



Audio Description: Lifelong Access for the Blind

Final Report

Public Part

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Executive Summary

The aim of the ADLAB project has been to work to heighten the profile of one of the most innovative and useful developments that has taken place over recent years, namely the provision of **audio description (AD)** in all kinds of audiovisual products. Audio description is the describing of film or other audiovisual products in the gaps between dialogue or other sound features for the benefit principally of the blind and sight-impaired community. The outcomes of the project are first of all of benefit to the end-users of AD, the blind and visually impaired, from the drawing up of an accurate picture of the situation regarding the blind population across Europe, to the detailed analysis of texts in order to identify best practices, to the testing of such practices in AD on blind and sight-impaired subjects to the final drafting of strategic guidelines for use by professionals, service providers, teachers and students.

Progress in the AD field has been very **varied** across the European spectrum, ranging from contexts in which AD is an accepted part of many audiovisual packages (eg., in the UK, in Spain) and other contexts where the process is unknown or rare. The ADLAB project has attempted to close those gaps through a mixture of applied research, experimentation, and the creating of products with a view to standardising procedures across the continent, and reaching out to stakeholders in the industry, in higher education and within the blind community itself. The outcomes of the project include a detailed report photographing the current situation regarding the user needs of the blind and partially sighted population in Europe and a report and book (published by Benjamins) on the text analyses carried out by all ADLAB partners designed to identify the 'crisis points' experienced by describers and offering solutions in order to promote best practices in the creation of ADs. A report on the testing procedures was then produced detailing how groups of blind users were tested in all the member countries and how their reactions framed the progression of the project and the final stage of producing the manual of strategic guidelines, again published though this time as an e-book with hard copy versions in English and German.

The ADLAB **partners** included universities in five European countries (Belgium, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain), and industry partners and service providers in three (Belgium, Germany and Italy). This set-up provided an example of hybridity primed for fruitful collaboration and, as one of the aims of the project was to extend cooperation between academia and the world of work in all European countries, the consortium provided a model on how to create the mechanisms by which best practices can be shared and acted upon. The partners had also been chosen on the basis of a diversification principle: the language permutations involved are Catalan, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish (to include both widely spoken and lesser-used languages from the Romance, Germanic and Slavonic families), and all forms of audiovisual translation are included (dubbing in Italy and Germany, monolingual subtitling in Portugal, bilingual subtitling in Belgium, voice-over in Poland, bilingual dubbing in Catalonia).

All materials are now freely available on the project website www.adlabproject.eu.

Table of Contents

1. PROJECT OBJECTIVES.....	5
2. PROJECT APPROACH.....	7
3. PROJECT OUTCOMES & RESULTS.....	10
4. PARTNERSHIPS.....	13
5. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.....	13
6. CONTRIBUTION TO EU POLICIES	18

1. Project Objectives

The ADLAB objectives can be summarized as providing reliable guidelines for the industry and for all users, providing the material for the setting up of a Europe-wide network of audio description courses in higher education and sensitising policy-makers to the importance of providing the blind community with access to quality audiovisual products. In addressing the need of the blind and visually impaired communities in Europe for the provision of quality audio description over a wide range of uses, ADLAB envisaged **four stages**:

Firstly the situation regarding access to audiovisual products on the part of the blind and visually impaired population in Europe had to be ascertained.

Secondly detailed text analysis was required in order to identify all the problematic linguistic, semantic and pragmatic aspects encountered in producing quality audio description and subsequently strategies to deal with these aspects had to be formulated.

Thirdly, once proto-texts based on best practices had been produced, it was necessary to test their efficacy with the collaboration of blind and visually impaired audiences in a number of European contexts.

Fourthly, when the descriptions had been tested, amended and approved, the project's final aim was to produce a manual consisting of a series of alternative strategies designed to enable describers to face the afore-mentioned problematic aspects. The manual would then be made available to all important stakeholders, from service-providers and the describers themselves to teachers in higher education courses covering AD.

Current practices and national norms and guidelines regarding AD in Europe (where they existed) were examined in depth in order to get a clear **photograph** of the present situation and a clear understanding of what was common to all and what was still required in the provision of audio description. While the original aim of the text analysis phase was to study the problematic areas involved in writing audio descriptions and produce a report, the opportunity arose to also collect the many findings from the analyses and publish them: this resulted in a **John Benjamins volume** entitled *Audio description: new perspectives illustrated*. The analyses had focused on the single text, Quentin Tarantino's film *Inglourious Basterds*.

The testing was carried out in six European countries through the use of carefully prepared questionnaires to be completed after the viewing of different AD versions of the vehicle film, *Inglourious Basterds*, to ascertain levels of comprehension and enjoyment.

It was decided that the final project product, the manual for describers consisting of strategies to deal with all aspects of AD, should not be based on previous prescriptive recommendations but should offer both the professional describer and the trainee student a set of **strategic alternatives** to apply in varying situations. The manual thus provides a standardized document which can be used across Europe (and elsewhere) but without the straitjacket of fixed rules. This project outcome also expanded into the production of an **e-book** available online with hard copies in English and German. This product is also available on CD and in a braille version. Crucially, the key **target groups** (the blind and visually impaired communities) have been involved across the board, not only through the membership of industrial partners and service providers, but also through awareness-raising initiatives. In fact, blind associations in the partner countries have been involved in ADLAB at all stages, particularly in the testing experiments. Individual blind persons from Belgium, Spain, Italy, Poland and Germany participated actively in both the mainstreaming meeting held in Trieste in July 2014 and in the Final Meeting held in Brussels in September 2014, contributing significantly to the discussion sessions. ADLAB has received recognition for example at major events such as ARSAD 2013 (and will be presented

there again in 2015) and 'Languages and the Media', and thus the awareness-raising aspect is strong. The audio description market is expanding, as explained by Alex Varley of Media Access Australia (and member of the advisory group) in the talk he gave in Trieste in November 2014. This means there will be work opportunities for describers, and the universities are beginning to expand their course curricula to include AD and thus provide skilled professionals. As Varley pointed out, the use of synthetic voices for AD is envisaged in the future though this will not impact on the need for the describers themselves.

2. Project Approach

The ADLAB approach policy from the start was to find **concrete** solutions to help close the gaps existing in many places in Europe as regards access to audiovisual products on the part of the blind and sight impaired community. This was to be achieved through the pursuit of distinct activities (“work packages”) concentrating on different aspects of the task in hand. Responsibility was shared among the partners, though everyone contributed at all stages.

An assessment of the **needs** of the target group of end-users (focused on the partners' Member states) was designated as the first step, and a report on the situation is available at <http://www.adlabproject.eu/Docs/WP1%20Report%20DEF>. This ‘snapshot’ generated a quite exceptional degree of interaction between enterprise and education, because the international external experts involved in the external evaluation of the report (Peter Olaf Looms, Alex Varley, Jan-Louis Kruger) not only provided extremely valuable criticism and feedback, but also triggered a very lively debate among all project participants.

The needs assessment was followed by work on audiovisual text (principally film) and **analyses** aimed at identifying what constitutes successful scripting of audio description, specifically by identifying the most difficult problems describers face, first in English and with reference to Quentin Tarantino’s film *Inglourious Basterds*. The results turned out to be so extensive and wide-reaching that the possibility of producing a book was considered. This then resulted in a volume by John Benjamins Publishers *Audio description: new perspectives illustrated*.

The next stage of the project was planned as a **testing phase** where the results of the text analysis (available at <http://www.adlabproject.eu/Docs/WP1%20Report%20DEF>) would be used to ascertain whether the resulting descriptions did indeed represent an improvement on the rather ad-hoc offer that exists at the moment and meet the approval of the end-users. The tests, involving blind subjects in six countries, included the use of questionnaires, interviews and comparative studies. Alternative audio descriptions of the film *Inglourious Basterds* were translated into the member countries’ languages and presented to participants. The purpose was to ascertain the efficacy of the different versions in terms of comprehension and enjoyment, and a report is available at <http://www.adlabproject.eu/Docs/WP2%20Report>.

The creation of the **guidelines** formed the final phase in the approach. This development has gone hand in hand with the formulation of **curricula** for higher education courses, beginning with those in the member countries’ universities, designed to embrace both the theoretical aspects of AD (e.g., those emanating from the text analysis and translation phase) and the practical skills required (to be found, in the first instance, in reputable, well thought out guidelines). This stage widened after much fruitful discussion during the regular workshops in the member countries’ premises and review meetings on Skype, and resulted in the decision to produce ‘strategic’ guidelines offering alternative solutions to AD problems rather than the prescriptive rules that exist at present.

The outcomes of all these phases were disseminated to interested stakeholders in the academic world and in the world of work. Meetings between partners were projected and held on a regular basis at the end of each phase, supplemented by local initiatives designed always to attract attention to the work being carried out.

To monitor and evaluate project performance, ADLAB devised a **quality assurance plan** based on five parameters (risk management, internal control, external control, best practices and quantitative

indicators). Good practices included the systematic drafting of meeting agendas and minutes (with embedded visual elements), the organisation of regular, distance “review” meetings via skype and contingency plans for complementary financial/administrative management and internal auditing. Communication activities were developed according to an ADLAB-specific communication plan and divided between internal and external exercises. An ADLAB working environment was put in place as an integrated communication platform for all project activities via the project website (<http://www.adlabproject.eu/>). Crucially, the website was developed according to the principles of **cognitive ergonomics**, in order to provide usability and accessibility also for blind people and the visually impaired community. The partners have worked on the basis of a formal, project-specific **consortium agreement**, approved by all partners’ legal representatives in the early stages of the project. The agreement allowed partners to work in a clear collaborative framework (project scope, governance, meetings and voting, deliverables etc.) from the very beginning, without having to agree and define each time the provisions regulating the individual project activities. The fact that ADLAB’s progress report (submitted to EACEA in April 2013) scored 9/10 in all evaluation criteria (except on financial management where the score was 8/10), and that its public part was put online by the EACEA (see http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/lfp/project_reports/project_reports_erasmus_en.php under the category “ECUE projects”, multilateral actions 2011) was especially encouraging and proved that the consortium was on the right track.

Dissemination activities have been planned and implemented both at project and partner level, and recorded with a system (dissemination list) that allowed individual actions to be extracted by heading (type of output, mode, target group...). ADLAB further engaged in sensitising stakeholders (and policy-makers in particular) to the importance of providing the blind community with access to audiovisual products: a series of **local events** have taken place in the partners countries and beyond. Firstly all partners have made contact with national and local blind associations, not only to sensitise the end-user organisations to audio description and to the work of ADLAB, but also to ask for useful information as to their membership and activities and to any lobbying initiatives they have undertaken (see User Needs report and appendices).

These events were then complemented by initiatives undertaken at **consortium level**, to which all partners contributed. The full list of events is substantial (See section “Resources” on the ADLAB website) In 2011, for example, ADLAB was presented to politicians, journalists and media figures at the inauguration of ValsuganaTV (a local television station with AD organized by Senza Barriere). In October 2012 the project coordinator (Taylor, University of Trieste) gave a talk on ADLAB at the University of Calabria at a conference devoted to European projects, where ADLAB was voted the best project. In 2013 and 2014 the project was also presented in Lecce, Perugia, Padua, Turin, Udine and also in Croatia (Zagreb, May 2012), a country with almost no AD at all.. Taylor was then a keynote speaker at the prestigious ARSAD conference in March 2013 in Barcelona (which also served as an outreach event for the project). In 2013 an ‘AD Day’ was held in Trieste: local stakeholders were invited (RAI Television, Blind Associations, media figures) and guest speakers included Vera Arma from the AD producers ‘Culturabile’, Carla Lugli voice talent for RAI television, Vincenzo Zoccano, vice president of the [Consulta Regionale delle Associazioni dei Disabili del Friuli Venezia Giulia](http://www.consultadisabili.fvg.it/) (<http://www.consultadisabili.fvg.it/>) and the audio description provider ‘Senza Barriere’. In 2014 a mainstreaming meeting took place in Trieste, where the ADLAB members reported their individual contributions to the project before an audience of service providers, blind associations, media figures and politicians. The Polish partners (Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza) have helped to raise awareness with the Polish Blind Association since November 2011 and have identified the AD organisations to contact in order to promote audio

description. In 2013 they presented ADLAB at an international audio description conference on Łódź. ADLAB was reported in the 'Hot Topics' section of the European Society of Translators' Newsletter. The Polish team also presented the project at 'Friday Lunch Talks' in Poznan and at the '111 years of English Studies' conference. Bernd Benecke of Bayerischer Rundfunk, as a very active professional audio describer and ADLAB partner organized a series of workshops in 2012 and 2013 on audio description, all related to ADLAB. They all attracted considerable attention to the provision of AD in Germany. The Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona set up the resource centre <http://publish.cephis.uab.cat> for ADLAB. User associations and government departments related to AD in Spain were contacted individually. The Belgian partners at the University of Antwerp and VRT have worked together on a number of ADLAB initiatives, including the presentation of the first AD product for Flemish television, and the holding of workshops on audio description both in Belgium and at the Dubrovnik 'Media4All' conference, see <http://mediaforall5.dhap.hr/Home/ProgrammeDetails/20130925>. Neves (Leiria) has conducted workshops including ADLAB content every year at Imperial College London and Francisco (Leiria) has set up the MOOC platform containing the ADLAB manual and an online course based on the manual - <http://up2u.ipleiria.pt/en/>.

The final meeting of the ADLAB project took place in September 2014 and was hosted by the partner Vlaamse Radio en Televisie (VRT) in Brussels. All ADLAB members participated actively before an audience of numerous and varied stakeholders from around Europe.

The project also reached **beyond Europe**: in October 2011 ADLAB was presented in Argentina (Santa Fe), a country which has practically no audio description and was keen to correspond. The project was also taken to Hong Kong, while have been instrumental in promoting ADLAB at ITU and ISO conferences in Toronto, Tokyo and Geneva.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The first outcome of ADLAB was the **User Needs Assessment** report (available at <http://www.adlabproject.eu/Docs/WP1%20Report%20DEF>), coordinated by the Bayerischer Rundfunk partner. It focussed on the partners' countries (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain) and provided the necessary 'snapshot' of the situation in Europe regarding the numbers of blind and sight-impaired persons and the provision of audio description for that community on television, at the cinema, in museums, at outdoor events, etc. The survey uncovered differing levels of awareness of the existence of audio description among the blind population, and different national legislation regarding access for the sensorially disabled in the various countries and the projected provision of AD by service providers. So, starting from this original 'snapshot' in 2011, the User Needs Assessment pointed the way to a **more widespread and better distribution** of AD products, with an education and training background provided by the fruitful collaboration between academia and service providers. The following chart shows roughly the situation in a number of European countries.

Country	AD on TV since...	Public TV broadcasters	Commercial TV broadcasters	Minutes of AD on TV
BE (Flemish Region)	2012	VRT	-	780 mins/year
DE	1993	BR, Arte, NDR, WDR, MDR, ZDF, 3Sat, HR, RBB, SWR	-	93,600 - 140,400 mins/year
IT	1997	RAI 1,2,3	-	218,400 mins/year
PL	2011	TVP	TVN	15,000 mins/year
PT		RTP	-	3120 mins/year
ES	1995	RTVE, Televisión Pública Andalucía, TP de Catalunya	Disney Channel Antena 3 Televisión	
UK		BBC	BSkyB, Channel 4, ITV	+/- 100 hrs/month

The report on **Text Analysis and Development**, coordinated by the Barcelona team, formed the second major outcome of the project, available at <http://www.adlabproject.eu/Docs/WP2%20Report>. Testing contained enough material, based on a matrix created by the Barcelona team, to be considered for publication as a book *Audio description: new perspectives illustrated*, John Benjamins, 2014), with eleven chapters ranging from the use of film language in AD to character fixation to spatio-temporal relations, etc. The text analyses were conducted by all members on a single text (the Quentin Tarantino film *Inglourious Basterds*, www.adlabproject.eu). The basic idea was to identify the many 'crisis points' that an audio describer can face in his/her work.

This stage was followed by extensive **testing** of alternative audio description approaches, based on the previous text analysis research. This part of the project was coordinated by the Polish

partners, though all partners were involved: the testing was carried out in Poland, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal and Belgium with the same AD translated into the respective languages and resulted in a report available on <http://www.adlabproject.eu/Docs/WP3%20Report%20on%20Testing>.

The results of the testing were indicative rather than conclusive, influencing the methodology used in the final stage of producing a **manual** on how best to approach audio description. The choice was to create strategic guidelines offering alternative solutions to AD problems depending on particular conditions, rather than a list of prescriptive rules such as those currently in circulation. The end product, the manual of 'strategic' guidelines, has been produced as an **e-book** with hard copy versions in English and German, to enable as wide a dissemination as possible (see ADLAB website home page). The manual is also available in braille and on CD, and will be offered to the industry as a useful tool in the production of audio description and to higher education facilities as a basis for curriculum development and the introduction of more courses and/or modules on AD in European institutions.

ADLAB has acted as an **awareness-raising** vehicle amongst the blind communities, particularly those citizens as yet unaware of the availability of audio described products. Service providers such as 'Senza Barriere' in Italy will disseminate ADLAB's results, publicize their service and keep a **database of users** now running into thousands **National institutes and associations** for the blind (for example the Unione Ciechi in Italy, O.N.C.E. in Spain, VeBeS and SBPV vzw - Het Slechtienden en blindenplatform Vlaanderen in Belgium, BBSB- Bayerischer Blinden- und Sehbehindertenbund in Germany, PZN Polski Związek Niewidomych in Poland and ACAPO in Portugal), have all been contacted and encouraged to collaborate to the advantage of their members. Much ground has already been covered in this respect (in Italy experiments have been carried out with the Rittmeyer Institute in Trieste and the Blind Persons' Unions in Pordenone and Trieste; the 'Consulta Regionale' for the disabled in Friuli.Venezia-Giulia has given ADLAB its patronage, etc.).

Distributors such as Telenet, Belgacom TV, TV Vlaanderen, Norkring, Mobistar TV, and decision makers Tom Sierens of the media department, Philippe Courard (Secretary of state for people with a handicap) and lobby groups such as Grip in Flanders have all been consulted. The Portuguese partner Joséia Neves holds regular meetings with the 'Grupo de Reflexão para a Acessibilidade aos Media where legislators, stakeholders and specialists have a say, and is a consultant for the Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação in Portugal; Matamala and Orero from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona are active in the ITU standardization group (<http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-T/focusgroups/ava/Pages/default.aspx>) and on the standardisation body AENOR in Spain; and in Italy the AD Day initiative was supported by the regional office for the disabled and by the Officer for the Disabled of the provincial government (who also asked the Trieste team to take part in a future Day of the Disabled conference). The mainstreaming seminar held in Trieste in 2014 provided another opportunity to present ADLAB's results to stakeholders. All these activities were designed to persuade such legislators and stakeholders to promote the expansion of the practice over the media. The television companies who are partners in the project (Bayerischer Rundfunk, VRT) and those already attuned to AD (e.g. TVC, the Catalan national television service, the BBC, DR the Danish television service) will give further emphasis to the fact that they can offer ever more programming with audio description, and this practice will be encouraged across Europe.

ADLAB's research reveals that such activity is destined to increase, if not dramatically, in the next few years though partner Benecke (Bayerischer Rundfunk) predicts major changes in Germany.

Either through government legislation or voluntary initiative, for example on the part of some private companies such as BSkyB, the targets set by decree or by wishful thinking are slowly being met. Taylor (Trieste) met with RAI Television operatives at a seminar in Forlì in 2012 who showed interest in the ADLAB project and website, and gave assurances that, despite the bleak financial outlook, progress would be made. By way of further example, Vlaamse Radio en Televisie (VRT) initiated audio description in Belgium during the first phase of the project and has now surpassed the quota required by Flemish legislation. As mentioned above, Bayerischer Rundfunk continue to expand their television coverage in Bavaria and beyond. ADLAB has brought together BR and VRT and discussions have begun on the possibility of international collaboration where languages are common to more than one country. Senza Barriere has increased its catalogue of described films to more than 600.

Importantly, in 2014 one of the first **doctoral theses** on Audiodescription was written by ADLAB's partner Bernd Benecke (Bayerischer Rundfunk): *Audiodeskription als partielle Translation - Modell und Methode (Audiodescription as partial translation - Model and Method*, cf. <http://litverlag.de/isbn/3-643-12367-1>.

The book presents the Audio Description Evolution Model ADEM which systematises the special interplay of sound and image and provides a methodology with an action-oriented sequence of steps that can be used in daily practice. Ania Maswerowska (UAB) also completed her PhD entitled *The Verbalisations of the Effects of Light and Contrast in Audio Description*.

As the project progressed, a **stakeholders'** list was developed and is now available on the ADLAB website.

The final ADLAB meeting in Brussels, held on September 19th 2014, gave members the opportunity to report on the outcomes and results of the project before interested parties including important guests from all member countries. The proceedings from this event are available on the ADLAB website www.adlabproject.eu.

The results of the project will be exploited to the full in higher education institutions where the introduction of courses (or parts of courses) in audio description will lead to inevitable discussion, experimentation and diffusion of knowledge for the foreseeable future and beyond. The production of the ADLAB book and the e-book manual will provide an excellent springboard for the promotion of AD courses in the partners' countries, e.g., in Italy through the organization of university language centres (AICLU). The University of Trieste, starting in 2014-15, will offer a Masters level course on access for the sensorially disabled, half of which will be devoted to audio description (see programme). The University of Poznań will inaugurate a new course (see programme) and the University of Antwerp will further develop its courses and workshops on AD. Neves of IPL Leiria (partner 3) will begin the teaching of AD in Doha, Qatar, while Masters courses on AD at the University of Barcelona will expand. Partners have also been invited to give lessons on ADLAB at universities which have not yet introduced AD modules, for example Taylor at the Universities of Zagreb, Pavia, Perugia and Calabria, Perego at the Universities of Udine and Rijeka, Neves at Imperial College, London, etc.

4. Partnerships

The ADLAB partnership consists of both **university** and **industry sectors**. The HEI participants (University of Trieste, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Instituto Politécnico de Leiria, University of Antwerp, Adam Mickiewicz University) had already worked in the audiovisual field for many years and in collaboration, and all had more recently turned to the question of accessibility. Most of the partners had practical experience of audio description (Pilar Orero in Barcelona with local Catalan TV, Aline Remael and Nina Reviere in Antwerp with Flemish TV and theatre respectively, Joselia Neves in Leiria with Portuguese TV). The ADLAB project represented the ideal opportunity to continue working together on the subject of access to audiovisual products for the visually impaired. The partners remain constant contributors to national and international conferences, workshops and seminars on audiovisual topics and their joint bibliography is both lengthy and authoritative. They have all introduced audio description into their **teaching modules**, whether in undergraduate or postgraduate study programmes, also bringing a number of Ph.D students into the field (see www.adlabproject.eu for a complete list of courses produced on AD in the project lifetime and projected for the future).

Among the **non-university** partners, the German television company Bayerischer Rundfunk Fernsehen (<http://www.br.de/index.html>) has in Bernd Benecke one of the foremost professional describers in Europe. Bayerischer Rundfunk also involves blind and visually impaired people in the AD process, while VRT (the Flemish television station <http://www.vrt.be/> provides AD material for Belgian TV and is involved in research. In Italy, the partner 'Senza Barriere' (<http://www.senzabarriere.org/>), a non-profit making organisation providing professional audiodescription products for the Italian blind community. The honorary director is Eraldo Busarello, who is blind, and therefore an essential element in the make-up of the consortium. 'Senza Barriere' has produced a first set of guidelines for, and holds courses for, potential Italian describers. A new version of the manual was produced in 2013.

As mentioned before, the partners were also chosen on the basis of a **diversification** principle. ADLAB includes a wide range of language permutations (Catalan, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish), and all forms of audiovisual translation (dubbing in Italy and Germany, monolingual subtitling in Portugal, bilingual subtitling in Belgium, voice-over in Poland, bilingual dubbing in Catalonia). By drawing on a highly diversified combination of expertise, both within and beyond the consortium, ADLAB is providing an example of real cooperation between academia and enterprise.

Certainly the increasing interest in audiovisual products produced in the countries of Europe (and particularly English-language products in translation) is encouraging in terms of inter-European contact. Suffice it to think of all the different language versions that can be found on DVDs in the form of dubbing, subtitling and captioning for the deaf and hard of hearing. Audio description has only just entered this polyglot world, and not at all in some countries, but the dynamic that has created the current range of multilingual products will embrace AD precisely through projects like ADLAB. The aim is for more and more DVDs to contain AD and in as many combinations as the other audiovisual systems. From the **post-production** point of view, it would make sense to add AD to the existing package of services, and this is now beginning to happen. The industry and service provider partners are tuned to the need for access at international level and are keen to promote standardized audio description for the benefit of all. The inter-European composition of the consortium provided the necessary synergy to pursue this goal, as demonstrated by the joint effort required to create the multi-lingual strategic guidelines. The John Benjamins publication *Audio description: new perspectives illustrated* was also the result of pooled resources and brought

together theoretical ideas and practical experience in a volume that covers audio description in a detailed and innovative way.

The first subjects to benefit from the outcomes of the ADLAB project are the **end-users** of audio description, that is the blind and visually impaired communities across Europe. The provision and promotion of best practices in AD, based on the results of the text analysis, testing and guideline production phases of ADLAB, together with the raising of awareness of the existence of audio description, particularly as regards the describing of television products, will now benefit a potential audience of millions.

In terms of the development of new opportunities for the teaching of audio description strategies and techniques, there will be benefits for those students who complete courses and are able to find work in an area which is due to expand along with other areas of audiovisual provision.

AD on television is **expanding**, albeit slowly, in line with government directives and voluntary decisions on the part, particularly, of private broadcasters. Within the media industry, as indicated above, the development of DVDs with 'packages' of extra material (trailers, standard subtitles in various languages, intralingual subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, multiple dubbing tracks, information on the films, etc.) means that the cost of providing audio description can be borne within the package and not represent the obstacle that has dissuaded many producers in the past. The European dimension of ADLAB has meant that stakeholders have been contacted and sensitised all over the continent, including those invited to the final conference in Brussels.

5. Plans for the Future

Following on from the latter phases of the project, in which **experimentation** was carried out, strategic guidelines produced and curricula developed, the ADLAB members will continue to promote the project ethos and reach out to the HEI sector and service providers across Europe. **Curriculum** development in the field, within the wider area of audiovisual studies, will be an ongoing concern. Already, during the lifetime of ADLAB, new courses in AD have been introduced. As mentioned above, entire courses (or parts of courses) in audio description have been introduced. In Italy, the University of Trieste, starting in 2014-15, will offer a Masters level course on access for the sensorially disabled, half of which will be devoted to audio description (see programme). This will complement the already existing audio visual translation course which contains a module on AD. The University of Poznan will inaugurate a new course (see programme) and the University of Antwerp will further develop its courses and workshops on AD. Neves of IPL Leiria (partner 3) will begin the teaching of AD in Doha, Qatar, while Masters courses on AD at the University of Barcelona will expand (see list of curricula). Partners have also been invited to give lessons on ADLAB at universities which have not yet introduced AD modules, for example Taylor at the Universities of Zagreb, Pavia, Perugia and Calabria, Perego at the Universities of Udine and Rijeka.

Representatives of **service providers** and **policy-making** bodies, such as those invited to local meetings e.g. AD Day in Trieste in 2013, and the final conference in Brussels, will continue to be contacted and sensitised. In Trieste, these included representatives from the provincial government responsible for policies for the disabled, the head of the Regional Government disabled consultation service, the university representative for the disabled, the head of service provider 'Intertitula', members of the Blind Union and representatives from the Rittmeyer Institute for the Blind (see stakeholder attendance list). The Final Meeting in Brussels was attended by members of ACIC from Spain, a representative of the Audio Description Foundation in Poznan, the heads of service providers 'Moviereading' and 'Artis Project', a representative of the Flemish Library of Audiobooks and by various blind associations (see attendance list). The aim, encapsulated in the pan-European guidelines, is for Europe-wide communication to be established so that everyone works in the same direction pursuing the same objectives. Two of the work package reports have blossomed into publications and will carry the project forward as both educational and vocational tools as they are disseminated as widely as possible to HEI and industry providers in Europe. The Benjamins publication *Audio Description: new perspectives illustrated* will receive definite promotion through the publishing house's own publicity machine. All academics in the audiovisual translation field will certainly be reached. The e-book *Pictures painted in Words*, available on the ADLAB website and also in braille and CD versions has only just come out but has already been presented at the above-mentioned Berlin conference where an entire session was allotted to ADLAB. ADLAB partners are responsible for promoting its use in their countries. For example Italian academia will be informed through the AICLU organisation of university language centres. It will be presented at a CERCLES initiative at Wulkow in January 2015 (CERCLES is the association of European university language centres with more than 200 members). Remael (Antwerp) will also be making a two-hour presentation of ADLAB at the University of New South Wales in Sydney in August 2015.

All the university partners will be involved with or are submitting proposals for future projects concerning audio description. For example, the **HBB4ALL** project (<http://www.hbb4all.eu/>), which is already operative and involves ADLAB members in higher broadband communication, and has a substantial audio description component.

The findings of the ADLAB project will continue to be brought to the attention of as many stakeholders in the audio description business as possible, particularly those organizations that provide a service and are anxious to improve their product (see stakeholder list), and those universities that wish to incorporate AD into their audiovisual courses or set up specific AD training. Both these objectives have been pursued at the 'Languages and the Media' conference in Berlin in November 2014, a biannual gathering of academics and service providers illustrating the state of the art advances in best practices and technology. Speakers presenting ADLAB included Taylor, Remael, Orero, Neves, Matamala, Benecke and Vercauteren. As a result of his report on ADLAB, Taylor has been invited to present the project results in the United States. The ARSAD conference scheduled for March 2015 in Barcelona will provide another opportunity to present the ADLAB book and manual to representatives of academia and service providers. ARSAD is devoted entirely to audio description issues. Other follow-up conferences and seminars will be encouraged throughout the European HEI network. The project website www.adlabproject.eu will be kept up to date after the project ends. Access will be made available to the project database that will contain data pertaining to all stages of the project. It will be opened to **all stakeholders**, who will be included in an extensive mailing list, and encouraged to contribute with suggestions, comments and additional data.

An important result of the project that will continue to benefit the final **end-users**, the blind and visually impaired themselves, is the greater visibility audio description now has. ADLAB has contributed to awareness-raising amongst the blind communities, particularly those citizens who were unaware of the availability of audio described products. This process began with the needs analysis phase which involved contacting blind associations in all the member countries. Members of these organizations were subsequently invited to participate in seminars and meetings and were involved in experiments and surveys in the third phase of the project. Members of blind associations such as the Unione dei Ciechi in Italy took part in the testing in six countries. They volunteered to fill in the rather elaborate oral questionnaires willingly, thereby providing invaluable information to the examiners regarding the optimum form of AD to use. These 120 participants were enthusiastic about AD and will undoubtedly spread the word amongst their visually impaired colleagues. The central office in Rome is keen to continue collaboration and experimentation. Similar experiences were met with in the other member countries. Service providers such as ADLAB partner Senza Barriere now provide ADs for several thousand users.

All the university partners in ADLAB are either already involved in or are applying for other projects connected to audiovisual translation and in particular to audio description (HBB4ALL, Joint Masters involving the University of Antwerp and Macquarie University, Sydney., Horizon 2020). The experience gained in conducting ADLAB has prepared everyone for similar processes in future. The Trieste team has learned a very great deal from coordinating the project and this knowledge will be put to good use in future initiatives. The e.book has just come out and the website link is being sent to those on the ADLAB stakeholders list. Senza Barriere have produced a new version of their Italian guidelines based on the ADLAB experience. The International Standards Organisation and ITU remain interested in collaboration (see e-mail correspondence)..

Finally, important steps have been taken to sustain/extend ADLAB's partnership and good practices to **world excellence** in research and curriculum development and/or synergies with industry. In 2012 and 2013, an application for an Initial Training Network was developed by ADLAB partners under the Marie Curie Programme. The project, which was intended to create a new profile for Future Experts in European Media Access, passed all evaluation thresholds, scoring 91/100, but was not retained for funding due to budgetary restrictions (only 130 projects were

financed out of the successful 631). Two other initiatives under the new Erasmus + programme are currently being considered for 2015: an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree and/or a knowledge alliance, depending on the degree of accreditation/recognition processes among potential partners, as well as on the interests of potential industrial partners.

The new **advisory board**, convened at a meeting during the Berlin 'Languages and the Media' conference, consists of two previous members of the ADLAB advisory board (Varley and Kruger) and two members of ADLAB (Taylor and Remael). This ensures a balance between academia, the industry and professionals. The principal aim of this body is to further the aims of ADLAB beyond the project lifetime and to monitor future developments. As foreseen in Berlin by both university representatives and the many participants from the AD industry, big changes are imminent (voice recognition software, synthetic voices for AD, personalized reception, live AD, etc.) and the board will follow these developments. The ADLAB team consider the strategic guidelines produced by the project as a 'state-of-the art' tool for teaching/training and for the profession but recognize that developments will not come to a halt in the autumn of 2014. As explained in the ADLAB guidelines the importance of cooperation along the whole chain of production of AD, from the commissioning of work to the actual describing, to the voicing, to the recording, to the distribution is paramount. 'Everyone should know everyone else' is a maxim that will be taken forward by the group in an attempt to dispel scepticisms which still exist in some areas between researchers and producers. Members of the board will meet on numerous occasions already planned – ARSAD 2015 in Barcelona, the 'Media4All' conference in Sydney in 2014, the next 'Languages and the Media' conference in Berlin. An inter-university MA is also in the pipeline between Macquarie University (Kruger) and European colleagues (Remael, Orero, Taylor).

6. Contribution to EU policies

The results of the user needs assessment, the first stage in the ADLAB project, confirmed how great was the potential **demand** for audio description in Europe. The figures relating to the size of the blind and visually impaired population was roughly similar in all the countries investigated and proved to be a highly significant number: for example 350,000 blind people and 1.5 million visually impaired in Italy. France numbers 77,000 blind people and 1.2 million partially sighted, Belgium 13,200 and 220,000 respectively, Germany 150,000 and 1.2 million. These figures indicate that the blind and partially sighted community all over Europe is not an insignificant minority, and is indeed growing, and that providing audiovisual access to these persons would bring benefits to a sizeable part of the population, as well as representing a major innovation in media production.

Work on this issue clearly requires a **European perspective**, given the different languages, cultures and traditions involved and the varying levels of provision to be found in different European realities. Indeed it is ONLY through cooperation at European level that this issue can be addressed, as sporadic work on a national, regional or local basis, which has generally been the case until now, has inevitably led to imbalances and even incomprehension among the many nations of the E.U. The project will contribute to preventing the development of isolated and incompatible practices before they are fully established. By providing an important E.U. financed platform for promoting audio description, ADLAB is attempting to attract the attention of national operatives towards the rational objective of having a standardized set of rules. However, at the final stage of the project, the preparing of the guidelines manual, the group members took stock of their experience gained in extensively analyzing all aspects of AD production and in gauging the varying needs of the blind audience. It was thus decided that what was required at European level was not a set of prescriptive rules so much as a set of alternative strategies to deal with particular situations, especially the identified 'crisis points' encountered by all describers. This approach lends itself to both theoretical considerations and practical training, and the resulting manual provides a tool that can be used across Europe in audio-visual translation curricula where audio description is included.

Already the ITU and ISO (see e-mail trail) have taken notice of ADLAB's contribution and ADLAB members have presented the project all over Europe and beyond as illustrated in an Excel dissemination table available on the ADLAB website. Three members of the ADLAB consortium are consulted as experts in their respective government bodies as regards audio description and thus have influence in decision making. Both BR and VRT, who control audio description on television in Bavaria and Flanders are members of ADLAB. Senza Barriere (member 8), already a major service provider of AD on Italy, is following the ADLAB agenda.

Against this background, ADLAB's scope and activities are fully in line with the **Europe 2020 strategy**, in particular with the two flagship initiatives "Innovation Union" and "An agenda for new skills and new jobs". The former aims to promote excellence in education and skills development and to strengthen links between education, business, research and innovation, while the latter promotes better anticipation of future skills needs, and better matching between skills and labour market needs. Within this policy framework, ADLAB strives to go beyond "cosmetic" dialogue and promote real synergies between academia, industrial partners and service providers: as mentioned before, this is seen as the only way to give a significant contribution to both curriculum development and professional practice in the AD sector. ADLAB is also expected to inform collateral initiatives under the latest **Lifelong Learning Programme's** priorities, especially the "Knowledge Alliances" intended to strengthen and develop Europe's innovation potential via the

provision of comprehensive sets of joint activities (including the design and delivery of new multidisciplinary curricula and innovative courses).

Already the HBB4ALL (Hybrid Broadcast Broadband for All) project is involving ADLAB members in the section devoted to audiodescription. This is a logical progression and a clear example of sustainability.