UNIT 1. MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY

ELEMENT 2. WHAT IS ACCESSIBILITY

ACCESSIBILITY

Video Lecture Transcript

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This is unit 1, Media accessibility; element 2, What is accessibility; video lecture Accessibility.

I am Anna Matamala, from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

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And in this lecture I will try to define the notion of accessibility.

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If I ask a theatre director, a head of school or a mayor "Is your theatre, school or city council accessible?", most of them will reply "Yes, of course! We have accessible toilets and a ramp for wheelchairs."

Accessibility is often seen as a way to providing access for persons with reduced mobility. But accessibility is more than a ramp for a wheelchair user, despite the importance of well-designed ramps.

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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD for short), includes a full article on "Accessibility". I'll read the first paragraph verbatim.

"1. To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.

Accessibility is not only about the physical space but also about communication and information.

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In fact, we could identify different types of accessibility. For example:

- Physical accessibility
- Cognitive accessibility
- Sensorial accessibility, when one does not have access to the visual or acoustic elements.

But we may also want to talk about:

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Linguistic accessibility, when one does not understand the language.

Social accessibility, when one does not have access because of socio-economic factors.

Another way to look at accessibility is from the perspective of the content that is made accessible.

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We could talk about audiovisual accessibility, written text accessibility, and many more.

And if we consider the environment where a specific content is found,

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we could talk about web accessibility, performing arts accessibility, museum accessibility, etc.

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The EN 17161:2019 standard "Design for All" defines "accessibility" in the following terms:

"Extent to which products, systems, services, environments and facilities can be used by people from a population with the widest range of user needs, characteristics and capabilities to achieve identified goals in identified contexts of use."

A note to this entry indicates that "context of use includes direct use or use supported by assistive technologies".

When reading other ISO definitions of "accessibility" available in the ISO Browsing Platform, you will see that accessibility is defined slightly differently. For example:

- Usability of a product, service, environment or facility by people with the widest range of capabilities.
- Ease of reaching and using a service or facility.

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Although accessibility was considered to concern exclusively or mainly specific groups of persons with disabilities (what Gian Maria Greco terms a "particularist account"), there is now a move towards a "universalist account of access", meaning that accessibility is considered to concern all human beings. Indeed, many accessibility requirements improve usability for everyone. A typical example: subtitles can benefit hearing people watching audiovisual content in a quiet place with the volume off.

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But let's take a step further: how does accessibility relate to usability? Usability is defined in an ISO 9241-11 standard as "Extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use". If "specified users" includes persons with disabilities and "specified context of use" includes accessibility considerations, then usability could be considered an umbrella term. The problem, according to some, is that very often the needs of persons with disabilities get diluted, as some usability practitioners do not consider their needs.

Things are not black and white, and I would advise you to read more about the topic so that you can better position yourselves.

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One question to think about: should we move beyond disability and focus on capabilities? In a 2019 article I published in *Hikma* with Belén Agulló and Pilar Orero, we argued that selecting users based on their sensorial disabilities may not be the best strategy in research as other capabilities (for instance, technological capabilities) may have a greater impact on the results.

And a second question: should we move beyond accessibility and put the focus on personalization and customization? Personalization would allow the system to identify you and offer you an experience based on your previous behaviour. Customization would allow you to make changes to your experience to meet your needs. I leave these questions open so that you can come up with your own ideas.

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This video lecture has been prepared by Anna Matamala, from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. You can reach me at anna.matamala@uab.cat.

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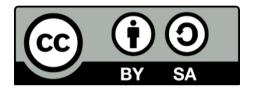License: Pixabay License, CC0

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