

Information Accessibility for Academic Life

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Let me introduce this Seminar saying that it has been organized thanks to the ICT4IAL Partners (European Agency, European Schoolnet, Daisy Consortium, G3ict, International Association of Universities, and Unesco) and thanks to Politecnico di Milano that is hosting and supporting.

But the first thing I should say is that it has been organized in a perfect G3ict style. Let me explain what I mean G3ict is the UN group with which I have been working for seven years promoting, all around the world, policies and best practices related to ICT accessibility. It is a very quick, efficient and passionate worldwide network that promotes ICT accessibility and the UN Convention for Rights of Persons with Disability. A lot of events, publications, projects supported in few times in very different cultures and countries by very expert and passionate, heterogeneous stakeholders. We could say: no

money, no power but a lot of dissemination, sharing, promotion and accessible strategies.

So, here it is: an International Seminar quickly organized (only a month and a half) and you: a passionate and high quality group of specialists and speakers.

I welcome and thank all the participants: the group of European speakers who accepted to present the ICT4IAL project results to promote the implementation of the created guidelines to make information for learning accessible. The overseas experts who flew to speak in Milano as members of the G3ict Network

The WS moderators and rapporteurs, all the Italian speakers, The Rector's Delegate for Disability belonging to CALD and CNUDD, the staff member of the services for students with disability of our schools, all the participants who will contribute to the WS and all the persons who made this possible (financing, inviting, organizing). We had special "guardian angels" who helped us to make this possible: you will meet and appreciate many of them during the day.

Read the list of participants that you can find into your carpet: today we will have a rare opportunity to share and discuss.

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We often say that: "Everybody knows architectural barriers but only few persons immediately understand what we mean when we speak about accessibility of contents and materials and when we address the difference that good accessible materials can make for learning and teaching."

We know how important is to create a culture based on two principles:

“think to accessibility in advance”

“verify with users if what you did or thought is working”

As for architectural barriers it is very difficult to make specialists and everybody :

- avoiding to create not-accessible materials but also
- avoiding to frustrate good solutions (it is enough to put a rag on a pathway for blind persons to frustrate a good – and expensive – policy)

Not-accessible materials and contents can frustrate all the good policies of inclusion and personalization we have been adopting, and can frustrate the most innovative research projects devoted to make adult life more satisfying for everybody.

It is very easy to transform an accessible material into an not-accessible one (well known examples are : transforming it into a “closed PDF”, using the wrong set of colours or characters, not describing pictures) but there are less known aspects (i.e., sometimes, when you transform an accessible document into a proprietary format)

But we know that it is also very easy to release materials accessible at least at a basic level. ICT4IAL partners have been working for 3 years to demonstrate, support and disseminate exactly this point. ICT4IAL, G3ict and Politecnico di Milano are contributing today to pass from definition to implementation and exploitation of the created guidelines.

The proposed Guidelines have been designed to help everybody to prepare accessible contents and materials

(text, video, images, audio, ...). They have been defined thinking t "not (ONLY) to ICT specialists".

It is not the unique proposal but we can consider it as a very important one, for the following reasons :

- the expertise of the involved partners
- the review process realised by G3ict involving 104 experts from 28 countries around the world,
- the dissemination process that have been realized during the last three years,
- the implementation and testing processes realized during the last year
- the wider implementation and exploitation processes that will start today,
- the 23 available versions of guidelines freely downloadable from the ICT4IAL web site in all the European languages. Chinese, Arabic and Russian versions will be added soon.
- Finally the updating and adapting process encouraged on the ICT4IAL Web Site

Some expert on Accessibility could object they are not "complete"

We chose to be short and simple, we chose to put links to more sophisticated documents to keep the life of everybody easier and to encourage adopting an ACCESSIBLE STYLE

TODAY we are not interested on discussing if the proposed guidelines could be enriched or modified You will be able to contribute to this process interacting as proposed on the ICT4IAL web site

We want to introduce problems and opportunities but we want mainly collect ideas from with you (experts coming from different learning and professional contexts). Ideas on HOW TO DESIGN ROADMAPS to implement and promote their adoption and their validation in different learning environments.

For this reason 2 workshops will be devoted to Academic and Primary / Secondary Schools. And 3 other workshops will be dedicated to legislative and technological aspects

All the workshops will have a main objective: to know what you think about the proposed instrument and to collect ideas to DESIGN ROADMAPS to promote, to support, to encourage an accessible style to produce contents and materials

The problem of creating ACCESSIBLE CONTENTS in LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS is complex for many reasons:

- Many actors and with different competencies are involved
- ICT not always supports accessibility: the rapid technological evolution is often not supporting in a good way the final and NON-expert user
- Computer Scientist training is still missing
- Legal problems are still not solved, international and national laws not always help

Today, we will work (as many of us are already doing everyday) to think and propose joint policies

We will share well known problems thinking to our organization and to how to facilitate their adoption of good policies.

To promote:

- attention to the subject,
- knowledge on how to solve at least some problems,
- attention to the adaptation and application of guidelines to different learning environments

We organized the Seminar in an ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT and we will use the Academic Context as a significant prototypal environment to discuss the subject we are interested on.

Here are some reasons:

1) Universities are for adult life

- They contribute to build a "professional self" (it's important for everybody to become expert and exercise specific responsibilities in different contexts)
- They are for employment, cultural and social responsibility

2) Universities are small but complex and significant social and cultural contexts

- Where people study, teach, work, cooperate, communicate, research
 - Many persons cooperate with different abilities and disabilities.
 - Everybody can experience autonomous and cooperative dimensions possibly supported by innovative strategies
- 3) Training, Searching and Exporting good policies are important missions for Universities and for Accessibility
- 4) The Rectors' Delegates for Disability, in each University, constitute, in Italy, a strong and active network at national and international level (and I know that the same happens around the world)
- 5) Finally, if we think to this University Politecnico di Milano trains Architects, Designer, and Engineers (professional skills strongly related to the topic) and its policies for Students with Disability and Special Learning Difficulties (designed in 2003 and implemented by the MultiChancePoliTeam) is considered by G3ict a reference point.

I will underline, some aspects of these strategies that can be considered as facilitators with respect to the creation of accessible materials for learning.

MCPT is a team composed by 7 experts responsible for:

- logistics, cooperation with professors and specialists
- students with disability and SpLD are protagonist of their choices but are also supported by specialists
- ICT solutions are chosen, tested and adopted,
- psychological support can help to personalize learning activities and first employment steps
- Different actors belonging to different services interact, in total safeguard of the private aspects
- Students cooperates with research teams
- Employment but also cultural, artistic, sportive initiatives allows integrate and inclusive initiatives. Please note that 0% unemployment rate for Engineers during the last 7 years.

We take care of accessibility of contents and materials for all the involved professors and researchers BUT – until now – we did not enough to cooperate with all the other services to “create a culture of accessibility in terms of learning contents and materials”

As professors of Computer Science we train on Accessibility young computer scientists via special projects and specific courses. But I know that this is not happening in all the Universities (at least in Italy)

Computer Scientist have specific responsibilities respect to applications, to devices, to the innovative algorithms that can be created (we will say something about in a few minutes)

As a researcher and professor of Computational Linguistic, Natural Language Process and Multimodal representation of contents ... I know how many interesting aspects can be treated to support Information Accessibility

At the Arcs Lab, the laboratory that I conduct to analyse linguistic and vocal interaction, we realised important projects and applications dealing with :

- The Analysis of the complexity of contents and their simplification from the linguistic point of view (vocabulary, syntax, semantics),
- multimodal description and transformation of materials and contents
- fruition and modification of multimodal contents during lectures (making for example available lips movements on the side of modifiable slides)
- simplification, summarization, and translation,
- spellchecking and prediction for Specific Learning Difficulties (as Dyslexia)
- iconic representation of contents for augmentative and alternative communication and iconic languages (we thought to often neglected persons : persons with intellectual disabilities, degenerative syndromes or simply aged "actors' of digital cultural and daily life")

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Specific problems will be underlined during the day :

During the morning :

- We propose you the presentation of the ICT4IAL partners and their contribution to the defined Guidelines.
- 4 workshops will involve you discussing how to implement the Guidelines in different contexts. Into the carpet you can find the workshop participant list.

After the **buffet lunch** offered by Politecnico (you will dress your Poli/Pin to have it ... please do not forget to dress it !) the 4 workshop Rapporteurs will present the workshop results

The second part of the afternoon preview different presentation:

- DAISY suggestions to make contents accessible with reference to new standards
- the presentation of 3 Italian projects (*one from CALD, relied to the support that an expert team can give to libraries and other academic actors, a second one from AIE, describing policies of making books accessible, and finally a third one from Polimi, that will take into account Accessibility and Open Access Policies*)

The **Seminar will end** proposing you the presentation of international policies relied to copyrights and the Marrakesh Treaty that. We hope that the Marrakesh Treaty will be signed and ratified in many countries (as progressively happened for the UN CRPD)

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After Expo 2015 the Carta di Milano is the Roadmap for a more sustainable life into the planet.

We will not be able to design (in one day) a roadmap. But I would like to encourage you to think to good policies and actions that you will write on a CARTA were **Information**

Accessibility for Learning can be addressed as one of the fundamental aspects **needed** to make the life into the planet more sustainable.

For everybody.

Without being too ambitious ... that is what I hope

And with such a proposal: I declare the Seminar OPENED.