

Audio Description Landscape in Russia and Greece

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Abstract: The article provides an overview of audio description landscape in Russia and Greece. It dwells upon the legal issues of providing audio description, comparing national legislation on media accessibility and Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, and their impact on the development of media accessibility services in these countries. Special attention is focused on describers' training both as degree training and further education courses. It also highlights insufficient financial support of accessibility services as one of the reasons for the slow development of Audio Description in Russia and Greece. The article analyzes the new opportunities for providing media accessibility, such as mobile applications and voluntary projects. It also presents an example of a service which can be viewed as a best practice to be shared and spread across other countries – an application *Искусство.Вслух* (Art.Vocally) with audio descriptions of theatre plays voiced by prominent actors and actresses, that was funded by one of the biggest banks of Russia. The article concludes by listing the possible solutions which might spur the development of Russian and Greek audio description.

Keywords: audio description, accessibility, training, AVT, inclusion

L'audio-description: étude comparative Russie-Grèce

Résumé : L'article présente une analyse comparative de l'audio-description (AD) en Russie et en Grèce. Il aborde les questions juridiques liées aux services d'audiodescription, comparant la législation nationale concernant l'accessibilité aux

médias et la Déclaration des droits des personnes handicapées, ainsi leur impact sur le développement des services d'accessibilité aux médias dans ces deux pays. Une attention particulière est accordée aux formations universitaires en lien avec l'analyse des nouvelles opportunités d'accessibilité aux médias au travers les applications pour les smartphones et les projets volontaires. Des données empiriques sont présentées et analysées via l'étude de cas *Искусство.Вслух* (Art.Vocally). L'article conclut par la présentation de scénarios de développement de l'audio description russe et grecque.

Mots-clés : audio description, accessibilité, formation, inclusion

Introduction

Russia and Greece, though being rather different countries in many ways, share one feature: with almost all the world providing access to the media for the blind and people with low vision, they are still struggling in their first steps to formulate the national legislation, standards, training and services themselves.

According to Pablo Romero Fresco (2013), the last decades, we have been witnessing a clear expansion of the accessibility services and Audiovisual Translation throughout the world. Undoubtedly, in many countries around Europe, scholars have undertaken research projects (i.e., Spain, AENOR 2012; France, MFP 2012; UK, Ofcom 2016; Italy, ADLAB 2011–2014) that have played a crucial role in raising awareness with regards to the inclusion of people with impairments within a wide range of cultural activities (Reviere, 2016).

For the purpose of determining and examining the evolution and the general landscape of the audio description services offered in Russia and Greece, a specific focus was given to the national legislation of Russia and Greece concerning the accessibility of people with visual impairment to content. Through the use of qualitative methodology strategies such as case studies and interviews, we managed to acquire a clear view of accessibility services in these two countries. The present publication aims to depict the gaps in the national legislation of Russia and Greece in terms of accessibility services or even cases where law is not respected. Furthermore, it highlights best practices as a motivation for a future development of audio description but also the need for a professional training in accessibility services.

The aim of the article is to raise awareness of the audio description issues and to provide an overview of existing practices in Russia and Greece dwelling both on the shortcomings and recent developments in order to suggest possible solutions to the problems raised in the article.

The article presents a qualitative research exploring the audio description landscape in Russia and Greece by applying the following methods and instruments:

- interviews with audio description professionals (12 interviews were taken between November 2019 and April 2020 – through e-mail. The interviewees are museum directors, professional audiodescribers, curators, scholars).
- document analysis of the existing legislation and national audio description standards;
- case studies of the best practices. They concern mainly museums in Russia and Greece but also theaters and university libraries.

The methods and instruments chosen can provide an in-depth insight into the situation with audio description in both countries.

Audio description is viewed as a constituent part of audiovisual translation and often considered to complement subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing as one of the tools providing accessibility. At the same time, Gambier (2006) distinguishes between accessibility and usability stating that the goal of accessibility is equality of access, and the goal of usability is a better experience for the user (Gambier, 2006). Following the definition provided by the Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB, 2020), the authors of the article understand audio description as commentary that describes body language, expressions and movements, making the programme clear through sound.

1. Russian and Greek National Legislation

Article 39 Part 1 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation states that everyone shall be guaranteed social security at the expense of the State in case of disability. Article 7 part 2 claims state support for disabled persons (Russian Federation Constitution, 1993).

While until recently social security and state support were mostly focused around providing rehabilitation for the people with disabilities, ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012 and introduction of changes into national legislation led to certain changes in providing equality of persons with disabilities, mostly in cultural and entertainment spheres.

The legislation of the Russian Federation on accessibility includes the following documents:

- Federal Law № 181-FZ of November 24th 1995 on Social Security of People with Disabilities in the Russian Federation;
- Federal Law № 46-FZ of May 3d 2012 on Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Federal Law № 34-FZ of March 28th 2019 on Introducing Changes into Articles 8 and 9 of the Federal Law on State Support Of Cinematography Of The Russian Federation”;

- Federal Law № 380-FZ of October 30th 2018 on Introducing Changes into Article 31 of the Federal Law on Mass Media.

On December 3d 2014 the President of the RF signed a law on introducing changes into the national legislation in connection with the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As a result, certain changes were introduced into 25 national laws concerning transport, social security, health care, election rights, information and telecommunication, and culture. In 2011 a state programme 'Accessible Environment' was launched; initially it was planned for five years and applied mostly to physical accessibility to facilities vitally important for persons with disabilities; further it was prolonged until 2020 and applied to educational institutions and administrative establishments; finally, in 2018 the programme was prolonged until 2025 with a bigger range of priorities.

In 2017 Federal Register of Persons with Disabilities was introduced (www.sfri.ru).

Vast majority of improvements for the blind and visually impaired people in Russia still cover mostly physical accessibility and rehabilitation.

According to Federal Law №34-FZ, all full-length films seeking financial support of the state for the production of the film are obliged to use a part of the money obtained from the state in order to provide audio description and subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH). Correspondingly, the law also obliges all vendors of such films to provide access for the target audience. Every year the Ministry for Culture of the Russian Federation establishes a list of films to get financial support of the state. In 2018 only thirty-five films received financial support, which means that this is the amount of accessible video content provided by the introduction of the law. In 2019 the number of state-supported films amounted to 68.

Federal Law № 380-FZ adopted in 2018 came into legal force on January 1st 2020. It obliges licensed broadcasters to provide a minimum amount of subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing: 5 % of all broadcasted programmes per week with the exception of live broadcasts.

The European Union views disability as a social construct, highlights environmental barriers as the main reason that prevents full participation of people with disabilities in society and considers that these obstacles should be eliminated. The European Union is facing accessibility and mobility issue, based on equal rights policy and the right to participate. Furthermore, it recognizes mobility as a right that belongs to every human being, taking, of course, into consideration any reasonable financial and technical restrictions. It also stresses the criticality of accessibility which, according to the international community, is seen as the key to equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

According to the Constitution of Greece (2001 revision) in Article 21 (6): "People with disabilities have the right to assume measures which ensure autonomy, integration and participation in the social, economic and political life of the coun-

try". Consequently, any act which turns against the autonomy or the possibility of people with disabilities to participate in social acts, violates a constitutionally guaranteed right and establishes the right of recourse to Greek justice. Inevitably, the lack of accessibility of infrastructures, services and goods, as it entails obstruction and inability to participate, is an unconstitutional act and gives rise to a right of action. With Law 4074/2012 (Government Gazette 88A/11.04.2012) "Ratification of the Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities", the United Nations Convention and the Protocol accompanying it, was ratified. As a result, the Article 9 of the Accessibility Regulation has been enacted, thus clarifying the State's obligations in this field.

The Article 21 of the Greek Constitution is of particular relevance to people with disabilities, as it states in paragraph 2 that "large families, disabled, victims of war, widows and orphans of those who fell during war, as well as those with incurable physical disabilities or mental illness are entitled to special care by the State". Except for the constitutional provisions that provide general frameworks for the protection of individuals with disabilities, numerous other laws, presidential decrees and regulations have been enacted, in order to specify the assumption of fundamental rights and the participation of people with disabilities in all areas of life, such as education, employment, health services, accessibility etc. Moreover, the text of the Constitution itself extends the protection framework of fundamental rights, as Article 28(1) states that "The generally accepted rules of international law, as well as the international conventions, after their ratification, they constitute an integral part of the Greek law and take precedence over any other provision of the law. So, the constitutional framework for the protection of fundamental rights, in conjunction with all related international conventions which oblige Greece to take them into consideration, constitute a framework of efficient protection, if all provisions are actually implemented and if the State manages to raise public awareness concerning the full acceptance of people with disabilities.

Law 2430/1996 establishes December 3rd as "Day of Persons with Disabilities" and stipulates that the National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities (*ΕΣΑμεΑ*) will submit annually to the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament a report addressing individual and social rights of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, it states that the *ΕΣΑμεΑ* as the most representative organization of persons with disabilities, will be responsible for organizing events for the celebration of December 3rd.

The National Confederation of Persons with Disability holds the position of a Social Partner for issues which are directly or indirectly related to persons with disabilities and thus participates in decision-making centers representing individuals with disabilities when dealing with the Greek State. It also struggles to promote their full participation in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the country. Media accessibility services, including subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing and audiovisual description for people with visual impairment, have now been estab-

lished in many European countries, as Directive 2010/13/EU also provides. However, they are not systematically used in Greece, although the Directive has been incorporated into Greek law since 2011 (Government Gazette 190/ A/ 05-11-2011, Presidential Decree 109/2011). This situation is reflected in the very limited offer of audiovisual translation studies by universities, technology institutions, private colleges or institutes for vocational and lifelong learning of the Greek State.

The Greek legislation currently in force under Law 3592/2007, which provides for four hours of subtitling on Greek TV channels, is widely known and generally accepted as not fully applicable, and in most cases not at all mandatory. Furthermore, the transmission of news in sign language with at least seven minutes presentation of subtitles is also compulsory. In this case too, the law is not properly implemented or it is partially implemented. These obligations appear in paragraph 20 of section 3 of Law 2328/1995 as amended by paragraph 3 of section 7 of Law 3021/2002. They are also provided by Law 3593/2007 on the licensing of media companies.

Both European Directive 2010/13 and earlier 0065/2007 explicitly recognize the right of people with disabilities to equal access to audiovisual content. The Greek Presidential Decree re-introduces the mandatory display of content with subtitles of at least 4 hours and 20% of the list in the case of non-linear audiovisual services. The same obligations with minimal modifications are mentioned in Article 2 paragraph 6 of Law 4173/2013 for the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT) as replaced by section 2 of Law 4324/2015, but also in Articles 6,7 and 8 of Law 4339/2015.

2. Accessibility in Russia and Greece: Accomplishments and Challenges of AD Landscape in Russia and Greece

According to national statistics, the number of people with vision impairment is 218 thousand, 103 thousand of whom are totally blind. The majority of blind and low-vision people are over 50 years of age, 22 % are youth and children (Russian National Statistics Report, 2019).

The main organization that provides for the needs of the blind and visually impaired people in Russia – the National Society of the Blind – was established in 1925. Its motto is “Real rights – real opportunities” [<https://www.vos.org.ru>]. The society has its own media – a magazine *Our Life* and its own radio station. It also takes an active part in providing accessibility to audiovisual material. The first experience of Russian audio description goes back to 1978, when in one of the Moscow cinemas – Burevestnik – the blind and low-vision audience could attend the viewing of the American film *Cleopatra*. It was initiated by The National Society of the Blind that implemented the technical part of providing the sound via an earpiece. All in all, the society organized demonstration of ten films, many of them Russian. Later the project was closed for several reasons, one of them - lack of audio description

standards and requirements which resulted sometimes in poor quality of audio description itself.

In the 1980-s another type of accessibility came into existence – sound films: a track where the sound of the film itself and audio description were mixed and recorded. These films were further sent to specialized libraries for the blind which existed in every region of the country. Apart from the films, the libraries were provided with records of theatre performances. Only in 1989 the first attempts to compile a list of recommendations for writing audio description were made in the form of instructions for parents of a blind child. Among instructions on how to bring up a blind child and prepare them for school and socializing, the authors of the book recommend the parents how to provide descriptions of the video content for their child (Solntseva et al., 1989).

Historic processes that took place in the country in the 1990s held back the development of audio description, and it took more than a decade for audio description in Russia to start anew. In 2004 a seminar was held with the participation of Joel Snyder, an outstanding audio describer, who delivered a series of workshops for Russian practitioners (Rubnikovich, 2018).

Audio description to video content in Russia is not easily accessible. Many blind people say that quite often they simply do not know where to look for a film with audio description (Sichkar, interview, January 28, 2020). There are some websites with links to different resources, mostly amateur ones; there is a Youtube channel of Mosfilm (with 8,5 thousand subscribers) where the viewers can watch classic Soviet and Russian films with audio description.

When OTT (over-the-top, streaming) services made their appearance in Russia, there was some hope that the situation might change, but the lack of strict requirements from the state obliging all vendors to provide audio descriptions allows lax vendors to refrain from that. In interviews with executives of different OTT services streaming in the Russian Federation, the most typical answer was: “We’ll start looking into accessibility issues only when we are made to do it, and have no choice.” (World Content Market, interview, November, 2019). Such answers explain why most Russian OTT services do not provide AD services. The only exception is Megogo which provides audio description both for Russian and foreign films. Several years ago they launched a project Look what you can hear aimed at people with sight and hearing impairment. With financial support of the charity foundation Arts, Science and Sports, the service shared 204 films in 2019 with a resource for the blind and visually impaired www.specialview.org. It should be noted that the majority of audio described films – about 70 % – are for children (Megogo Streaming Service).

A number of Russian theatres, mostly in big cities like Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Kazan, Vladivostok etc, provide audio descriptions for some of their performances, in most cases using headsets that can be obtained from the theatre itself. To make art more accessible, the biggest bank of Russia – Sberbank – initiated and

implemented a project that consisted in creating a mobile phone application Art.Vocally. The application allows people with visual impairments listen to audio descriptions of performances in different theatres of the country. Voice assistant makes the application accessible for the target audience.

A new turn in accessibility services appeared when the representatives of the target audience initiated the process of establishing the services themselves (under the slogan “nothing for us without us”). Such services, if approved by the target audience, can become best practices to be shared and spread across other countries. The website *Опиши мне* (*Describe for me*), initiated by a totally blind person, is a platform where the blind and visually impaired people can order a description which will further be provided by volunteers in accordance with the instructions presented at the website. When the website gained popularity with the target audience, a mobile application for Android users was introduced as another voluntary project. The application is fully integrated with the website, which provides a wider accessibility. Now an application for IOS is being developed. The categories presented on the website include music videos, postcards, logos, celebrities, pieces of art, landmarks and sightseeing attractions, nature and animals, machinery and transport, handicrafts etc., with the biggest number of descriptions for music videos (590), followed by postcards (415).

According to Greco (2016, p. 23), media accessibility (MA) is “the research area dealing with theories, practices, technologies and instruments that provide access to media products and environments for people who cannot, or cannot properly, access content in its original form.” When it comes to the field of accessibility, the audiovisual services provided should be accessible by all users no matter the place where they live, their mental or physical abilities etc. Consequently, accessible content should not be limited to people with impairment but it should be available to all (Gambier, 2006). An illustrative example would be the case of the Archaeological Museum of Tripolis in Greece which formed part of the CrossCult project (<https://www.crosscult.eu/>). The particular museum was selected among others, first, because, it does not receive a huge flow of visitors per day, and second, because its exhibits are not widely known to the public and last but not least it did not meet any accessibility criteria.

What the research group did was to create a model for the structure of the narratives which would contribute to the enrichment of the context-aware experiences of the CrossCult app (available at <https://www.crosscult.eu/en/resources/deliverables/>). Every story was composed by different elements which carried additional information that consequently linked the narrative to the physical object. For instance, a sculpture of an ancient woman connected to the field of “everyday life” was not only provided with a digital image of that object but also by a short video describing the everyday life of a woman in ancient Greece, etc. (Kontiza et al., 2020).

Furthermore, “the more than 70 narratives designed for the Archaeological Museum of Tripolis involved both venue-specific and venue-independent elements,

allowing them to be reused in other settings: Straightaway, in tens of small and medium-sized museums all over Greece, and with some more editing (and adopting a more abstract or comparative focus) in many others worldwide. The narratives for the Archaeological Museum of Tripolis were presented to the visitors in the form of videos. Subtitles were also available for people with hearing impairments” (Kontiza et al., 2020).

In Greece, concerning the cultural domain and especially museums, there are a number of cases where AD is almost inexistent. Nevertheless, there are museums where AD is being offered to visitors in order to facilitate their tour through the rooms of the museum. Particularly, the Museum of Byzantine Culture has integrated a variety of accessible services available to its visitors. Since 2014, the museum has been offering audio description services for people with visual impairment for the permanent collection “Touch and get to know Byzantium”. Visitors are also provided with an audio-tactile tour. Furthermore, the museum participated in the 2nd Festival “Reflection of Disability in Art – Reflection of Disability in Art” with the aforementioned permanent collection. Moreover, from 2016 till 2018, an application for smartphones and tablets called “Amusing Museum” was offered to visitors. It contained an interactive tour inside the museum as well as a lot of games, puzzles and creative activities in general. The particular application was created by a research group of students of the University of Macedonia. The same museum was also supervising the permanent collection at the museum of White Tower in Thessaloniki where visitors are provided with audio guide in four different languages: English, German, Russian and Turkish (Tsilipakou, interview, March 18, 2020).

With regards to the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, visitors are provided with audio guide in five different languages (Greek, English, French, German and Jewish). The particular service is offered to visitors through an i-pod and the feedback they had received from them was very positive (Nachmia, interview, March 19, 2020).

The Jewish Museum of Greece also offers an audio guide service which is provided as a mobile app. Visitors can have a tour through the museum or even have information for particular exhibits in the museum (Solomon, interview, March 31, 2020).

Another important initiative would be that of the Archaeological Museum of Tegea where visitors are provided with audio guide. In particular, this service functions as an app which can be downloaded to mobile phones and it can then be connected to the exhibits through their different barcodes. The audio description is offered in two languages (English and Greek) and visitors are also provided with tablets for an easier and more convenient walk through the museum (Karapanagiotou, interview, March 28, 2020).

Noesis, Thessaloniki Science Centre and Technology Museum, offers audio description services as an audio guide application for visitors of the Technology Museum. The particular service is offered in English and Greek and concerns the per-

manent collections of the museum. According to the museum staff, mostly foreign visitors opt for the particular service (Karnezou, interview, March 30, 2020).

The Acropolis Museum does not offer any audio description services but they are planning to promote an accessible content to all visitors with visual impairment via an application for individual visitors and a second application for family groups. This application is due to be introduced in summer 2020 (Papadimitriou, interview, March 20, 2020).

Concerning visual arts, a crucial role in the promotion of inclusion of people with disabilities is played by the Movement of Disabled Artists which was created in 2010 by a group of disabled artists whose main goal was not only to present the art of disabled artists but also to promote the reflection of disability in art as an integral part of human nature. One of their first actions was called «Σαββατόβραδα με νόημα» for the Greek Deaf Theatre back in 2011 providing subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing in films and documentaries along with an open discussion with interpretation in Greek sign language. The group of the deaf and hard of hearing is constituted by 35,000 people who are generally excluded by the seventh art due to the inexistence of accessible content in most cases (Retrieved from <https://www.pressreader.com/greece/documento/20200223/283442078495286>). That is why the Movement of Disabled Artists fought for equal opportunities and access to art and they have offered Audio Description services (as well as subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing) in more than 12 films, 15 TV productions and many plays (Palos, interview, November, 2019).

The Movement of Disabled Artists had also provided audio description services for the International Film Festival of Thessaloniki. In particular, for the 57th International Film Festival, spectators with visual impairment were given the opportunity to watch two audio described films, first, *Ο Δράκος* (The Dragon) directed by N. Koundouros and second, *Μια Ζωή την Έχουμε* (We Have Only One Life) directed by G. Tzavellas. For the 58th Film Festival, there were shown two audio described movies as well: *Θου Βου Φαλακρός Πράκτωρ* (Thou Vou The Bold Agent) directed by T. Veggos, *Το Προξενιό της Άννας* (The Matchmaking of Anna) by P. Voulgaris. For the 59th Film Festival people with visual impairment could watch again two audio described movies: *Μετέωρο και Σκιά* (Meteor and Shadow) by T. Spetsiotis and *Στρέλλα* (Strella) by P. Koutras. Finally, for the 60th Film Festival two audio described movies were also offered, first, *Στη Σκιά του Φόβου* (In the Shadow of Fear) by G. Karypidis and *Το Ποτάμι* (The River) by N. Koundouros (Stavropoulos, interview, April 7, 2020). Onassis Foundation was the sponsor of accessibility for the 59th International Film Festival of Thessaloniki.

One of the contributors of inclusion in Greece is Artogether (former Very Special Arts Hellas) which, with the support of the General Secretariat for Youth and the Ministry of Culture, had the basic specialized audio equipment that served up to 30 people (in special cases and more) and was transported to each theater when the program was being performed. According to VSA, in order to carry out the audio description of a play, a long preparation with theatrical agents and bodies that serve

people with visual impairments is necessary. VSA has provided audio description for more than 25 plays in Greece (Aslanidou, interview, March 23, 2020).

“Audio Description is divided into Traditional AD which has five characteristics: it is exclusive, neutral, non-auteur, third-party and post hoc. As such, TAD anchors one extreme of a theoretical spectrum with integrated AD at the other end of it and is unlikely to reflect AD as it is practiced in the real world. Instead it captures AD as it is perceived by theatre makers and by some AD users” (Cavallo & Fryer, 2018; Lopez, Kearney & Hofstadter, 2018 *apud* Fryer, 2018, p.172). As a result, as one might understand, TAD is not accessible to all but exclusive since it is offered through headsets. On the other hand, Integrated AD (IAD) constitutes the exact opposite of TAD (Fryer, 2018) since it is conceived from the very beginning of the creative process with the direct involvement of the artistic team (Cavallo & Fryer, 2018).

A representative example of IAD in Greece should be the European coproduction ImpArt which was “a new aesthetic approach to the performing arts, the aesthetics of access, it was hosted and proposed by the Alternative Stage of the Greek National Opera, where the premiere of ImPART international production took place on September 8th, 2019. More than 20 artists from four countries (Greece, Italy, Germany, Armenia), inspired by the objectives of the innovative European project ImPART, collaborated to bring on stage the outcomes of their creative research about the development of interdisciplinary performances (dance, dance theatre, music theatre, performance) immediately accessible by any audience, people with sensory disabilities included, with an emphasis on the inclusion of professional artists with disabilities. It is a partnership of four artistic organizations: Synergy of Music Theatre (Greece), Sommertheater Pustoblume (Germany), Oriente Occidente Festival (Italy) και NCA Small Theatre (Armenia)” (Impart, 2020). Particularly, the performance “Gravity and Other Attraction”, directed by Costas Lamproulis, integrated the Audio Description into the script and it got a very positive feedback by people with visual impairment but also by specialists in AD. The same performance was also presented in Antwerp last month (Lamproulis, interview, March 27, 2020).

Another initiative of crucial importance for the Greek audience is the AMELIB, the Accessible Multi-modal Electronic Library. The development of AMELib in the framework of the action 9.7 of SEAB, aims to strengthen the effort to remove the obstacles for the printed-disabled users of the Greek academic libraries. The goal is to provide accessible content through an equally accessible online application, which is based on the applicant's exemption from copyright for printed-disabled persons, as provided for in copyright law (cf. <https://amelib.seab.gr/>).

Member of the Amelib is the Library of the University of Ioannina where the software used is: Text to Speech Program (BALABOLKA), INNOETICS READER, DAISY (DOLPHIN), VOICE IN, DOLPHIN SUPERNOVA MAGNIFIER and Non Visual Desktop Access (NVDA). Concerning the hardware, Digital Talking Book Player (SCHOLAR) is used among others (Chrysafi, interview, March 25, 2020).

Another member is also the Open University of Greece which also provides accessibility services for people with visual impairment by using the Screen Reader (Libeap, 2020).

3. Audio Description Standards

Unlike detailed standards and recommendations for many European languages and broadcasting corporations easily available on the Internet,¹ the Russian national standard on audio description gives a brief overview of the terms and their definitions. The introduction to the standard states that in view of expanding audio description practices and a growing number of audio describers, the basic terms of the process have to be established and explained. The introduction is followed by fifty-three terms and their definitions in the following format:

Audio description of stative objects can include:

- audio description of museum exhibitions and exhibits, picture galleries, pieces of art, sculptures and architecture;
- audio description of natural and artificial landscapes;
- audio description of the environment;
- audio description of images, including digital ones(GOST R 57891-2017).

As it is seen from the example, the standard does not offer any recommendations on how to prepare the script of the audio description, what to include in it, how to prioritize information, what language to use with reference to the type of content described, etc.

As it has been mentioned before, audio description practice is re-emerging in Russia after a long period of historic changes in the country that affected the development of many industries. It is reflected in the lack of manuals and teaching materials, as well as academic publications on the topic. Search for the key word 'audio description' in the national digital library shows less than 200 publications (Russian National Electronic Library).

One of the basic books on accessibility for visually-impaired people, Typhlo-commenting, or verbal description for the blind, written by the pioneer of Russian audio description S. Vanshin, is not accessible in any of the open-access libraries of the country.

¹ Standards: <https://www.acb.org/adp/guidelines.html>;
<https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/215510667-Audio-Description-Style-Guide-v2-1>;
<http://www.adlabproject.eu/Docs/adlab%20book/index.html>.

4. Training in Audio Description

Professional training in Russia is defined by federal educational standards that set a list of qualifications Universities can provide (Portal of Russian Federal Educational Standards). At present there is no separate educational standard that gives Bachelors' or Masters' degrees in audio description or other accessibility services for visually impaired people, with the existing standards focusing mostly on education and rehabilitation. This is why training of professional audio describers in Russia is provided in very few educational institutions.

In 2018 Moscow State Linguistic University opened a Bachelor Programme "Typhlocommenting and intercultural communication" (<https://linguanet.ru>). . Though it might be considered a great step towards media accessibility, it must be mentioned that the syllabus of the programme might need some major changes as it combines a syllabus of traditional linguistic bachelor education with the emphasis on theoretical courses and language practical courses, and does not include audiovisual translation courses. The problem obviously stems from the fact that audio description in Russia is not viewed as a part of audiovisual translation.

The major training (not a University degree) is provided by the institute Reha-comp (rehabilitation and computer), that was initiated by the National Society of the Blind and provides courses of audio description/ typhlocommenting for people who meet the requirements in terms of qualifications, voice and other characteristics. The training includes 142 hours of theory and practice and, as is seen from the requirements and syllabus, concentrates mostly on live audio description. Until 2020 the institute provided courses for two groups per year, with an average number of 20 students in each group, which is obviously not enough for a country where there are more than 200 thousand visually impaired people across eighty-five regions.

In view of the growing demand for professional audio describers, a number of universities across the country (Omsk State University, Murmansk Arctic State University, etc) introduced audiovisual translation and audio description training as part of translator training. In Greece as well there no bachelor programmes dedicated to Audiovisual Translation or Audio Description in particular. Some private institutions provide webinars or seminars mostly on Subtitling. In view of the expanding demand for accessibility services some companies² have started courses and webinars with experienced practitioners in order to train their audiovisual translators in the new field.

² Exemples of companies: <http://www.alba-multimedia.ru/ru/ru/services/ad.html>; <https://rusubtitles.com>.

Conclusion

Russian and Greek national legislation, following the national Constitutions and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, provides basic accessibility services to people with hearing and eyesight-impaired people. It should be noted, though, that the minimum amount of SDH and audio description which is set according to the national laws, directives and resolutions, is not sufficient to meet the requirements of the modern society. National legislation and stricter evaluation and control procedures should cover all the accessibility areas not only for the state-supported products but for all the spheres where providing accessibility is needed.

In both countries, Audio Description is not widely spread. There are some organizations, or activists who offer AD services for people with visual impairment but due to the lack of established law, there is no real accessibility. In big Russian and Greek cities, some theatres offer AD services for some of their spectacles but yet they cannot be considered sufficient since they do not represent the majority of the cultural places in both countries.

Existing practices and services do not completely provide for the needs of the target audience which can be explained a number of reasons, such as lack of information about the services provided, lack of practitioners and professional training, insufficiency of scientific research aimed at improving the implemented practices and, consequently, improper or non-existent standards that take into consideration the peculiarities of the national languages.

In both Russia and Greece there is no professional training offered on AD accredited by a University degree, so there is a real lack of professionals who would be willing to contribute to the creation of accessible content. Thus, AD may be offered by people who have an empirical knowledge or who have been trained unofficially by other audio describers.

Finally, the need for professional training as well as for the creation of national AD standards in both countries, is considered of crucial importance.

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