of learning examples has covered each of the three topics mentioned above [for more information you can download the eInclusion@EU framework report (D1.1) at <http://www.einclusion-eu.org/SHOWUSERSQL.asp?SQLID=2,36,35,34,33,31,32,3,4&show=LIST&ShowEmpty=NO&MenuID=194>].

2 Structure of the learning examples

Each learning example is structured along four main parts:

- 1) eInclusion@EU Topic and Issue including short description of the topic: The first part of each learning example shortly describes the topic for which the learning example has been identified. Since each eInclusion@EU topic is divided into different issues, short descriptions of the issues are described as well. This enables the reader to better understand the overall context of the learning example.
- 2) The Case outline concentrates on a description of the background and context within the project or initiative has been conducted as well as its objectives and main aims. Furthermore, the case outline provides, where applicable, an overview on resources with regard to finance, people, skills, equipments and so on and an overview on concrete activities and actions undertaken within the framework of the learning example in order to achieve its objectives. In addition, results and impacts in the sense of what direct results did the case produce, related directly to the case objectives where relevant, further planned results and impacts. Unexpected results and impacts are described as well.
- 3) The “Learning Points” section presents the core of each example. Here, it is described what specific conclusions (for the learning example itself) and generic examples (potentially relevant for other cases) were learnt. In general, one can distinguish between thematic lessons, i.e. what can be learned from the whole project/initiative or parts in relation to its topics, and methodological/structural lessons, i.e. what can be learnt from the whole project/initiative or parts of it in relation to methods used or management issues.
- 4) The “Further information” provides interesting and important references and links, i.e. web-addresses, literature, relevant studies and reports and other related evidence.

3 Deutsche Hörfilm GmbH – Accessible movies and more for blind people

3.1 eInclusion@EU Topic and Issue including short description of the topic

Topic I: The eAccessibility component of eInclusion

In this topical area the project focuses on eAccessibility issues emerging from the eEurope 2005 roadmap and from the inclusive electronic communication regulatory framework, in particular, as well as other relevant policy frameworks.. The workshops and data collection carried out under this topic have focused on the issues of:

- Addressing eAccessibility requirements in the public procurement of ICT
- digital rights management and copyright issues in relation to accessibility for those who are print disabled
- eAccessibility rights and redress - the possible role of an eAccessibility ombudsman
- Access to telecommunications and broadcast services for disabled and older people in light of the EU Universal Service Directive Case Outline

Issue 3: Access to telecommunications and broadcast services for disabled

This topic concerns provisions for disabled and elderly people in the telecommunications and broadcast area. Both equipment/service provision and financial supports towards costs were relevant aspects for this topic. Examples of equipment/service provision might include accessible public telephone booths, text telephone relay services (these are services that provide a human operator to “interpret” between users of text telephones, usually deaf people or people with severe speech impairments, and users of ordinary voice telephones) and so on. Examples of financial supports towards costs might include discounted tariffs for text telephone users, subsidised line rental for older people and so on.

3.2 Case Outline

The Deutsche Hörfilm GmbH (freely translated to German Audio Movie non-profit Ltd.) aims at making visual media accessible for people with visual impairments, especially for blind people. Their interest is not to develop a new type of media but rather to open existing mainstream media such as cinema, video, DVD or even theatre up to people who are blind or otherwise visually impaired. People with this kind of impairments shall have the same opportunities to participate in cultural life offered by visual media as all other people. As visual media play an important role in everyday life and are a means for social integration, it is important to give all people the chance to fully participate in this part of culture.

In order to make visual media accessible to people with visual impairments the movies are supplemented with an audio description. Sequences of a movie that are only understandable in their visual context are described in short sentences in the dialogue breaks of a movie. This includes a description of gestures and facial expressions of the actors or the setting of a scene. One innovation introduced by the Deutsche Hörfilm is audio-description for DVDs, including an accessible menu.

The predecessor of the non-profit company is a project called “Projekt Hörfilm” which has been carried out by the DBSV – Deutscher Blinden und Sehbehinderten Verband (a German association for blind and visually impaired people) and was launched in 1998 and promoted the implementation of audio-described programmes by German TV stations. Using the second audio channel of a stereo broadcast audio descriptions for people with visual

impairments can easily be added to the normal TV programme. At the end of the 1990s there were two German TV stations broadcasting a small part of their programme with this service. As the project proceeded and became today's non-profit company the number of partners has risen. By now the company could acquire very prestigious partners including one of two major German public TV stations, ZDF, as well as the Kinowelt Home Entertainment company (a film distributor) and the International Film Festival of Berlin. The partners support the Deutsche Hörfilm by either implementing audio descriptions in their programmes (in case of the TV stations) or by supporting the marketing of DVDs with audio descriptions (in case of the film distributor).

Since 1998, the German Audio Film non-profit Ltd. has produced audio descriptions for about 500 cinema and TV movies as well as TV series. Movies are selected for audio description according to a set of criteria of which licence management is the most important. There are three variants of licence management that make a movie suitable for audio description: The first variant is that a TV station produces the movie or series and is therefore the rights owner. In this case the Deutsche Hörfilm produces the audio description and makes it available to the TV station for broadcasting. The advantage of this variant is that the audio description is made for a program which can be broadcasted repeatedly by the station without additional costs, i.e. it provides an immediate and sustainable increase of the movie's value. The second variant is that a TV station has bought the licence for a program for a limited number of reruns. Then the Deutsche Hörfilm must calculate whether the expected audience for the limited replays is high enough that it pays to produce an audio description. The third variant comes into play when a movie can be considered to be a film classic having a high cultural value. Thus, it is possible to produce an audio description even if the TV station has a licence for one broadcast only, as it can be expected that the movie will be repeated in the future.

The audio descriptions are produced by professional narrators together with visually impaired people providing advice from the point of view of the target group. The narrators must be experienced rhetoricians (e.g. actors) and undergo a special audio description training provided by the Deutsche Hörfilm GmbH.

In 2004 the company has organised an audio movie performance tour in Germany on the occasion of the premiere of the movie "Die Blindgänger". Within a project called "Audio Description in Cinemas" 42 audio-described performances in 24 German cities have been organised which attracted about 3,000 viewers. Most performances were held in the form of an open audio description where the comments are played back over normal speakers. Some performances were based on a technique called "Dolby-Screen-Talk" where the comments are played over headphones and are thus not hearable for non-visually impaired people. This method is also used at the Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin where visually impaired people have access to the audio descriptions via infrared headphones. This enables blind people to watch a movie together with the audience who don't need the audio descriptions. After the audio movie tour the project "Audio Description in Cinemas" received the price for innovation by the Federal Ministry of Culture's film aid programme.

3.3 Learning Points

Initially launched as a project by the DBSV in 1998, the Deutsche Hörfilm non-profit company is now in its eighth year. During this period the company experienced continuous success. The number of TV stations and programmes transmitted with an audio-description has increased considerably over that time. In 1997 there were eight audio movies shown in German TV. The number has increased to 147 in 2000 and up to 271 programmes with audio descriptions in 2003.

The step from a project towards a non-profit company also indicates that the scheme has been successful enough to lay the foundation for the continued improvement of the work carried out. This impression is confirmed by the company's partnerships. In case of the

Berlinale festival the partnership already holds for seven years. During that time there have been exclusive film festivals with audio description of movies. These are a very good platform to promote the issue among a large audience that couldn't be reached by other means. Also the variety of audio-described DVDs which are produced in partnership with Kinowelt Home Entertainment is continuously increasing. Through this partnership it is possible both to produce audio descriptions for low budget movies and also to offer accessible high quality mainstream movies. That shows that the quality rather than the quantity of partnerships is important in order to be successful.

Copyright can constitute a major barrier to publishing movies with audio descriptions, especially if the company producing the descriptions has to buy full rights for each movie. The Deutsche Hörfilm circumvented this problem by not buying copyrights for the movies but by transferring the rights for the audio descriptions to other right holders (TV stations, film distributors) that integrate the audio description into the medium and then release it. In the case of DVD or Video productions these can then be purchased over the website of the Deutsche Hörfilm.

From a technological point of view, the objective of the company is to use existing solutions rather than to develop new ones. However, also in the cases where new methods and technologies are developed or tested, e.g. usage of infrared for headphones or "Dolby-Screen-Talk", this is done in order to integrate accessibility into standard media and events, such as movie or theatre performances. This makes mainstream media accessible for blind people and is thus an important step to facilitate their participation in cultural life.

However, the implementation of these technologies into a majority of cinemas takes a long time and is likely to be hemmed by the fact that the target group (i.e. visually impaired people with an interest in movies) is still relatively small when compared to the whole population and the business case is accordingly weak. On the other hand, only if there is an appropriate number of accessible performances people with visual impairments will be able to consider movies as a cultural offer which is valuable for them. And only then the integration of people with visual impairments into mainstream media will be successful.

Another good step into the direction of better including disabled people into cultural life is the implementation of accessibility technologies into theatre performances. This seems to be a very courageous action, as it is a lot more difficult to audio-describe a live performance, than a movie. But again this constitutes a indispensable step on the way towards accessible cultural offers.

3.4 Further Information

More information on the Deutsche Hörfilm GmbH is available at <http://www.hoerfilm.de/>. In August 2006, an interview with Martina Wiemers, Deutsche Hörfilm gGmbH, has been conducted. Contact details are: 030 – 235573432 and info@hoerfilm.de.