Strategic aspects of standardisation and certification in the field of eAccessibility & eInclusion

A satellite event to the 14th AAATE Conference 2017

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Co-organised by AAATE and the IN LIFE Consortium

Report

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On 12 September 2017, AAATE and the IN LIFE Consortium co-organised a workshop on *Strategic aspects of standardisation and certification in the field of eAccessibility & eInclusion*. The workshop took place in Sheffied, UK, as a satellite event to the 14th AAATE Conference. The participants were welcomed by Evert-Jan Hoogerwerf on behalf of the board of AAATE, partner in the IN LIFE project. He expressed appreciation for the work going on in the IN LIFE project, for the release of *Recommendation 2016* and promised continuous support from the AAATE board to further initiatives aiming to move forward Accessibility in standardisation work.

Standards are important for the practical implementation of legislation and also for the health and social care sector they are particularly relevant: standards are often referenced in laws and they are crucial for allowing interoperability – meaning that a new solution can be deployed in different settings, such as different care delivery contexts , in combination with diverse existing or other innovative systems.

This became particularly evident in the EU funded IN LIFE project – *INdependent LIving support Functions for the Elderly*, a Horizon2020 funded project that focuses on deploying adaptable ICT solutions to assist elderly users with cognitive impairment and to connect these ICT tools into an open reference architecture, facilitating further deployment of these tools in different settings.

In the IN LIFE project, 19 services were tested in 6 pilot sites with elderly patients, mostly by using an ICT assistive device or online tool. In doing this, the IN LIFE partners experienced that interoperability goes far beyond technical compatibility and that **interoperability has many facets** many of which might turn into obstacles if standards are not taken into account properly.

"Overall, we see a lack of training and knowledge regarding standards and their role in fostering interoperability", said Christian Galinski from Infoterm, consortium partner in IN LIFE. "So far, there exists some industry self-certification, but an overall standardization based on general standards is missing. We need certification for the rendering of services to persons with dementia". This certification, according to Galinski, must rely on **standards for integrated healthcare and accessibility**, because standards provide safety as well as consumer choice.

Galinski further highlighted the obstacles. On the one hand, there exists no means today to get a global view of standards that relate to accessibility, and on the other hand standardisation committees do not consider the needs

of persons with disabilities or elderly patients in the standardisation process. The good news is that the IN LIFE project has facilitated the start of **a comprehensive mapping of accessibility related standards**, and the consortium partners are now searching for ways to ensure the continuance of this standards database.

An overview of existing standards however is not enough. Standards themselves must be accessible and all content modalities need to follow the same methodology to be accessible to all. The IN LIFE project has also shown that we need a generic approach to personalisation of software tools and devices so they will work for the population at large.

To tackle these aspects, the IN LIFE project produced *the **Recommendation 2016 concerning standards on eAccessibility and eInclusion***, putting an emphasis on:

- the importance of barrier-free design of ICTs in order to meet the needs of all users and to allow them to actively participate in the digital society;
- the need for effective standards in eAccessibility & eInclusion to facilitate barrier-free design;
- the importance of providing a comprehensive overview of pertinent standards to help institutions, organisations and single experts in the fields related to disability and technology to base their work on standards;
- the need to facilitate the active participation of organisations of persons with disabilities in the standardization processes.

The implementation of the Recommendation 2016 is all the more important since recent surveys have revealed how even "experts" in the field of eAccessibility & eInclusion know little about standards and, therefore, about the right application of standards in design and development work.

Klaus Höckner, board member of Accessible Media (AT) and director of the Austrian Association in Support of the Blind and Visually Impaired, explained in more detail **the meaning and importance of eAccessibility** which refers to the ease of use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as the Internet, by persons with disabilities as well as elderly patients, and everyone with a permanent or temporary functional limitation.

This means that websites for example need to be developed in a way that allows everyone to access the information, be it via a screen-reader programme that reads out the content to blind persons, adjustable font sizes and contrast control for people with low vision, transcripts of audio content and/or closed captions for deaf and hard-of-hearing users.

One way to ensure that eAccessibility is factored into the design and development of software and ICT tools are **certification schemes**. Certification can mean many things: it can refer to the certification of products, software, software tools, organisations, or single individuals as in the case of the Austrian scheme for the certification of web accessibility experts (CWAE).

Klaus Höckner explained that the CWAE is the certification of an individual according to ISO 17024. It is internationally accepted and it creates a pool of experts, registered with the Chamber of Commerce, which institutions, organisations and companies can turn to, to fulfil their obligations under new accessibility regulations (such as the Web Accessibility Directive (2016/2102) in the EU or Section 508 in the US).

Other certification schemes are:

- the Professional Certificate in Web Accessibility (PCWA) in Australia
- the Web Accessibility Specialist (WAS) in the US
- IT4Blind, a certification for persons working with blind visually impaired people in an educational context, in Austria
- the IAAP Certified Professional in Accessibility Core Competencies (CPACC) in the US
- the ECQA Certified Web Accessibility Professional in Europe

Important for all of these certifications schemes is that they rely on **international standards for eAccessibility**, so that the resulting websites and ICT tools can be deployed globally.

"There is a huge amount of work going on in standardisation, but these efforts are so far mostly **neglecting the needs of persons with disabilities**," summarised Klaus Miesenberger, head of the Centre for Integrated Study at the University of Linz (AT).

He mentioned that AAATE is forming a **Special Interest Group** dedicated to implementing *Recommendation 2016*, promoting accessibility in the international standardisation processes and continuing the work started in the IN LIFE project.

Klaus Miesenberger concluded the event with the call upon all participants to be ambassadors for accessibility within the standardisation bodies and to work with AAATE to **set up a cooperation tool for standards and standardisation activities**. Only when accessibility and eInclusion are anchored in international standards, can they be taken up globally.

21 organisations, including ISO TC37, have already endorsed *Recommendation 2016*. **It is still possible to express and endorsement** by following the link: http://aaate.net/2017/04/14/aaate-endorsed-the-recommendation-2016-concerning-standards-on-eaccessibility-and-einclusion/

More information:

- AAATE: www.aaate.net
- Infoterm: http://www.infoterm.info/
- Accessible Media (AT): http://www.accessible-media.at/
- Austrian Association in support of the blind and visually impaired: https://www.hilfsgemeinschaft.at/information-english
- Certified Web Accessibility Expert: https://www.incite.at/ausbildung/de/zertifizierungen/certified-webaccessibility-expert/